



Marcus Dolman (left) and Geoffrey de Mowbray, co-Chairmen, at the BExA Annual Luncheon at the Mansion House. London, October 2019

BExA Marks 80th Anniversary, Celebrates Culture Change

What started out as an industrial group for export merchants founded with encouragement from the wartime government, has evolved into a tightknit community of exporters and their service providers, who come together to drive the change that they need, and hold the government to account for the services it provides to exports

This year the British Exporters Association (BExA) celebrates its 80th anniversary and, to mark the occasion, *The Exporter* sat down with co-Chairmen Marcus Dolman of Rolls-Royce, and Geoffrey de Mowbray of Dints International, to discuss the Association's rich history and its path forward.

What does BExA offer its members, and where are its greatest areas of focus and influence?

Marcus Dolman (MD): As an independent national trade association, BExA is there to support its members and to lobby government to provide the services that exporters require to be successful overseas. Those services can include anything from assistance in entering export markets, to financial support

for exports. Historically, our greatest area of focus has always been on the country's export credit agency, UK Export Finance (UKEF). But I think that all changed with the Brexit vote in 2016, which gave us a wider remit to look at government influence on exports across the board.

Geoffrey de Mowbray (GdM): What BExA has done is create a peer network for exporters. The biggest challenge we have as exporters in the UK is

one of psychology: people are nervous of exporting, or don't believe they've got the tools to do it. Being part of a network of peers can help exporters overcome this thinking and export more effectively.

BExA has really ramped up the support that we offer our members, such as the recent launch of our helpline for members seeking advice on international trade, which has given us another string to our bow.

How has BExA progressed over the years in line with its members' needs?

MD: When I first started representing Rolls-Royce at BExA, which was 10 years ago, the Association was primarily focused on UKEF. We had done a couple of years' worth of the UKEF benchmarking papers, but no real change had yet happened to UKEF. A decade on, and we've seen huge strides, both in terms of what BExA has been doing, and what UKEF offers UK exporters.

Within the structure of BExA itself, a lot of the responsibility has traditionally been shouldered by the chairs, which hasn't changed much over the years. It's something

that Geoff and I recognised, and why we decided to put in place BExA's new sub-committees, which cover areas such as Concessional Lending, Export Strategy, Legal & Compliance and Customs & Export Licensing. These were created to try and make BExA more responsive to current issues and activities. They will also benefit BExA going forward, making it an easier Association to run and control, and benefitting everybody that's a part of it. That's the beauty of BExA: how much effort our members put in is directly relatable to how much benefit they get out of it.

How have members' needs changed over the years?

GdM: For some exporters – potentially those that have been members for a long time – there has been little change to their needs: access to finance for the SMEs and the general UKEF product range for the larger exporters. The needs of potential exporters were never met in the first place because we, as a country, have been focused on those who already export. But now that the UK is trying to get more people to export, there are new needs for earlier in the cycle, so to speak.

Has Brexit been the biggest challenge that members have faced in recent years?

MD: It's both a challenge and a tremendous opportunity. It

has one huge benefit in that it has got companies to look at themselves, understand where they procure goods from, and seek out different markets. And that's got to be a good thing. Obviously, there'll be challenges with new customs regulations – and we don't know what they're going to be yet. But business will cope with those. So, personally, from an international trade point of view, I can only see positives of Brexit going forward.

What have been some of BExA's greatest achievements, both historically and since you've been co-chairs?

MD: One of the greatest achievements is starting up the





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UKEF benchmarking papers: that has really helped us to hold UKEF to account and effected real change within the agency. As part of that, one of the major success stories was the bond support scheme that BExA lobbied hard for, which got reintroduced by UKEF in 2011, and is now one of the most used UKEF products.

GdM: When it comes to what we've done as co-chairs, the biggest contribution I believe we've made is changing the culture: there have been changes to the BExA Council, and there is a greater sense of accountability. People are getting impassioned about subjects again, which is great. More importantly, BExA is no longer about government bashing – it's now more about working with government to find solutions.

What are your hopes for BExA going forward?

MD: My hopes are that it continues to hold government to account for the services it provides to exporters and does so in a manner that effects change. I hope that it continues to engage with members and that our membership continues to grow.

GdM: The core of what I'd like to see for BExA's future is a continuation of being a group of passionate people coming together to push for the change that they need in the exporting world. And for BExA to increase its sphere of influence through that. BExA provides a great opportunity to bring people passionate about export together to drive change, and deepening and broadening that is my hope.

To learn more about BExA and the benefits of membership please visit the website www.bexa.co.uk/JoinBExA or email info@bexa.co.uk

BExA Annual Luncheon, 2019



BExA through the ages

1940 BExA's forerunner, the National General Export Merchant's Group, is formed by London and certain other Chambers of Commerce. For over 50 years, through its periodic Export Enquiry Circular, the Group introduces UK manufacturers and suppliers to export houses, providing, in some ways, an overseas market and supporting trade, finance and shipping services.

1961 The Group becomes an independent entity and changes its name to the British Export Houses Association (BEHA).

1988 BEHA becomes the British Exporters Association (BExA), and admits manufacturers into membership.

1991 Hampson Amendment: Following the privatisation of the short-term credit arm of UKEF (then ECGD), government agrees to retain an involvement with the insurance or reinsurance of political risk for a period of at least three years after privatisation – a revision for which BExA lobbied fiercely.

2003 BExA publishes 'Guide to Letters of Credit', its first of seven guides, written for exporters by exporters.

2005 BExA launches its Young Exporter Award, aimed at encouraging young people in exporting.

2006 BExA contributes to the improvement to Nigerian regulations when the country moved from pre-shipment to post-shipment inspection following a meeting with BExA and the Nigerian High Commissioner in London.

2006/07 UKEF (then ECGD) announces more flexible rules for exporters looking for support for contracts involving non-UK firms, including that the maximum level of support for foreign content be 80% of the contract value (up from 30-40% previously), as lobbied for by BExA.

2010 BExA publishes its first annual benchmarking of UKEF.

2011 UKEF reintroduces its bond support scheme, as lobbied for by BExA. Under the scheme, UKEF provides guarantees to participating banks under a master bond support agreement in respect of UK exports.

2013 BExA publishes its 'Guide to Successful Exporting'.

2018 UKEF announces an increase to its direct lending capacity of £2bn in the years after Brexit, as lobbied for by BExA.

2019 BExA's response to UKEF consultation on foreign content policy impacts government intentions.