

Eighty attend soirée sans frontières

Eighty people attended this year's celebration of France's national day organised at Durham Castle by the French Business Council.

With 2001 being the European Year of Languages, the evening was conducted in an exotic blend of French and English.

Instead of the traditional formal speeches at the end of the black tie dinner, the FBC invited Hexham based theatre company Théâtre Sans Frontières to perform two short plays at the beginning of the evening. One play, suitably themed around the French revolution, was presented by children from Hexham Middle School. The other was an extract from the theatre's recent production "Le Tour de France".

Guests not only enjoyed a good night out with friends and colleagues, but also strengthened their contacts and networks with France.



Bastille Day at Durham Castle - 14th July 2001

Focus on France event

North East businesses interested in accessing the French market are invited to a seminar organised by the international trade team of Business Link Tyne & Wear, in collaboration with the French Business Council and RTC North on Tuesday 11 December.

Whether you need to develop existing links with French companies or need help just getting started, Focus on France is an ideal opportunity to discuss potential opportunities and learn more about the practical issues involved.

The seminar will be chaired by Nick Peace, the Trade Partners UK expert on France and will be held at RTC North in Sunderland. The event costs £15 plus VAT which includes a buffet lunch.

For more information or to reserve your place call Emmanuelle Deplanche at the French Business Council on 0191 284 2213 or email emmanuelle@frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk

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Mission to the Limousin for North East glass artists

The French Business Council is helping organise a reconnaissance mission to the Limousin region of France in October.

The mission follows an invitation to exhibit in the town of Saint-Yrieix extended to a group of glass artists based in the North East. The group will meet the town's culture team and visit the spaces available to prepare their exhibition proposals.

They will also meet relevant contacts in the rest of the region, view gallery spaces, and discuss opportunities for other exhibitions, partnerships and exchanges.

The Limousin region attracts the largest share of government funding for culture in France. Government support for culture in the Limousin per head is ten times that of Paris.

Thinking of marketing your business in France? Here are a few unusual media supports and how much they cost (source: L'Entreprise)

984,000FF for 6000 café tables (Média Table Impact) for a fortnight

50,000FF for distributing leaflets in 500 taxis for a fortnight

Bringing Sophia-Antipolis experience to the North East

by Vicky Smith and Roger Tipple (ReCET)

The Regional Centre for Electronics Technologies (ReCET) joined forces with Club Sophia UK to bring the experience of Europe's largest and most successful technology park to the electronics sector of the North East. A joint visit in July provided the opportunity to meet with high technology companies based at Sophia Antipolis and the Côte d'Azur commercial development organisations. The key objectives were to explore opportunities for collaboration with NE companies on innovative products and to understand the basis of the Park's outstanding success.

with North East businesses with the specific intention of establishing prototype applications. Furthermore, these meetings raised interest in accessing prototype and system testing expertise and equipment based within the North East at ReCET. The development of web-enabled technologies makes remote access to selected test and verification equipment a realistic option for SA companies, especially for collaborative work.

Longer term objectives were met through discussions at the Riviera Resource Centre, Côte d'Azur Development Company, Méditerranée Technologies and Club Hi-Tech. All these organisations provided valuable insight into the way in which business opportunities have been developed in the Park over the past 30 years. The importance of the technology focus has been a clear success factor. Although the Côte d'Azur climate and quality of life was highlighted as a key attraction for enticing highly skilled experts to the region, this has been facilitated by a clear hi-tech focus co-locating leading edge research expertise alongside large businesses from which small business clusters have emerged. With a thirty year history, Sophia Antipolis provides a number of important learning points that will help to shape our own strategic thinking regarding the development of North East technology expertise.

Since our visit, interest from Club Hi-Tech, the Sophia Antipolis business-led association, has led to the planning of two separate video-conference events to transfer knowledge and experience of thermal modelling and pcb rapid prototyping technologies from the ReCET team and North East businesses to companies based at the Technology Park. Specific commercial opportunities have also enabled ReCET to progress links with regional businesses regarding product application development. ReCET are also working with Club Sophia UK to further business creation opportunities.

Our first visit to Sophia Antipolis was a huge success and we hope to report further on business developments!



Left to right:
Roger Tipple, ReCET Sector Development Manager
Vicky Smith, ReCET Sector Development Manager
Estelle Chatard, Project Manager Club Sophia UK
Loïc Coutures, Correspondent Club Sophia UK

The short to medium term objectives were met by working closely with Club Sophia UK's networks to target companies working with Bluetooth, smartcard, and systems integration technologies. The aim was to explore commercial project opportunities between Sophia Antipolis and North East businesses. With recent technological advancements (notably Bluetooth and wireless communications), ReCET are seeking technology partners to develop new applications that exploit generic technologies through systems integration and the expertise of companies in the North East. International collaboration provides both technological opportunities and access to global markets. Meetings with Sophia Antipolis companies specialising in appropriate technologies enabled ReCET's Sector Development team to explore links

287,500FF for your message for one hour per day for two weeks on 250 plasma screens at Cyberdesk

580,000FF for 5330 posters for one month in French TGVs (high speed trains)

80,000FF for a one month campaign on 100 bicycles from Omniprésence

Global Enterprising: an innovative event

Last June, Club Sophia UK teamed up with the Chamber of Commerce in Sophia Antipolis to organise a unique videoconference entitled 'Global Enterprising'.

