

## Encouraging response



Having first raised the idea of a 'IT IS British' nationwide PR campaign in the last issue of 'Furniture Times', I am delighted to report that it has fashioned a very positive response from all sectors of the industry.

We have received unsolicited offers of financial support, letters from retailers backing the concept and manufacturers pledging assistance in the development of the strategy.

The overall aim and objective will be to increase awareness of British manufactured furniture in the eyes of the consumer, retailers, contract specifiers, architects and the wider international audience.

The next stage will be to undertake an analysis of views and opinion amongst the BFM membership. This will establish the first stages of a 4 year strategy.

As ever, we welcome continued opinion and support from the industry but if the initial feedback that we have received is anything to go by, this can be an incredibly significant venture for BFM, its' members and the industry.

Roger Mason, MD

## Imports still down!

Monthly cumulative import and export figures to April 2006 have now been analysed. They show further positive news and evidence that more furniture manufacturers are embracing the global market - long overdue!

- In April 2006, £9.3m less furniture was imported in the UK compared with April 2005.
- To April 2006, £19.25m more furniture has been exported from the UK, compared with figures to April 2005.
- Across all sectors, exports to Russia have increased by an average of 176%.
- In the domestic furniture sector, exports have increased significantly in Croatia (110%), Turkey (50%), Kuwait (100%), Pakistan (80%).
- More established export markets have also seen important growth: USA (5%) and Japan (10%).
- In the contract sector, South Africa (300%), Singapore (500%), Canada (50%) and Thailand (50%) have seen fantastic export growth.
- In the office sector, Russia (400%), Japan (100%) and the USA (40%) have seen dramatic increases in exports.
- Latvia (500%), Lithuania (300%) and Poland (200%) were the stand out export figures for the beds sector.

## employment

### Everybody can claim discrimination at work!

**Arguably, the most wide-ranging and intrusive employment law ever to be introduced in this country will be with us from 1st October this year.**

The Employment Protection (Age) Regulations 2006 will outlaw discrimination on the grounds of age in every workplace. Anybody of any age (young and old) can claim discrimination. It is not like any other discrimination law as they are limited to certain groups in society. Age though is something we all carry.

The law will cover all aspects of the employment relationship including, recruitment, pay and benefits, working conditions, training, promotion, dismissal and references. There will be a default retirement age too, set at 65 and a process that MUST be followed when retiring an employee to avoid claims of automatic unfair dismissal and (uncapped) compensation awards. When the law was introduced in Ireland, employment tribunal claims increased by 25%.

ACAS has published a guide for employers, Age and the Workplace, looking at a few of the issues that employers will need to address. ACAS also guide employees through their rights and how they may make a tribunal claim if they feel they have suffered discrimination, victimisation or harassment because of their age.



*continued on page 2*



Suggested articles for publication should be e-mailed to Caroline Hays, [chays@bfm.org.uk](mailto:chays@bfm.org.uk)

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employment

environment

exhibitions

services

representation

exports

# employment

continued from page 1

A taster from the ACAS guide examples:

- ▶ A young employee is told that he is 'wet behind the ears' and 'straight out of the pram' - this is harassment.
- ▶ A manager is asked for a reference and he says he cannot recommend the employee for the job because she was 'too young and inexperienced' - this is direct discrimination.
- ▶ An advertisement asks for qualified driving instructor with 10 years experience - this is potential discrimination as it prevents people from under 28 from applying.
- ▶ George is in his 60's and works with people below 30. George is not invited to their frequent social events where business is often discussed and problems resolved. This is a potential form of harassment.
- ▶ Redundancy - '...practices such as LIFO (last in first out) and using length of service in any selection criteria are likely to be age discriminatory' - many are asking too - how does this leave skills assessment as skills come with age too?

Put your 'lateral thinking hat' on now because that is what is needed to get to grips with this law.

BFM however can help. The BFM web site ([www.bfm.org.uk](http://www.bfm.org.uk)) contains a section on **diversity in employment** and within that site is a **benchmarking tool** that allow companies to audit their terms and conditions, policies and practices etc., against the potential of discrimination and it has been updated specifically to account for the age laws. Members of BFM will receive guidance and model letters that will take them through the whole process of retirement beginning with the duty to notify employees of their rights and ending with the decision. This will be the first of several 'age' packages that members will receive.

## Age discrimination

### FREE seminars

With the help of a leading firm of employment law solicitors, BFM is to run **two FREE seminars** - one in London and the other in the Nottingham area - on the age discrimination laws. They will be practical in nature and address the implications for recruitment, employment, benefits and dismissal, as well as how to conduct an in-company 'age-audit'. Delegates will also be led through the statutory procedures and processes on how to retire employees. The dates are still to be finalised. To register your company's interest please e-mail Mike Dimond at [bfmhw@lineone.net](mailto:bfmhw@lineone.net) and indicate which of the two seminar locations would suit you better.



