

## Busy year ahead for FBC

Dr Andrew Robinson, Chairman of the French Business Council, presents the new opportunities for the year 2001.

The New Year is traditionally a time for looking back, taking stock and daring to look forward. The French Business Council can do all three with a sense of renewed purpose and confidence. Why? Well, the year 2000 has seen the FBC embark upon new projects which meet the needs of SMEs, reflect the emerging reality of a balanced regional economic strategy, and hit the targets of the ERDF support allocated to the FBC up to the end of 2001.

The FBC, with an expanded professional team, is well on track to deliver the targets for growth among North East SMEs for whom the French-speaking market is important. The outward mission programme includes Toulouse (aerospace), MILIA 2001 in Cannes (multimedia), Biovision in Lyon (Biotechnology), Paris Air Show (aerospace) and a trade mission to Lyon.

Strategic regional partnerships remain crucial. They range from One NorthEast to RTC (Regional Technology Centre) and North East Chamber of Commerce, from sectoral groups such as NDI (Northern Defence Initiative) and Bio Sci North, and, in 2001, will include the new Learning and Skills Councils and SBS (Small Business Service).

The FBC is also determined to remain responsive to both the manufacturing and the "new economy" sectors. This is demonstrated by a focused effort to help SMEs win business in the expanding Anglo-French defence and aerospace markets, and by the development of Club Sophia UK based here in the North East to accelerate the growth of knowledge-based spin-out companies, thanks to a tightly managed network of worldclass centres for innovation, funding, and cluster development. A joint Anglo-French high tech mission to Silicon Valley in 2001 is just one



The North East in Toulouse - we report on the success of our mission to SITEF.

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Pictured above : Drew Garrow (Stargate Precision Engineering) and Thomas Bayat (Isocom Ltd) in front of a model of the Arianespace rocket.

of the actions currently being planned, complemented by the Global Forum Conference being hosted by the region later in 2001.

The FBC is a centre of excellence in and for the North East. It has shaped a strategy which positions it, its partners and clients very advantageously as major Anglo-French developments offer major opportunities to some of the new and old strengths of the region. By opening doors to our close neighbour's market, culture, language and lifestyle it helps promote and transform the image and outlook of the region here.

On behalf of the Directors of the FBC, a happy new year to you all. Bonne Année !

Jan - Feb 2001

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At the end of 1998 there were 3.7 million internet users in France. In January 2000 there were 6.7 million.

At the end of 1999 21% of French households owned a PC and 6.6% had a modem.

In March 2000, 22.6 million French people owned a mobile phone.

## Club Sophia to create a global knowledge network



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Serviced by the French Business Council, Club Sophia UK is a new initiative, unique to the North East, which will accelerate the capacity of local businesses to operate internationally. It has grown out of an agreement signed in 1999 between the region and Sophia Antipolis, the largest Science and Technology Park in Europe. This link places the region's economy in a privileged network

starting with Sophia Antipolis but extending to the global economy. Focusing on the new technologies, telecommunications and biotechnologies, Club Sophia UK is a must for North East incubators, SMEs, research centres, universities and the e-Generation project, opening them out to international markets.

With financial support from the EU, Club Sophia UK has an existing programme in place including the launch of its website in early 2001, a visit to Milia in Cannes (multimedia exhibition) in February which will be followed by a visit to Sophia Antipolis to build upon existing links and to activate the partnership.

Estelle Chatard is Club Sophia UK's new Project Manager and she will take the lead of the organisation and development of the club's activities. Estelle recently completed research on Entrepreneurship and Regional Economic Development in the North East of England.

## BioSquare: the life sciences community meets in Lyon

BioSquare, the international partnering conference for the life sciences community takes place 8-10 February this year. The FBC is taking a delegation of North East businesses to join companies from around the world and meet to partner their technologies and products.

Biosquare is a unique forum for business development and research executives from the pharmaceutical, agricultural, food and environmental industries to meet with top management of biotechnology companies.

The FBC has joined forces with Bio Sci North to prepare and support the visit of a number of local businesses including Elfab Ltd (North Shields), Cambridge Laboratories (Wallsend), Novocastra Laboratories (Newcastle) and Isocom Ltd (Washington).

