

North East England in a Global Europe

Thursday 12 November 2015

Speaker biographies

Dr Andrew Robinson
Chair, European Commercial and Consular Office and Consul for France



Andrew's engagement in regional, Anglo-French and European affairs draw on wide, senior experience in regional economic policy and practice, academia and research, at the proactive interface between business, government and learning.

As Chair of ECCO he shares and shapes innovative approaches to help both private and public sectors in the North East and beyond, harnessing economic intelligence and economic diplomacy in an international, multilingual context.

He has contributed to several European Presidencies, the Global Forum, working also with the EC, European Parliament and European Investment Bank to advance and communicate a closer practical understanding of European policies.

He has been honoured with the Legion d'Honneur for services to Franco-British understanding, and is also Chevalier de l'Ordre du Merite and Chevalier des Palmes Academiques.

He is the co-architect of the first Franco-German Consulate in the EU, based in Newcastle. With UKTI, local authorities, the LEP framework and other agencies, he also helps business growth in exports and inward investment blending local, national and international contacts and relationships.

Nicola Bolton
Managing Director, UKTI



Nicola is an experienced business director with a strong delivery track record of nearly 30 years in the public and private sectors, developing and driving UK and international programmes to achieve business change, operational efficiency and financial targets in dynamic operating environments.

Experienced in the development and implementation of challenging public sector strategy and policy, as well as in the leadership of large-scale programmes of business change, she makes a difference by bringing together stakeholders in complex organisations and making interfaces work quickly to empower staff to deliver, and by modernising, restructuring and transforming organisations to be fit for purpose.

She joined the civil service in late 2007 and has worked in the Home Office and the Cabinet Office prior to joining UKTI in June 2014. Previously she worked for IBM, where she held roles at UK and international levels, latterly as Government Industry Director.



Caroline Theobald

MD Bridge Club Ltd, co-founder Gabriel Investors LLP, Chairman, International Newcastle and Honorary Consul for Sweden



Caroline Theobald founded Bridge Club Ltd in 2000 as a private company with a mission to 'champion, foster, and accelerate enterprise and entrepreneurship'. Bridge Club Ltd has introduced thousands of people to like-minded individuals and given them access to a wealth of contacts. These connections have resulted in successful partnerships, lucrative contracts and a whole host of other business benefits. Caroline is now launching a new social enterprise called FIRST that will provide face to face networking and online support to early stage businesses.

In 2007, Caroline accepted a Queen's Award for Enterprise Promotion for the work she continues to do in harnessing the enterprising capital of young people and business owner/managers. She sits on the boards of several early-stage and growing companies, is the co-founder of Gabriel Investors LLP and the Northern Institute for Business Ethics and the chairman of International Newcastle. She is also the independent chairman of the BQ Live debates that take place around the country.

Caroline has been the Honorary Consul for Sweden since 2007 and since her induction into the role has worked on strengthening business and cultural relationships between the UK and Sweden. In recognition of that she was made the honorary chairman of the north east chapter of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in 2010.

Geoff Ford, Chairman Ford Aerospace & Ford Component Manufacturing



Geoff Ford may be a qualified Chartered Accountant, but for the last 42 years, he has worked in the engineering industry, an environment he describes as "fascinating and challenging – in equal measure".

A native of South Shields, he has been involved in numerous initiatives to benefit his native North East.

Some of his more recent forays have included establishing the South Tyneside Manufacturing Forum (now the Advanced Manufacturing Forum) in 2006, and the Ford Engineering Academy in 2013. He has been Chairman of the South Tyneside Workplace Health Alliance since 2012, and is Chairman of the North East LEP Apprenticeship Growth Partnership.

In 2007 he received a Queen's Award for Enterprise Promotion and in 2008 he was made an MBE.

John Barnett, Operations Director, Calsonic-Kansei



John has worked in manufacturing for 32 years, the past 25 in the automotive industry in the North East of England. The last 16 years have been spent with Calsonic Kansei where he currently holds the position of Operations Director as well as European Head of Manufacturing. John has a passion to increase both the footprint and capability of manufacturing in the North East, working on 'Engineering the Supply Chain' for maximum TDC benefit to the OEM. Lean manufacturing is a key element to success in this, working closely with the customer for both cost reduction and value up initiatives. Outside Calsonic Kansei, John sits on the boards of both the North East LEP Business Support Board, as well as the North East

Automotive Alliance to give a voice to and enhance the manufacturing and automotive sectors.



