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Today's news from Birmingham Chamber Group  
2010

July 1

## **Recovery stalls as export sales take a dip**

Falling export sales among Birmingham and Solihull manufacturers underline the fragility of any recovery from recession, a new survey reveals today. According to the latest quarterly economic survey by Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCI), 49 per cent of companies reported an increase in overseas sales. But this figure was only five per cent higher than the previous quarter and there was concern that 27 per cent of firms, against six per cent in Q1, said their exports had fallen. This gave a disappointing percentage balance of 22 per cent, a fall of 16 per cent on the first three months of 2010. However, there was encouragement on the home front, with manufacturers recording their best UK sales since the second quarter of 2007. Forty-nine per cent said sales had increased compared with 41 per cent in the previous quarter while 43 per cent, against 38 per cent in Q1, had fuller order books.

Figures for the service sector indicate that any recovery has slowed over the past three months. Home market sales increases were reported by 34 per cent of firms, a drop of two per cent on Q1, and orders were also down at 33 per cent from 34 per cent. There was better news on the export front for service companies, with 48 per cent, compared to 31 per cent in Q1, reporting increased sales and 40 per cent, against 33 per cent, having boosted orders.

There was encouraging news on the jobs front for Birmingham, where unemployment stands at 11.9 per cent, the highest among the UK core cities. Twenty-eight per cent of manufacturers said they had increased their workforce while only four per cent had suffered a drop. These were the best figures for over 12 months – in the same quarter past year nearly half of the firms were cutting staff levels. A smaller increase, by five per cent to 23 per cent, was reported in service sector staffing levels. About a third of firms in both sectors were expecting to increase recruitment over the next quarter and only four per cent warning of cuts.

Underlining the unstable economy, investment plans continue to fluctuate, with equipment and training suffering in both sectors.

## **Invitation to meet Hong Kong and China experts**

Businesses are invited to meet Hong Kong and China experts with a view to exporting to or investing in the country. UK Trade & Investment, with Birmingham Chamber is hosting an event on July 13 at Chamber House. Hong Kong and the UK have been close trading partners for nearly 200 years. In 2006 Hong Kong took £4.1 bn in value of British goods and services. The region also serves as a trading gateway to mainland China. To book email [a.hawkins@birminghamchamber.org.uk](mailto:a.hawkins@birminghamchamber.org.uk) or tel. 0121 450 4205.

## **Lawyers launch new web site**

Walsall Law Firm Enoch Evans LLP has launched a brand new website to support its recent conversion to LLP status. Along with the new logo and new literature the website, designed in-house by Marketing Co-ordinator Sophie Willett provides a more modern, informative and user-friendly way of finding information quickly and easily. The company is offering both new and existing clients (with new matters) an initial free 30 minute consultation throughout July and August. Visit [www.enochevans.co.uk](http://www.enochevans.co.uk).

## **Life after RDAs**

With the abolition of regional development agencies, business support, the role of local authorities and

the impact for business will be debated on 9 July. Keynote speaker Adrian Bailey MP with an expert panel to include Dermot Finch at Centre for Cities and Michael Izza of ICAEW will be in attendance at eleven Brindleyplace. To secure your place, email [rsvp@centreforcities.org](mailto:rsvp@centreforcities.org) or tel. 0207 803 4300.

## Sick levels lowest for years

The employment team at leading law firm HBJ Gateley Wareing is highlighting figures which indicate that the average UK worker took 6.4 sick days last year, the lowest number for over 20 years. The CBI/Pfizer Absence and Workplace Health Survey has found that the average of 6.4 sick days last year was the lowest number since 1987 when the survey began. This fall includes a reduction in the public sector absence rate to 8.3 days last year. However, this is still significantly higher than the private sector, where each employee averaged 5.8 sick days. The survey estimated that the total 180 million sick days taken last year cost the UK economy £16.8bn.

## West Midlands still losing lives at work

Ten workers were killed at work in the West Midlands between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010, according to new figures released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). This is compared to an average of 22 work-related deaths in the past five years in the region, and 11 fatal injuries in 2008/09. Across Britain, the number of people killed at work has fallen to a new record low with 151 workers dying at work in 2009/10 – down 15 per cent on the previous lowest total of 178 in the year before.

## Keeping ahead of health and safety inspections

The penalties for breaking health and safety laws have been dramatically increased in recent years warns James Lowe, an associate in DLA Piper's litigation and regulatory team. He said: "Don't get into a panic if a health and safety inspector comes calling. Try and get in ahead if you've got a problem and whatever else you do, do not seek to obstruct an investigation as big fines and even imprisonment will be on the cards." Mr Lowe pointed out that inspectors had wide-ranging powers including requiring people to answer questions, to direct that premises be left undisturbed for as long as reasonably necessary, to take possession of relevant articles or documents, to require employers to provide the facilities and assistance needed to carry out their work, and to issue an improvement or prohibition notice.

## Birmingham adviser is named best



One of Birmingham's leading figures on enterprise was recognised for her achievements at the region's Business Support Professional Awards. The competition, organised by Business Enterprise Support (BES) and sponsored by Business Link West Midlands celebrated the achievement of seven leading support professionals, who between them had helped 5,000 companies get off the ground and played a role in creating more than 10,000 jobs. Go-Woman's Yasmin Akhtar

walked off with one of the main awards after beating off strong competition to secure the title of Minority Ethnic Business Professional of the Year.

## Aston Law student wins top legal place



An outstanding Aston Law undergraduate has beaten off fierce competition to secure a place on a highly regarded national scheme. Laura Taylor, aged 19 and a first year student on the LLB Law with Management programme within Aston Business School, has been selected to attend the prestigious City Solicitors' Educational Trust (CSET) Summer School. The aim of the scheme is to provide key skills and knowledge and so improve access to the most competitive legal firms by students from less traditional backgrounds, particularly those who have no family experience of legal education and the university sector.



## Housing boss named new chair

A Walsall housing boss has been chosen as the new chair of a leading forum that represents disabled people across the borough. Rod Brown, Head of Support Services for Caldmore Area Housing Association, will replace Angela Steatham as Chair of the Walsall Disability Forum. The Forum works with more than 70 organisations in Walsall, including Caldmore, to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and or impairments. Rod Brown brings to the board 18 years of experience in shaping and delivering services for adults with learning disabilities, mental health problems and older people.



## King Sturge cycle challenge

To mark King Sturge's 250th anniversary, over 200 employees took to the road for a 1200 mile charity relay bike ride, linking 16 of the company's offices across the UK, starting in Glasgow. The Birmingham office took to the saddle on the seventh day of the relay, setting off on their 120 mile leg to their Cardiff office.

Taking the baton from their Nottingham colleagues, they completed the challenge in four stages, with 14 cyclists and 7 volunteers providing back up support. The cycle challenge forms part of King Sturge's national charity appeal to raise £250,000 for two charities chosen by employees - The Children's Trust and Orchid Cancer Charity. The Birmingham office is also raising funds for a local charity, The Royal British Legion with specific emphasis on the Selly Oak military trauma ward. Anyone wishing to support King Sturge's charity appeal can log onto [www.kingsturge1760.com](http://www.kingsturge1760.com).

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