## Paris: international exhibitions capital

In recent year, Paris has gained a lot of ground on rival cities in Germany to become a European focal point for international exhibitions. With its position at the crossroads of Europe, easy access from the US and the quality of its infrastructures (2,300 official hotels), Paris is fast becoming the place of choice for foreign visitors and exhibitors. According to Bernard Irion of the Paris Chamber of Commerce, the French capital is "the only European city capable of accommodating onsite exhibitors and visitors to the major exhibitions such as The World of Machine Tool, the World of Textile Machine Exhibition or the International Aeronautical Exhibition at Le Bourget", world number ones in their respective fields.

Last year the number of non-French exhibitors to trade shows in Paris increased by more than 18% and the number of foreign visitors increased by 13% for both trade and public shows. Indeed some 'niche' exhibitions attracted a considerable proportion of foreign visitors. Corrugated, the international exhibition for manufacturers and fabricators of corrugated cardboard attracted 73% of foreign visitors at its last event. That figure was 55% for the Composite Materials Exhibition, when the average is normally 25%.

Raphaëlle Neveux of the French Fairs and Exhibitions Federation believes this success is due to a strong effort to market French exhibitions abroad. "The exhibition organisers are providing greater support for the exhibitors and helping them achieve a real return on investment and training them in the job of exhibitor." Add to this considerable investment (260 million Euros) in the last three years to improve and enlarge the capital's two main exhibition parks Paris-Expo and Villepinte.

Paris is not the only French location with a strong reputation on the international exhibition stage. Other French cities hosting large scale shows include Cannes with Mipcom, Midem, the top world exhibitions for communications and television, Lyon with the Gourmet Trades exhibition, Bordeaux with Vinexpo, the wine exhibition. In February this year, you can visit or exhibit at Milia in Cannes, and Biosquare in Lyon with the help of the French Business Council.

### MILIA 2001

The North East will be exhibiting at Milia 2001 for the fourth year running.

The world's leading event for interactive entertainment, interactive TV and wireless media is taking place 11-14 February in Cannes.

Computerisation of French SMEs (in 1999) stands at 94%, and 61% of connection to the internet.

Out of 4,036 new business start-ups (second half of 1999), 75% were in the ICT sector.

From 1996 to 2000 the ICT sector accounted for 20% of the growth of the French economy.

## SITEF: Toulouse visit brings results for North East delegates

Following a successful visit to Farnborough Airshow last July, the French Business Council decided to organise a North East stand at the 2000 edition of SITEF, the exhibition for advanced technologies in Toulouse.

Delegates included Stargate Precision Engineering, Aztec Precision Engineering, Isocom as well as representatives from the Northern Defence Initiative and RTC North. "There were some major companies at the exhibition

in the aerospace and defence applications sectors", says Thomas Bayat of Isocom. "We also found other sectors such as industrial electronics, the water

industry and computing. It was very interesting in terms of product requirements and general interest." Mr Bayat, who has since met at his plant in Washington with a contact he made with Thomson, adds "I have made major contacts with some potential customers such as Dassault and EADS. We made contacts virtually with everyone exhibiting including a large company: GIAT Industries."

Rahmon Nassor, Sales Director of Stargate Precision Engineering agrees the trip was useful. "We enjoyed the event and the possible business markets that it opened up for us. It has shown us there is a need for engineering manufacturers in the French market, and hopefully we will be able to take advantage of this."

On the strength of such positive feedback, the FBC is now organising a visit to the Paris Airshow at Le Bourget in June 2001.

If you would like to join our trip to the Paris Airshow at Le Bourget, please contact Aurélie Liraud or Emmanuelle Deplanche on 0191 284 2213 or [info@frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk](mailto:info@frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk)

### FBC on target

Between March and December 2000, the French Business Council has assisted 143 SMEs.



## Strasbourg comes top in business survey

Strasbourg is well-known as the home of the European Parliament but less so as a thriving industrial centre at the heart of Europe. This year the city has come top of a survey on the best business cities in France (L'Entreprise – Palmarès des villes de France – over 200,000 inhabitants), followed by Toulouse and Montpellier.

