



Allied Irish Bank (GB) Voted No. 1 Bank for Small Business

3rd December 2002

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"BIG FOUR" LAG BEHIND RIVALS IN BUSINESS BANKING PERFORMANCE

Allied Irish Bank (GB) has been voted Britain's Best Business Bank, ahead of the 'Big Four' and other UK banks, in the most comprehensive survey of the small business sector since the completion of the Cruickshank Review and the Competition Commission enquiry.

The survey commissioned by the Forum for Private Business*, found the 'Big Four' UK banks (which dominate the market with a combined market share of 75 per cent) are lagging behind smaller rivals, led by Allied Irish Bank (GB), in the battle for customer satisfaction.

The survey, conducted every two years, rated Allied Irish Bank (GB) top for customer satisfaction for the 'fifth' consecutive time. The results indicate Allied Irish Bank (GB) understands the businesses it deals with and scores highly for speed of service, competent bank managers' policy towards financing and overdrafts and competitive charges and interest rates.

Aidan McKeon, Managing Director, Allied Irish Bank (GB), commented, "We are delighted that our customers have endorsed our position as the proven alternative to the large clearing banks in the UK. Our advantage is that we are able to focus on providing quality services to small business by getting to know and understand their business and what they need from their bank."

Continual staff development and training is one of the initiatives launched by the bank to ensure a closer link with customers. Others include:

Linking management pay with customer satisfaction results

Conducting annual customer surveys to benchmark the bank's performance and implement real change as a result

Hosting Forums where business customers can network and meet specialist experts and discuss issues relevant to the development of their business.

Extending the business banking office network

According to McKeon, Allied Irish Bank (GB)'s understanding of small business is crucial to the bank's strategy and vision for the future. "Our ability to focus on the small business market has helped us double our business over the past five years to 2% of the UK small business market."

The bank, which has ambitious growth targets, wants to hold five per cent of the market within five years. This will be achieved by increasing its workforce significantly and doubling the number of branches throughout the UK – against the current market trend of closing branches.

Based on responses from more than 6,500 businesses, the results establish that small businesses still have a perception that banks provide poor value in their service - something that the Treasury Committee found in its report on Small Business Banking earlier this year.

Banks were rated on:

Knowledge of their customers business and the industry they operate

Provision of advice

Competitiveness of products and services

Speed of decision, efficiency and reliability

Convenience

Friendliness of staff

Commenting on the findings Nick Goulding, CEO of the Forum of Private Business said, "The relationship between a small business and its bank is a crucial one, and can have a major impact on its success and growth. Banks lend £38 billion to UK businesses with turnover of less than £1 million, yet many small businesses continue to feel dissatisfied with the treatment and charges some of the major banks impose.

" We are delighted that Allied Irish Bank (GB) has retained its lead position. Allied Irish Bank (GB) should be seen as an example of best practice for the industry - by understanding its customers and providing them with the products and services they need, it has maintained its lead over the 'Big Four' and other banks," he concluded.

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Notes to editors:

Allied Irish Bank (GB) is a trade mark used under licence by AIB Group (UK) p.l.c., a wholly owned subsidiary of Allied Irish Banks p.l.c. The bank operates from 37 branches in major population centres throughout Britain and employs over 1,000 staff.

Allied Irish Bank (GB) is part of the Allied Irish Bank Group, Ireland's leading banking and financial services organisation. The group operates principally in Ireland, Britain, Poland and the USA and employs almost 30,000 people worldwide in more than 1,000 offices.

*About the survey: The survey 'Private Businesses and their banks' is conducted every two years by the Forum of Private Business. The survey, which is based on responses from more than 6,500

businesses, is the largest and longest running survey of its kind. It is prepared and produced in association with Nottingham University Business School.

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