

FBC Celebrates 10 years during Entente Cordiale Centenary Year

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If the Entente Cordiale can be described as “this most surprising diplomatic achievement”, then the 10th anniversary of the French Business Council may come as a surprise to some, but not to those who have followed its development, not only of initiatives and projects, but of collaborative leadership, values, sheer determination and innovation.

Back in 1994, a group of enthusiasts keen to help the Region trade more successfully with France set up the FBC as a company limited by guarantee. Over the next few years, the FBC managed general and specialist trade development missions to France, providing business culture briefings and training for North East businesses.

The FBC has always sought innovation and change to refresh its mission and stimulate demand. It anticipated many of the trends now being mainstreamed in the Region, for example by championing the international promotion of the NE multimedia industry at the MILIA exhibition in Cannes and by building a special relationship with Sophia Antipolis, Europe’s biggest science park. Its concern for linguistic and European business cultural skills blends well with the work today of the Regional Language Network North East, of which the FBC is a major partner. Particularly gratifying has been the contract secured with ONE, the Regional Development Agency for the North East, to support inward investment from France.

Thanks for the continued development and success of the FBC go to many people and organisations, but first to my fellow Directors. In good times and bad, their challenging enthusiasm ensured that the FBC Board held fast, bonded by a shared sense of value of the company to the Region, especially during the many sea-changes affecting the NE over those 10 years.

Another key factor in the FBC’s commercial success over the past ten years has undoubtedly been the dedication and skills of the FBC staff. They are multilingual professionals giving a highly professional service to companies in the Region, and are crucially linked to the Chambers of Commerce networks across the EU. The FBC plays a critical role in providing closer-to-market economic, linguistic and cultural information to companies and organisations in the Region who want to succeed in a market often seen as difficult to crack.

Collaboration with regional organisations has also played an important role in the success of the FBC. Too many fully to mention, they include Government Office

for ERDF and ESF support, ONE, the North East Chamber, UKTI (formerly TPUK), and all those who worked with and for the FBC in the Region over 10 years.

When, on 8 April 2004, both nations mark the centenary of the Entente Cordiale, we might, in this region of Europe, allow ourselves a moment to reflect on what we, in and for the North East, have sought to provide and achieve. 2004 will see further changes, and wider transformations, as the FBC meets the challenges of new trends in the Region and beyond by developing its European dimension. In uncertain times, what remains certain is the commitment to sustain the service to the North East begun 10 short years ago.