John Rundle
Chair of the Land of Oak and Iron



John has had a long career as a Civil servant, but also ran the team that set up the RDA, and subsequently worked for it. He has run a number of other public private initiatives, including the Northern Way. He has considerable experience at working on the interface of the public and private sectors.

Currently, he is the Chair of the Land of Oak and Iron, A multi –agency partnership to restore some surviving traces of the industrial heritage as well as the outstanding natural features of one of the North East’s most historic landscapes in and around the Derwent Valley.

He is also a Director of his own company, focussing on Interim Management, Economic development, Public Private Partnerships and Facilitation.

Julie Underwood
International Trade Director, North East Chamber of Commerce

Julie is the International Trade Director at the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC), being the voice of North East Businesses and the leading business membership organisation in the North East of England. The NECC is contracted to deliver UKTI International trade services from April 2015-2020 and Julie leads a team of thirty plus colleagues delivering International Trade Advice and Language & Cultural guidance to small and medium sized businesses in the North East.

Zélie Guérin
Director, International Newcastle



Committed to helping the North East increase its business impact internationally, Zélie has over twenty years experience in the field of international relations. Working regionally, nationally and internationally, Zélie led the Regional Language Network in the North East, helping businesses increase their competitiveness in export markets. Businesses reported increased turnover following the development of language and intercultural skills. The Regional Language Network was ranked as the top UK performer of the 12 Networks. Managing and collaborating on multi-national teams, she has led international projects and events on business, education and culture.

Zélie is delivering International Newcastle’s ‘Better Visits’ inward visit organising and hosting service, including offering bespoke briefings on working with other cultures. Working together with Newcastle University, she creates and delivers seminars for international and home students, designed to raise intercultural awareness and contribute to student integration. She has a wealth of experience in hosting and organising international delegations, most recently inward visits from China, Japan and France, for Newcastle City Council. Zélie is also a project manager of the Newcastles of the World alliance, which brings together Newcastles across the globe.

Mike Gilkes
European Projects, Enterprise Europe Network



Mike is active in a range of international networks and sector groups, including nano & micro technologies, sustainable construction and creative & digital industries.

Mike previously managed D-LAB, a research and development unit exploring online economies through the application of real-time interactive 3D virtual business parks. Mike also held roles as senior lecturer covering digital media for business, and virtual reality applications developer servicing the offshore, health care, architectural and airport industries.



Craig A Iley ACIB
MD Business Banking, Atom Bank



Craig Iley has over 30 years banking experience spent mostly in the corporate and commercial arena. He has worked in both front line and credit roles across the UK and in Spain for banks as diverse as TSB, Lloyds, Alliance & Leicester and Santander each of which had a distinct approach to market. He is currently Managing Director Business Banking and a Founder Member of Atom Bank which is first UK bank designed and built for the digital age. Based in Durham, Atom Bank will be at the forefront of the digital banking revolution for SMEs.

Sven Riemann
Head of Marketing, German-British Chamber of Commerce; Franco-British Chamber



Sven holds a MBA from Warwick University, a BA (Hons) in European Business Administration and a Betriebswirt (FH).

He has many years of market research experience and after living in several European countries, speaks English, German and French.

Previous work experience has been with the fifth biggest European mail order company Neckermann Versand AG, the world's largest provider of business information Dun & Bradstreet and Europe's first Information Technology pricing

provider Context.

Since 1998, Sven has been with the German British Chamber of Industry and Commerce. A membership organisation, the Chamber promotes business relations between Germany and the United Kingdom.

His current role includes developing market entry strategies, undertaking market research, performing partner searches and giving speciality business training.

Hans Moller
Innovation Director of NELEP and Chair of Karolinska Institutet Science Park, Stockholm



Hans Möller is Innovation Director with the North East LEP. He has over 25 years managerial experience including all areas of innovation promotion, sales and marketing. Before starting at the North East LEP in 2015, Hans worked as the CEO of the leading Science Park in Sweden, Ideon Science Park in Lund. He was also Chair of the Swedish Incubators and Science Parks, and is Chair of Karolinska Institutet Science Park in Stockholm.

Aidan Stradling
Director at Anglo-Russian Centre in North East England



Aidan Stradling is a policy practitioner, businessman and linguist. He has worked as a policy-maker in government, EU negotiator and ministerial adviser. He now runs the Anglo-Russian Centre in North East England, linking companies and carrying out consultancy work. He chaired the Arab Ambassadors' Steering Group that brought Ambassadors from ten Arab countries to North East England in May 2015, and set up the platform 'Arab Info North'.

