

HELPING THE REGION TALK WITH THE WORLD

Would you like your company literature translated into Spanish? Are you planning to go abroad on business in Italy and need some cultural background information? Would you like to know whether there is some funding available to exhibit at an international trade fair in Germany?

Although these questions have very little to do with the French market, the French Business Council (FBC) is now providing this type of advice and guidance to NE companies after winning a major contract as sub-regional partner of the Regional Language Network North East (RLN NE).

The RLN NE was established by One NorthEast and the Languages National Training Organisation in March 2002 to increase language and cultural awareness in the region. This followed an audit in the region in 2000 that showed that one in five companies had lost business abroad because of poor international communication skills.

Since December 2002, the FBC, as part of the RLN NE Team, has been contacting businesses in County Durham and Northumberland to find out more about their language needs and international communication skills, and to provide useful information about available grants, language training, cultural training, translation agencies, staff with language skills in the region, etc.

Together with two other RLN NE sub-regional partners offering similar assistance to Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley companies, the FBC is helping to raise awareness of the importance of international communication skills in the North East and is identifying best practice examples in the region. Two examples are Rhodia Pharma Solutions in Northumberland and PPG Industries International in County Durham who are both working closely with French colleagues and supporting French language training for their staff.

The FBC organised two RLN NE events in County Durham and Northumberland, at Seaham Hall and Longhirst Hall respectively, and 30 businesses and language service providers attended to learn about the support available, to exchange ideas and to

network. Speakers included Geoff Young and Joyce Rawlings, International Trade Advisers from Durham and Northumberland Business Links, who presented services offered by Trade Partners UK; Andrew Robinson, Chairman of the French Business Council; and Zélie Guérin, Coordinator of the Regional Language Network North East.

Zélie Guérin highlighted the success of the first stage of the project: "This has proved to be an invaluable part of the RLN NE's first year of operations, yielding a cohort of North East businesses keen to develop international communication skills for business success."

Having entered the second stage of the RLN NE project, the FBC will organise other workshops and events throughout the year and will continue to visit companies in the region. Should you have any questions about the RLN NE, support available for your business, cultural/language training or upcoming events in your area, please feel free to contact either Sylvie Larocque or Wibke Baumann at the FBC. The Regional Language Network's website can be found at www.rln-northeast.com.