

Maximising opportunities

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CHRISTOPHER JEFFREY has been Dean of the British University Vietnam for nearly eight years and an active BBGV member for seven years, where he currently serves as a board member. He moved from Cass Business School in London where he was faculty and Director of the Executive MBA, to help set up the University and has been part of the leadership team from that point, being involved in the expansion and move to the new \$25 million campus at Ecopark. He also is on the advisory board of the United Nations International School Hanoi and Operation Smile and represents BBGV on the Vietnam Business Forum, where he is also a board member.

British business is well established within Vietnam, having had a continued presence since the Doi Moi reforms. The British Business Group Vietnam has been established since 1998 and was the first licenced International Chamber of Commerce within Vietnam. Over the last 20 years, the group has worked alongside the British Embassy supporting Britain's standing in Vietnam as well as helping the Vietnamese government in building closer ties between the businesses of the two nations. 2018 marks a number of anniversaries between the countries, including 45 years of diplomatic relations, 20 years of the British Council in Vietnam and 8 years of the strategic partnership between the countries. This relationship has been supported by high-level visits of Cabinet Ministers building the political and trade opportunities available to UK companies, which will be further increased with the adoption of the European Free Trade Agreement, scheduled to occur before Britain leaves the EU.

Over the last 20 years, the Chamber has supported British business that operates in the country as well as Vietnamese companies that trade with the UK. From its origins in Ho Chi Minh City, the chamber has expanded to open an office in Hanoi. BBGV has also developed its operations to match those required in a country of over 95 million people, a large percentage of whom are young, and a GDP growth rate of 6.8 per cent annually with the first quarter of 2018 reaching over 7 per cent; the highest level seen in the last decade.

The Chamber has over 500 members based throughout the country, ranging from the big multinationals through to SME's and individual members. Following the policies of both governments there is an increased focus on the SME sector, with it being seen as the driver for the next stage of development between our two countries. This is evidenced by the decline in the exports of food and chemicals to Vietnam, which has been compensated by an increase of 92 per cent in the purchase of manufactured articles - predominately clothing and shoes. In 2013, to support the UK government's drive to increase commercial links worldwide, BBGV launched its business centre, which is aimed at supporting the potential markets, and over the last 5 years this has developed into one of the top performing operations globally. Working alongside the team

from the Department of International Trade, BBGV works to bring a seamless relationship for companies navigating what can seem a complex process to set up operations either directly or through local partners. In 2018, BBGV also launched The British Advocacy Group which is a high-level group of Senior CEO's of British businesses in Vietnam, enabling advocacy to occur between the British business sector and the highest level of government on the main issues which would further boost investment and business ties.

The traditional focus of UK interests within the business sector are predominately related to financial and professional services, education and hi-tech manufacturing and IT, where Britain has had an established footprint for a number of years. In 2017, the UK was ranked 15th in terms of FDI projects and the 3rd largest European trade partner with a bilateral trade turnover of over US\$2.7 billion. Whilst this is predominately focused on Vietnam exporting goods to the UK, with the growth of the economy and transition to middle-income status, there is a demand for a new range of services and relationships, with the growth of retail brands, automobiles and high value goods as well as education. Alongside this, with the development of the manufacturing base further up the value chain, there is also opportunity to utilize the existing competitive hub for production, which is already being undertaken by many Japanese and Korean multinationals.

Over the last 8 years, the country's development has increased dramatically, the use of English has exploded and the growth of language centres has grown exponentially. This is really testament to the commitment to education shown by families to enable their sons or daughters or grand children to take full advantage of the opportunities that industry 4.0 is bringing to the country. This year, over half the students enrolling in my own institution at Undergraduate level have achieved an IELTS of over 7.0. This commitment to education is again shown by the increased interest in all education elements in Vietnam, with students being able to achieve British qualifications through K12 to PhD from British institutions.

On the whole, BBGV feels that business and relationships between the two countries are very strong. Vietnam as a market is attractive: it is not easy but also not hard, but does take time and commitment to maximize opportunities. **F**