

Chairman's Report to the BBCA AGM - 11 May 2010

Summary

I would like to start by thanking our new Ambassador to Belgium **HE Jonathan Brenton** for agreeing to continue as our association's Honorary President and for making time to attend this meeting in this, only his second week in the job.

We were very sad to see our President & Patron, **Dr. Rachel Aron**, take early retirement from the Foreign Office at the end of March, hence leaving her post as HE Ambassador to Belgium. Over the past 3 years Rachel has been a fantastic leader of the British Community here in Belgium, and we have all been motivated by her refreshing and caring approach. Certainly the BBCA has greatly benefited from her presence, and we are sure that is also true for British business and diplomatic interests here in Belgium. The BBCA sends Rachel our very best wishes for the future. We look forward to similar continued cooperation with Jonathan.

Last year saw a slight decrease in subscription fees, but still new members joining in all categories. Our donations to charities totalled €6,500, but still leaving us with net assets of over €11,000 in line with our Donations Policy which I will cover later. We very much appreciate and thank the British Chamber of Commerce secretariat for their continued support in our events. The English @ Work Project and the Festival Resonances have been positive new developments, and we look to assist the newly formed BRATS group in the future. The continued economic recession has limited the time many of us have been able to devote to the BBCA, but we feel we are still moving forward with the Association. Congratulations as well to the Antwerp British Community Association which last month celebrated its 90th Anniversary, and I was pleased to represent the BBCA at their reception in Antwerp Town Hall.

BBCA Policy on Donations

At the 2009 AGM we committed to define a policy for donations by the end of 2009. The following was therefore decided at the Conseil d'Administration:

- BBCA needs to keep some funds in case an event it is supporting or organising is loss-making; the Conseil d'Administration has a responsibility to manage the finances of the organisation en "bon père de famille" and has set this figure at 10.000 €. Should BBCA get to the stage of organising a major fund-raising event where deposits, for instance, are required it was felt a contingency of 10.000€ was not excessive.
- annual donations, assuming there is sufficient excess cash, would be made to organisations which
 - support the needy in the community
 - and rely on purely local fundraising (i.e. have no financial support from any "parent" organisation, government or institution)
 - and are paid-up members of BBCA.
- there are currently three member organisations that fit the above definition, being the British Charitable Fund, the Community Help Service, & the Royal British Legion.
- of the amount available over 10.000€ a maximum of 25% would be available for other member organisations that submit a request for funding an event/project in support of the needy in the community; the Conseil d'Administration will decide which requests qualify for a donation. The remaining 75% would be donated equally to the three member organisations mentioned above.



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- should the first 25% not be allocated or fully allocated due to a lack of requests or qualifying requests then the balance would be donated equally to the three member organisations mentioned above in addition to the other 75%.
- should a new organisation qualifying for donations join BBCA then the above policy would be amended to reflect that.

Events

Soon after our last AGM, Ambassador Rachel Aron renewed the tradition of a **Queen's Birthday Party**, but with a modern difference. The party celebrated the UK's commitment to tackling climate change and highlighted the plight of the environment during EU Green Week, with a 'Think Green' theme. The BBCA is very grateful and honoured that the Embassy invited all our individual and family members to this very special evening reception at the Rue Ducale residence.

In October we held another Group Networking Evening at Scotland Europa's prestigious offices on Rond Point Schuman. In total 30 people attended, representing 26 of our "constituent" groups. The participants listened to an excellent presentation by Charles E. Crouch, a Lecturer in e-business at the Boston University in Brussels, which comprehensively covered **how to improve the efficiency of an organisation's website**. We would sincerely like to thank Scotland Europa for providing the refreshments, in addition to their excellent premises: the attendees were able to enjoy a successful "networking" cocktail after the presentation.

The Christmas Reception was held jointly with Britcham at Rue Ducale on 9 December. The occasion allowed HE Dr. Rachel Aron to present donations totalling €6,500 to the the **British Charitable Fund, Community Help Service** and Royal British Legion each receiving €2000, and **BSB's Senior Citizens Christmas Party** with a donation of €500.

The BBCA was also involved in supporting a new annual international chamber music festival in Belgium, the Festival Resonances which took place from 26th April to 2nd May at venues in the Brabant Wallon area, with proceeds going to a local association called "L'allumeur de rêves", who have various projects helping children in difficulties; Jeremy Dixson was involve in producing the website for this venture, and the BBCA agreed to promote the Festival to our members.

English @ Work Project

During the last year we acted as a catalyst for the "English @ Work" project, which in December was selected for funding by the 2010 BreXpat programme of the King Baudouin Foundation. This is a result of a request from a Flemish school in Diest to the BBCA, to provide some of their students experience in an English speaking business environment. On 26 and 27 January, students from the British School of Brussels and Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege of Diest paired up together to accomplish the pilot project English@Work. Ten companies from the British Chamber of Commerce (Britcham) welcomed the students to undertake a genuine out-of-classroom work experience. A media reception was held at the Brussels Hotel de Ville on 27 April 2010, where the students made in-depth presentation of their results in the English@Work project. All were extremely positive of the results and experience gained, so the exercise will likely be repeated next year.