# environment

## Making the industry greener

Are your customers taking a greater interest in environmental management? Is your company being asked to take back end-of-life furniture when selling new items? If your answer to either question is yes, a new BFM environmental research project will be of interest. The two year study will start in July 2006 with DTI funding. Key areas of focus include:

Product service systems: reconsideration of the way in which furniture manufacturers sell their product offers the potential to decouple producers' business success from the amount of products sold. By creating value from the provision of additional service rather than additional product, it is possible to create greater economic benefit simultaneously with reduced environmental impact.

**UK manufacturers are much better placed than importers to offer higher value product service systems.**

Environmental design for furniture: consideration of environmental issues during the design of the product is integral to achieving material reduction, choosing environmentally sound raw materials, enabling the reuse of components and facilitating cost effective remanufacture. **Again, the competitive advantage of such research should accrue to UK manufacturers.**

Sustainable consumption: furniture purchasers have the potential to influence the supply chain by demanding environmentally sound products and services. Furthermore, such purchasers can also specify a constructive end of life outlet for their used furniture. **The project will enable UK furniture manufacturers to participate in the creation of an environmental impact evaluation tool which can be adapted by their designers.**

Remanufacturing: this option offers an attractive route for material which is surplus to reuse requirements. It involves converting used furniture into new products. **Early involvement in remanufacturing will give project participants a competitive edge with regard to the provision of value added services to customers**

Participation is encouraged from UK manufacturers who stand to gain a competitive edge. For further information contact Alistair Bromhead, BFM Environmental Consultant: [alistair@abromhead.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:alistair@abromhead.freeserve.co.uk)

# employment

## Changing hours to match workflow: it can be done

The traditional 39 or 40 hour week is not designed to cope with fluctuations in demand, and many of you I suspect have grappled with the dilemma of how to match hours of work with workflow peaks and troughs. Just think of the benefits - reductions in overtime and short time working, improved cash flow/lead times/stock control/competitiveness and in today's environment a timely opportunity to achieve a reduction in energy usage.

BFM has produced a guide to annual and seasonal hours working. This has been done in conjunction with representatives from across our industry and has drawn on the experience of companies who use these systems. Workflow is analysed and the hours are plotted against ebbs and flows in production. The length of the working week is then varied to match the flows. To take advantage of an alternative way of thinking, BFM members can download the guide from the BFM web site ([www.bfm.org.uk](http://www.bfm.org.uk)).

# events

**New Designers**  
Business Design Centre,  
London



More than 4,000 graduate designers from 20 creative disciplines will be exhibiting at New Designers.

### Part 1: 29 June to 2 July 2006

Contemporary Applied Arts; Ceramics and Glass; Jewellery and Precious Metalwork; Fashion, Textiles and Accessories.

### Part 2: 6 July to 9 July 2006

Product Design; **Furniture Design**; Illustration and Animation; Graphic and Interactive Media; Photography and Spatial Design (Architectural Design, Interior Design, Model making and Theatre Design).

**London Fabric**  
Earl's Court, London



[www.londonfabric.com](http://www.londonfabric.com)

20 - 22 FEBRUARY 2007

Next year's dates for UK's only manufacturers' trade show of upholstery and drapery fabric are: **20 to 22 February 2007**.

# services

## BFM Knowledge Centre – Import & Export Statistics

Following the fantastic news that furniture imports were down and furniture exports increased in 2005, BFM now undertake a monthly analysis of all furniture imports and exports. Using official data and harmonisation codes from Revenue and Customs Statistical and Tariff Office, these figures are broken down by the following sectors: domestic, contract, office, kitchens and beds.

The BFM Knowledge Centre also holds the industry's National Labour Agreement, production figures, 'Wages Survey', 'State of Trade Survey', 'Profit and Costs Survey', overseas market reports and buyers lists.

So we now have the most up-to-date information on how the industry is performing, both presently and comparatively, key data to assist planning and budgeting, benchmarking statistics and information to help grow your export sales.

For further information on all statistical and economic data held in the BFM Knowledge Centre or to register to have access to these statistics, please contact [adam.mason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:adam.mason@bfm.org.uk)

## London Olympic Games, 2012

Despite being some six years away, BFM have taken an active involvement in consultations, through it's membership of the CBI, to develop the procurement strategy for the London Olympic Games.