There is no doubt that the Parliament, the Council of Europe and the forty Embassies present in Strasbourg have helped put a smaller, provincial city on a global stage. When a location was sought for the International Aerospace University, Strasbourg won over seven other cities including Toulouse. Strasbourg was chosen for the headquarters of Aventis, the chemical giant born out of the merger between Rhône Poulenc and Hoeschst. It is also the location for another French and German venture: television channel Arte.

With a large student population (50,000) and support from a good infrastructure (two 'technopoles' were created by the city), the high tech sector is developing rapidly particularly in the life sciences area, with genetics pioneer Transgène, and new comers Quantum Appligène and Antomed.

Strasbourg's more traditional industries (Agrifoods, electrical and mechanical, chemical, pharmaceutical industries) are also doing well



thanks to the city's enviable position at the centre of an 800km radius which has Europe's 60% of working population and 75% of its wealth.

L'Avancée - an office and housing complex in Strasbourg  
© CUS 1999 photo G Engel

## NB Group tops export table

NB Group provides integrated marketing services to clients all over the UK and mainland Europe, with particular expertise in helping businesses market products within the European community. Export sales in the past quarter of £583,000 have earned the company top place in the region's Ernst & Young Manufacturing League's Export Sales table, for the second time this year.

As well as studios, print facilities and a direct mail house in Gateshead, NB Group also has offices in London, Paris, Madrid, Brussels and Geneva. It employs skilled multi-lingual nationals who understand the cultural nuances that affect local marketing processes, a feature that's built overseas partnerships with many blue chip clients.

Recently, NB Group helped Procter & Gamble roll out the Sunny Delight 3x3 basketball project in France, with the result that more than 2.5 million French kids are now involved in the schools' basketball programme. The whole programme was managed by NB Group's Paris-based representative, who plainly admits to the importance of being a French national, for success and credibility in that country.

In addition to delivering major below-the-line campaigns for Sunny Delight, NB Group also promotes Procter & Gamble's Crest, Actonel, Vicks and Fixodent brands throughout Europe. It also works for other global organisations like Bayer and Sanofi-Synthelabo, for internationally-owned companies, like South East Water (owned by Saur) and for UK companies with worldwide focus, such as The Sage Group and QSP.

Even though the company is enjoying achievements in Europe, NB Group intends to remain based in the North East.

NB Group managing director, Brian Waites, explains. "We started out as one of the North East's foremost litho print suppliers but, in recent years, have added new personnel, skills, experience and countries to the portfolio. We've grown strategically, creating new business channels and providing more value-added services for both single country and multi-national campaigns. Export trade is fundamental to our growth. However, we've



MD Brian Waites enjoys export success, yet still keeps faith with the region

been operating from the North East for over 18 years, have an excellent workforce and are firmly committed to this region, as last year's multi-million pound investment in our new Team Valley print and production facilities bears out."

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case study

## A taste of France in Whitley Bay

In a first for the region, Whitley Bay hosted a French market just before Christmas, in what could have been a controversial event for local farmers and traders. However, the market was a great success and there are plans to repeat it next year, mixing French and North East stalls.

Ten traders from the Agen region in South West France came to Whitley Bay for three days, offering delicacies from their area such as prunes and cassoulet. The queue for a baguette baked in a nearby bakery was so long that bread had to be rationed. Other produce to sell out included 650 kilos of cheese and 400 kilos of honey.

Local businesses also did well out of the event, reporting an 80 to 100% increase in trade during the market. Such was the popularity of the market with local people and businesses that now they are asking: "When are they coming back?"

## Forthcoming highlights

### February

BioSquare - Lyon  
Milia - Cannes

### March

Interprise 2001 - Durham

### April

Trade mission to Lyon

### June

Paris Airshow - Le Bourget

## Alliance française

Tuesday 23 January  
La Gestuelle des Français  
Newcastle University Old  
Library Building SCR

Tuesday 13 February  
Table ronde à bâtons rompus:  
discussion de l'actualité  
française  
Lit & Phil Society



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