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Newsletter

Last year we issued 4 newsletters, and we have produced one to date this year. Once again we would like to thank **John Houston** as editor of the newsletter. We have continued to cover members events and feature their activities, plus interviews with key individuals in the community. We decided at our last committee meeting that we should now seek to update the format to a more modern style, reflecting new technology advances. The current format has now served us well for 6 years, the first newsletter in this style appearing in March 2004 just prior the launch of the BBCA website that April.

Website/ Events diary

Here I thank **Jeremy Dixon** for maintaining the technology base to support our operations. The Events Diary continues to be the main focus of the site and again we encourage more organisations to e-mail their upcoming events for publication.

We are now receiving requests from many different organisations that are seeking to communicate their events and activities with the British community here. The English @ Work project developed from an enquiry via the website

Fortunately this school year we have again had several students from the British School of Brussels (BSB) volunteer to work with us in their CAS programme (Creativity-Action-Service), and this is much appreciated by the BBCA.

Membership

We have 1 new constituent group: BRATS – British Retired Expats in Brussels, and its associated “Wednesday Club” to assist Expats who bring over their elderly parents to live with them in Belgium.

We hold records of 49 groups, with the 41 of the active ones on the website. Active means paying subs during the previous 3 years

		Paid	Paid	New	New
	Active	2010	2009	2010	2009
Group	41	26	32	1	1
Family	51	24	36	1	3
Individual	68	34	51	5	9

There is outstanding action to increase the group membership to include the CBI, British Council and the UK Regional Offices. As reported last year we spoken to the senior members in of all these groups, and it remains for the BBCA to find the time to incorporate these organisations.

We again thank **Rhoda Grant** for the very thorough work she does as membership secretary and for chasing the subscriptions.

Finance

The financial situation of the Association remains healthy as will be seen later from the accounts, which is admirable considering the current economic climate. The conseil has again operated essentially within the limits of the budget it proposed to the last AGM: an excess of income over expenditure of €3,443 just €400 less than the budget. Thanks go to **Christopher Thubron** as treasurer.

We would also thank **Martin Hare** who has again continued as the Association's Auditor, and who has duly audited the accounts that will be presented later.



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Supporters

Last year as far as Patron Supporters are concerned, **Fulcra**, **ING** (Expat Financial Services), **Eurostar**, and **Norfolkline** have continued. We still have room for one further Patron supporter.

Unfortunately **BMI** closed its Belgian Office at the end of last year, and **EuroConsumerPanel** has decided not to renew. This leaves us with the following Corporate Supporters: **British Chamber of Commerce**, **Eurocity**, **Maasmechelen Village**, **The Bulletin**, and **Stonemanor**. We have capacity on the website for at least another 6 Corporate supporters.

We really thank all these organisations for their continued generous support.

Again we have had a second year of a difficult business environment where obtaining sponsorship remains difficult.

Future events

As the Embassy will not be hosting the Queens Birthday Party this year, we plan to hold a Summer Charity cocktail reception with Britcham, provisionally scheduled for 1 July.

A Group networking event is planned in October, and we intend again to open this as well to our Patron and Corporate supporters.

A Christmas cocktail with Britcham is planned again in December, hopefully at Rue Ducale, when we will make our Charity donations.

Conclusions

I would like to thank **all our committee members**, for the support they have given over the last year, in order to for the association to successfully continue in what has been a difficult economic climate. **Bill Seddon Brown** has been recovering from cancer and we wish him well in any continuing treatment.

I am pleased that we have 2 new members being proposed for the conseil d'administration, for the two vacant positions left after the last AGM. **Tracie Ryan** who is very involved in the Theatre groups provides an excellent replacement for Catriona Cummings, and **Joanna Bishop** who works at the Embassy, returned to Brussels last year, having spent part of her childhood here, and some of you may remember her father Ray Bishop from the 1970s.

As indicated at the last AGM, having completed 3 years as Chairman of the BBCA, it is time for a change, and I am pleased to announce that John Houston will take over from me as Chair following this meeting. In accordance with our constitution, the conseil d'administration unanimously elected John to this position at our last committee meeting on 13 April 2010. I will be pleased to continue with an active role in the BBCA, as time permits.

I will now hand over to our new Ambassador HE Jonathan Brenton for a few words and we look forward to our continued cooperation with the Embassy during the next year. We thank the Embassy for its very generous support to our events in the last 12 months and for hosting us yet again this evening.

Stuart Dowsett
Chairman BBCA
11 May 2010