

Moving forward together

By **PETER BYRNE**

ACTING CEO, BRITISH IRISH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



PETER BYRNE is the acting CEO of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce and is charged with bringing the Chamber into existence. He has extensive experience of Chambers and has delivered seminars to Chambers throughout the world. He has a Masters degree in Organisational Behaviour and the practical experience of being a Chamber CEO. He previously had the opportunity of working with both Dáil Éireann, Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Chamber brand is synonymous with Business on a global scale and in 2010 a focus group was brought together to assess the need for a British Irish Chamber of Commerce. The most surprising outcome was that one did not already exist.

Ireland and Britain have been engaged in business for as long as anyone remembers. Today that relationship is vibrant and of enormous benefit to both economies. It is well supported by a number of state agencies including the IDA, Enterprise Ireland and UKTI. For a business person now is the time to enter the market place of Britain or Ireland as support and opportunities are available to support their growth.

The Chamber has come into being through the commitment of 22 Founding Member Companies; these companies are contributing the financial and personnel resources to enable the Chamber to make a positive contribution to promoting, supporting and encouraging trade in both directions between Britain and Ireland. Our President Fergal Naughton, Executive Director – Group Operations, Glen Dimplex Group leads from the front and sees on a daily basis the benefits of working in both Ireland and Britain. Like our other Founding Members Glen Dimplex is prepared through the Chamber to share knowledge and experience that will assist companies looking for new markets.

The British Irish Chamber of Commerce whilst working in partnership with the state agencies will bring its own suite of services, knowledge and opportunities to the business community. We will offer to business people the opportunity to meet and learn from other business people who have experience and knowledge of the British / Irish market place. We will offer practical advice and assistance drawn from our own involvement in this arena and be a referral point to the State Agencies.

For business people in both Britain and Ireland our proximity, shared language and business culture mean that for exporters, importers and investors alike it is possible to engage in the other country very quickly. Many people in both countries are very familiar with the other however sometimes that closeness masks the many opportunities that are so close and they can be missed. A challenge to our newly established Chamber is to showcase what is available and to encourage more people to utilise the excellent supports that are available. Our business linkages offer other business benefits in the

form of visiting tourists, inward and outward investment, joint ventures, flows of capital, skills and technology. It is a win-win situation for Irish and British business people.

Trade between Ireland and Great Britain continues to be of great importance and offers potential growth for both markets as well as the potential for the creation of synergies and partnerships on a European and Worldwide level. A shared language and excellent transport links allow for ease of communication and access, enabling an interactive sharing of concepts and innovation. Our Chamber is part of a European wide family of British Chambers and part of the Council of British Chambers of Commerce in Europe and we will have the opportunity to work with our members on business opportunities in other European countries. This will open up many new and exciting possibilities for companies. With the globalisation of markets and technologies, there is an even greater opportunity for collaboration amongst our members in both countries to ensure success in third markets. The British-Irish Chamber of Commerce will play a positive role in promoting opportunities for companies in the market place, in promoting a supportive environment for business and in celebrating the very strong British-Irish business relationship. We will be the voice of the business community echoing the positives and concerns of our members to both Governments. Championing at every turn the many opportunities that exist in both countries and utilising our membership of the EU for our mutual benefit.

Despite the current economic challenges in the last year trade between our countries has grown, further strengthening the relationship and helping both economies work towards a return to sustainable long-term economic recovery and growth. Now, more than ever, both economies will be looking to trade. There are significant opportunities in both markets. The British Irish Chamber of Commerce will encourage and support that potential, working together with government organisations such as Enterprise Ireland, the IDA and UK Trade & Investment we will play our part in economic growth to benefit Ireland and Britain.

The State Visit by Her Majesty The Queen will offer us all the opportunity to reflect on how close we really are as neighbours and together how much more we can achieve and it is an ideal opportunity to launch a Chamber that will have a pivotal role in developing business relationships between the two countries going forward. 