

Leeds manufacturers to fly the flag for UK business overseas

Three Leeds manufacturing firms – Hopkins Catering Equipment, Brandon Medical and Rakusens – have been selected export champions to fly the flag for UK business in overseas markets as part the Commonwealth First initiative which aims to highlight the depth of innovation and quality that the UK's SMEs have to offer.

Launched by the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, the export champions programme will provide access to high level networking opportunities and trade missions across the 53 Commonwealth nations.

Leeds is a major centre for manufacturing and home to extremely innovative businesses in the advanced medical technologies, food and drink, specialist equipment manufacture and engineering, manufacturing sectors.

Sandy Needham, chief executive of West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce said: “The continued success of Leeds manufacturing companies in highly competitive international markets has set a great example and will be even more important as the UK seeks to develop new trading relationships post-Brexit.”

Cllr Judith Blake, Leader of Leeds City Council said: “It's fantastic news that Hopkins Catering, Brandon Medical and Rakusens have been selected to take part in the export champions programme. We need to encourage more firms to export in order to grow the regional economy and these are three very successful Leeds firms with strong track records in trading with Commonwealth and other countries around the world. They will make tremendous ambassadors for the city and the wider region in overseas markets.”

- **Brandon Medical** is a £6 million turnover business, which manufactures operating theatre lighting, AV systems, control systems and equipment. Growth in exports – which account for nearly half of total sales – has been driven by the appointment of a network of a new distributors covering the major Asia Pacific countries including Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Indonesia. The company has also added to its product range to meet the requirements of its international customers with the new Anteris operating table which was exhibited at the Arab Health trade show in Dubai.
- **Hopkins Catering Equipment** specialises in the design, manufacture and installation of bespoke frying ranges for the chip shop and restaurant trade in the UK and abroad. The £5 million turnover business, based in Pudsey, is run by managing director Victoria Hopkins and currently

exports to Australia, the Middle East and the United States. In 2015 the company launched a new product range aimed specifically at US market at the National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago. Export currently accounts for 11% of turnover but, with online sales, is a growing area of the business.

- **Rakusens** is a manufacturer of crackers and biscuits, originally established in 1900 to provide kosher foods aimed at the Jewish community. Kosher products remain at the core of the business but recent years have seen new markets opened up for the company's range of flame baked products, which are extremely low in fat, saturated fat, sugars and salt. Business owner Andrew Simpson is aiming to build Rakusens into a £6 million business, with overseas sales the key driver for future growth.

The Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council facilitates trade and investment throughout the 53 states of the Commonwealth and supports private sector companies and governments to promote economic activity. It works with member companies to expand their businesses and to help with new investments in any Commonwealth country.

The three year CommonwealthFirst programme was announced at the Commonwealth Business Forum, Malta 2015 and will see a group of 100 outstanding UK SMEs selected to represent the UK as Commonwealth export champions.

Lord Marland, Chairman of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, said: 'This programme is a wonderful way of demonstrating both the ingenuity of British businesses and the huge opportunities in Commonwealth markets. We hope these companies will serve as ambassadors for other UK businesses looking to trade internationally.'

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For more information about the Commonwealth First export champions programme, visit:

www.commonwealthfirst.org