

**Presentation by Michael Hirst OBE, Deputy Chair, Events Industry Board
at the Events are GREAT Launch, Chelsea Football Club, 14th April 2016**

Events in Britain are in a league of their own.

What a GREAT venue to kick this campaign off and what better place is there than Chelsea Football Club to show how Events in Britain are in the premier league of events worldwide. In fact I think we can go one better and claim events in Britain are in the Champions league!

So on behalf of the Events Industry Board, I'm delighted to be able to add the Board's endorsement and support to the exciting new Events are GREAT campaign that is being launched today.

One of the Board's key remits is to find ways to improve and promote the UK Events sectors and there's no better way than a campaign that will illustrate the breadth and depth of the events industry in Britain and how it is contributing so much to its economic, cultural and social well-being. That's why we are delighted that the British Tourist Authority through VisitBritain has agreed to lead on the programme in one of its first initiatives following its re-adoption of the sector as a priority.

It is around the GREAT programme that all government departments promoting Britain overseas as a pre-eminent and strong trading export nation coalesce. That events are now to be fully integrated into this programme, is strong evidence of the government's understanding and intention to ensure that business events are at the forefront of its industrial and commercial strategy.

Simply put the objective is to tell the persuasive story as to why Britain is so GREAT for events and why Events are so GREAT for Britain.

The journey on the GREAT programme actually started three years ago, when the Business Visits and Events Partnership published its Events are GREAT report, depicting how every aspect of staging events in the UK contributed to government policies of growing the Country's wealth and status as a world-class destination.

Shortly afterwards, the Prime Minister put out a challenge to his Policy Unit to consider how Britain might attract more international large-scale events to Britain. This was followed by a series of meeting with industry representatives, co-ordinated by the Department of Culture Media and Sport, finally leading to the publication in April 2015 of the government's Business Visits and Events Strategy, which proposed the establishment of an Events Industry Board.

I was struck by the comments from one of the DCMS official tasked with developing the strategy. She said this industry "ticks all the government's boxes", more than anything else she had ever come across.

- Generating trade opportunities and inward investment – box ticked
- Growing exports – box ticked
- Developing creativity and innovation – box ticked
- Showcasing Britain's best products and services – box ticked
- Sharing and exchanging knowledge and research – box ticked
- Providing skilled employment with some 530,000 jobs - box ticked
- Driving 35% of the visitor economy with high value visitors – box ticked
- Shaping destinations – box ticked
- Helping community cohesion and building civic pride – box ticked
- Contributing over £23 billion to the exchequer in tax revenues – plenty of boxes ticked

So implementing the Strategy was a no brainer and despite not all policies initiated by a previous government being carried over to a new government, it came as little surprise that the Prime Minister announced as part of the government's five point plan for Tourism that an Events Industry Board would be established to implement the Business Visits And Events Strategy.

The Board is made up of representatives of the leading associations within the industry, some highly experienced independent members and government departments whose policies influence the industry.

It is co-ordinated by specifically assigned DCMS officials and reports to the Inter-Ministerial Group on Tourism and where appropriate to the GREAT Project Board.

It is ably chaired by Nick De Bois, himself experienced in the industry as well as being a former Member of Parliament and previous Chairman of the All Party Political Group for Events.

Its focus is to implement the Business Visits and Events Strategy, promote the sector and act as a sounding board and point of dialogue between the industry and Ministers, across government departments. It's there to ensure the industry's voice is heard and fully represented. The challenge to get buy-in across government departments is critical to its success.

Above all its there to win more business across the United Kingdom -both new events that can be attracted internationally and to grow those events already held here which could so with the Board's support.

The Board has met once to agree its priorities and method of working. As a result four sub-groups have been created to inform the Board's work.

These are a group led by Mike Rusbridge, ex Managing director of Reed Exhibitions, to consider Britain's International Competitiveness; a group led by Tracy Halliwell, Director of business tourism and Major Events at London & Partners to review Barriers to Progress; a group on Ministerial Bid Support led by Simon Gidman, Head of Business Visits and Events for Visit England and a Group to consider the criteria and potential priority list of Events on which the Board should focus presently led by Joss Croft of VisitBritain.

Joss is as many of you will know taking up a new marketing role with UKTI, an important player in driving exports and inward investment, a big part of the Board's role too and with UKTI already a Board member we are delighted that Joss will continue to play a major role in the board's work as will his successor at VisitBritain Chris Foy, who will speak to you in a moment about the campaign and Visit Britain's part in it.

I mentioned earlier that No 10 had been largely instrumental in kicking this whole thing off and the work of the Board is being fully supported by the team at No 10 responsible for the GREAT programme and from where additional funding support may be derived.

To further support the work of the Board, the BVEP is updating its 2011 Report into Subvention and Bid Support Practices for International Conferences and Events in Britain.

The Board next meets in June to consider the progress of the sub group work and to start the identification of events for specific support.

In the meantime Board members are having various discussions with government ministers departments and other influencers to explain the work of the board and how their assistance can be of benefit.

One other important part of the advocacy jig saw has been the re-establishment of a strong parliamentary voice through the All Party Parliamentary Group, now under the highly effective leadership of James Heapey, Member of Parliament for Wells, the constituency that is home to Glastonbury and the Royal Bath & West Showground. James has taken an enthusiastic interest in the sector and already raised within parliament a number of critical issues on behalf of the industry.

All of these components of industry representation, the Board, the APPG and the industry bodies though the BVEP will be able to considerably benefit through the successful implementation of the events are GREAT campaign, working together with the common objective to grow the value and importance of Britain's events industry.

The value in 2015 to the visitor economy from events is put at £42.3bn with billions more of value from trade, research and knowledge exchanges at business events. Just a glimpse at industry news over the past month would indicate the sector is on course to significantly exceed that figure with events like:

- Newcastle Gateshead hosting the European Thyroid Association's five day conference at the Sage Gateshead Centre in 2018
- Hull, Britain's next City of Culture approving plans for a 3,500 events centre to include an 800 seat conference auditorium.
- A new 4,320 square metre exhibition space at the Yorkshire Event Centre in Harrogate opening this summer.
- The InterContinental at the O2 in Greenwich hosting the Procurement Leaders World Congress next month
- Belfast's Waterfront Conference Centre reopening in May following a £30 million investment set to attract 55,000 delegates a year and £100 million to the City.
- Torquay to host the 7th UNESCO International Conference on Global Geoparks in September.
- Edinburgh International conference Centre is to host 16 international conferences this year compared to 7 in 2015.
- A four day festival at London's ExCel in September hosted by New Scientist Live to explore how science, technology and engineering drive the economy, shape culture and improve lives.
- The Great Exhibition of the North for 2018 and the competition for Cities to bid to stage the event announced last week.
- The Welsh Government partnering Celtic Manor to develop an £80m convention centre for 5,000 delegates.

These are just a few of the highlights from an events calendar that can only be further enriched by the collective work of this GREAT industry and the campaign being launched here today.

I said at the beginning of this presentation that Events in Britain are in the premier league of events worldwide. With the delivery of the Events are GREAT programme, I'm sure we will be able to say that Events in Britain are in a league of their own.