All kinds of businesses, large and small will be needed to deliver the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. A set of draft procurement principles has been prepared that will guide the existing programmes of contract-letting. In due course, a detailed Procurement Strategy for the London Games will be drawn up.

For further information on the procurement strategy and time scale for the potential opportunities, please contact [adam.mason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:adam.mason@bfm.org.uk)



## Membership Services review:

### Employment and Personnel top the charts!

Of the 18 core services available to BFM members, Employment & Personnel and Health, Safety and Environment Support have been voted the top two in a recent survey of the BFM membership to ascertain which services are of most importance.

The top five services are:

1. Employment & Personnel
2. Health, Safety & Environment Support
3. BFM website
4. National Labour Agreement
5. Business Enquiries & Sales Leads

BFM has undertaken the survey in order to develop and streamline the core services it offers to members in a bid to communicate more effectively and continue to provide value for money.

*"The survey has proven to be an extremely valuable exercise. As well as discovering which of our existing services are of most benefit, many members have suggested services that they would like to see introduced. We are now working hard to develop these ideas and will be launching a number of new services in the coming months."*

commented Roger Mason, Managing Director

If you would like further information on the new services, existing services or to contribute to the survey, please contact [adam.mason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:adam.mason@bfm.org.uk)



# representation

## All-Party Parliamentary Furniture Industry Group

After many years and painstaking discussions within the sector, the jigsaw is now complete and we have a direct access to the heart of Government. May 22nd 2006 saw the inaugural meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Furniture Industry group at the House of Commons.

The election of officers produced the following committee:

Chair: Madeleine Moon MP  
Vice-Chairs: Jeremy Browne MP, Lord Davies of Coity  
Treasurer: Gordon Prentice MP  
Secretary: Paul Goodman MP  
Officers: Anne Snelgrove MP, David Liddington MP, Lord Hoyle

In order to keep the groups' aims and objectives as focused as possible, the committee will be asked to address the following key issues:

To raise awareness of the furniture industry, to publicise and promote the industry in the United Kingdom in order to protect jobs and investment

Flammability regulations and their enforcement at the point of entry

This development reinforces BFM's strong position on representation. We now hold key positions in:

- Europe through membership of the European Federation
- UK government through participation in the All-Party Parliamentary Furniture Industry Group
- Business & Industry through membership of the CBI and Trade Association Forum
- Micro companies & SME's through membership of the Genesis Initiative
- International Trade through membership of Sponsors' Alliance and as an
- Accredited Trade Organisation

As ever, we are the voice of our members in all representation and lobbying activity.

We have now received a full list of both attendees and apologies for the 'All Party Parliamentary Group' meeting and having undertaken an exercise to locate the MP's and their constituencies geographically, it makes interesting reading. If you would like further information please contact Adam Mason, Email: [adam.mason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:adam.mason@bfm.org.uk)

# services

## BFM teams up with Sagar on a RAS Insurance Management Scheme

Pilot schemes within the membership has produced indicative savings on insurance premiums in the region of 30%.

For further information please contact Roger Mason, [rogermason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:rogermason@bfm.org.uk).

# industry

## Quotes

from "Give us the cheapest seats in the house", published in The Daily Telegraph, May 27, 2006

"We are a nation in love with the cheap couch"

"The average Briton is now expected to buy at least seven sofa sets in his lifetime, the majority of them in leather."

"The cheap couch industry is now a billion-pound-a-year business ..."

"In the coming year, the British public will buy an estimated quarter of a million sofas at an average price of £1,500 each."

"The average Briton spends 12 years of their life sitting on a sofa."

# membership

## New members

BFM is pleased to welcome the following companies into membership:

Exclusive Contract furniture Ltd  
Greengate Furniture  
Inspirations Upholstery Ltd  
Newcastle Furniture Company  
Ultra Furniture  
Wesley-Barrell

*Exclusive Contract Furniture*



If you wish to receive future quarterly BFM newsletters free of charge, simply send an email to [info@bfm.org.uk](mailto:info@bfm.org.uk) or call 020 7714 0851.

# exports

## Mebel 2006 November 21st - 25th

Mebel has now established itself as Russia's main furniture event. It is the most prestigious and large-scale exhibition in Eastern Europe.

Mebel is in its 18th year and covers every aspect of domestic & contract furniture. In 2005 it brought together 2,500 exhibitors specialising in manufacturing and wholesale of furniture products. It attracted a total of 96,000 visitors, 80% of which were trade.

For this year's show BFM are hoping to organise a showcase of British product which will afford companies new to the market a low cost entry to gauge interest and commence business.

For further information, projected costs and confirmation that your company meets the funding eligibility criteria, please contact [adam.mason@bfm.org.uk](mailto:adam.mason@bfm.org.uk)