The event gathered around 180 people from Sophia Antipolis and the North East of England, who came to share the experience of successful entrepreneurs.

Louise Allcroft from Complement Genomics, Josie Donaldson from healthytherapies.com, Keith Wallis from Interv8 and Keith Watson from Urban River Ltd evoked in turn how they dealt with such issues as finding and operating in a business incubator, intellectual property rights, and recruiting and finding partners, whilst speakers from

organisations in Sophia Antipolis presented the French experience.

As Louise Allcroft reports, the event "was a great opportunity to meet other businesses in the region and also to hear of the work currently being done in Sophia Antipolis. I hope Complement Genomics will be able to visit Sophia Antipolis in the future and maybe even find potential partners, collaborations and customers".

Transfer of experience is essential for would-be entrepreneurs. 'Global Enterprising' was an innovative way of bringing together a wealth of information on setting up a new business with international perspectives. The audience, made up mainly of start-ups,

established SMEs and North East students appreciated the quality of the different case studies presented.

David Park, of Small Business Service, was pleased to see that such an event was hosted in the North East and thought it "was useful to see that French start-ups had to face similar issues". Tracey Pitt, Director of the e-business centre at Northumbria University noted that "the conference opened a new channel of communication with Sophia Antipolis and hopefully, Club Sophia UK will continue to open new channels in the future".

Sénateur Pierre Laffitte, the founder of the science and technology park, introduced the session and was delighted by the quality of the relationship between Club Sophia UK, its members and Sophia Antipolis. He proposed plans for the future such as launching an international network of business incubators.

With such a success, the Club Sophia UK team is currently working on the organisation of a second similar event in partnership with Sophia Antipolis. E.C.

For more information on Club Sophia UK contact:

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or visit the website: www.clubsophiauk.com which contains full details of events and projects.

Mind your languages, businesses told

North East businesses are being challenged to boost their employees' foreign language skills in order to compete more effectively in the global market place.

The University of Sunderland, in partnership with language training provider LTP 2000 Ltd, has launched the North East Business Language Challenge to help regional companies respond to the growing need for language skills.

University of Sunderland's Peter Bowes says "North East companies need to take the use of foreign languages seriously because, in a global economy, it can be the key to winning new business and servicing that business in a professional way."

"A basic ability to communicate and an appreciation of the business and social culture of the country concerned can make all the difference to clinching a deal. Staff certainly should not be put off by what they did, or didn't do, at school – we have seen individuals progress in a new language regardless of age or academic background."

To mark the Year of European Languages, North East companies are being challenged to prepare a professional, two-minute presentation to a small group or an individual, in a new language by October 2001. Anyone wanting more information about the challenge should contact Peter Bowes on 0191 515 2666 or the FBC office.

Back to France

We wish all the best on her return to France to Geneviève Roulet who has spent the last four months as the FBC stagiaire.

Geneviève has been a fantastic help to the FBC team, particularly with her work on the organisation of Bastille Day, and on the content production for the FBC website.

Going back to Grenoble to finish her business studies MA, Geneviève believes she has gained an invaluable experience at the FBC. She says "I really hope other French students will be able to join the French Business Council team and enjoy it as much as I did."

The FBC website is now live at

www.frenchbusinesscouncil.co.uk

Visit the site for up to date information about forthcoming events and projects, useful documents about France, links to partner organisations, and more.

case study

AskAlix choose Paris for flagship European office

In July this year AskAlix became the biggest online business directory in Europe, ahead of its closest competitor Scoot.

The success of the Teesside-based company in Europe follows the launch of its flagship European office in France a month earlier. The Paris base gives the company its first physical presence in the heart of Europe, opening doors for further European business opportunities and partnerships.

The new Paris office is a third base to complement the company's headquarters in Eaglescliffe, Stockton on Tees and the business development office in London.

"France is one of the most important markets in Europe for the internet. If you can succeed there you can succeed anywhere" says European marketing executive Nick Hanson-James. However he doesn't believe in the widespread idea that the French market is the most difficult one to crack in Europe. He says "All markets are difficult at the moment, and France is no exception. With the

legacy of Minitel however, we believe there is an audience in France who are accustomed to accessing a wide range of everyday information needs from home based technologies. What is tough though is establishing a brand in a foreign country, realising the needs and wants of your

audience and then fulfilling them. That is what we have done in France and are in the process of achieving in other parts of Europe."

In actual fact, Nick believes the success of businesses like AskAlix contributes to breaking down old barriers to trading with France. "As European integration accelerates, we are all becoming members of one giant business community. Negative stereotypes are usually based on either events that happened long ago, or outdated attitudes. By carrying our business community vision across Europe, we feel that we are helping to break down these preconceptions. We will all be doing business across Europe very shortly, and we want to help both UK and French SMEs benefit from our service."

Thanks to an approach which takes a winning formula and localises it to the needs of the French audience, the French office already has a number of major business deals in the pipeline.

With a strong team of French nationals and French speakers, the company conducts negotiations and meetings in French. "This integrates us further with French culture and strengthens our credibility" says Nick Hanson-James.

AskAlix Commercial Director Chris Johnson is delighted with the company's performance in Europe so far and says "With the problems dotcoms are having at the moment, commentators think it's encouraging that a young company from the North East of England is bucking the trend. Take a look at the site - our results speak for themselves."

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Commercial director Chris Johnson (right) with European business development executive Philippe Pedron in Paris.



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