

### CBI calls for investment drive

The head of the CBI in the North West has urged the Government to push the region to the forefront of its attempts to rebalance the economy. Damian Waters (pictured) said there is an urgent need to drive investment to the region. He said the North West has a formidable package to offer investors in its skills base, industries and quality of life. However, he said Whitehall had to develop greater understanding and passion for the region to properly sell it to the world.

"The North West is an economic powerhouse and has so much potential. However, there is a feeling that, with the demise of the local development agency, we are not only losing out to London but also being out-muscled by Wales and Scotland, which have the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament lobbying hard for them. The North West desperately needs more-powerful lobbying to fight its corner. This problem needs urgent action."

Mr Waters urged the Government to move fast, as the region braces itself for the full impact of public-sector job losses. "We desperately need to kick-start private-sector investment here to create the jobs and wealth to replace the public-sector investment that parts of the region have been too reliant on," he said.

"We know our private sector can do so much better if greater investment is made here. For example, both Liverpool and Manchester are making real strides in forging trading ties with China, but we really need national Government, which has the ear of the Chinese Government, to support that."



"Moreover, we know we have so much to offer investors here, with lower operating costs and excellent transport links. Furthermore, we excel in key growth industries such as defence, energy, pharmaceuticals, creative, finance and automotive; so we have the infrastructure in place, but we do need greater recognition, attention and support."

"London, on the other hand does not. It is expected to create 385,000 extra jobs over five years — a faster annual growth rate than it managed in the 10 years before the recession. The South East and eastern England will not be far behind; here, however, the picture is not so optimistic, so we need the backing of the UK's power brokers."



### Software improves on-time deliveries

Bury-based DRM Industrial Fabrics has seen on-time deliveries improve by 5% since installing ERP/MRP software from 123 Insight Ltd to take over from a database that had been developed in-house. Managing director Peter McGuinness (pictured) says: "We spent a lot of time looking at different providers. Having already had one bad experience when purchasing a major software system I wanted to ensure that we chose someone who would give us their full attention for as long as we ran their software." After attending an evaluation workshop with two colleagues, he chose the 123insight software.

When the system went live across all departments — with shopfloor data capture added later — the amount of paper produced fell

immediately. Paula Heap, head of IT, says: "When we despatched items through the old database, we had to print out four different coloured sheets for different departments; now everything is on the same paper-work or visible on screen. We also saw massive benefits in stores, with more-accurate control of stock."

Purchasing was also made significantly easier, as all relevant parts of the system are updated when a process occurs. "Previously, we would raise a purchase order in one part of the system, then go back to the stock systems and tell it that we'd raised it. When it came in, we had to book it in both places. With the new system, the purchase order is raised, it's shown in stock that it's raised, and you book it in just once."

### Fuel-cell pioneer wins £1 million

A Runcorn firm that is pioneering fuel-cell technology has won £1 million from the Carbon Trust. ACAL Energy has been awarded the money by the Government-backed body as part of its Polymer Fuel Cell Challenge, which was launched to encourage cheaper production of the technology.

ACAL, set up by Andrew Creeth and Amanda Lyne in 2004, has developed a way of making fuel cells that uses 80% less platinum than the conventional method. Fuel cells are similar to batteries but, instead of storing energy, they create it from an external source — often hydrogen and oxygen. However, the use of platinum in existing designs makes them too expensive for mass-market production.

According to the Carbon Trust, ACAL's cheaper technology is on the cusp of making cars with hydrogen fuel cells a mass-market reality, contributing to the creation of a global industry estimated to be worth over £180 billion by 2050. "The technology could be the key to the future of low-carbon transport, making fuel-cell cars the lowest carbon vehicle available and also potentially cheaper to run than plug-in hybrids or battery-only electric vehicles," said the trust.

Ms Lyne said: "In these tough economic times, the promise of 'green' growth is not just good news; it's a life-line for many organisations. To take advantage of the opportunities endemic in such growth, businesses

need to put sustainability at the heart of their strategy. With the support of organisations such as the Carbon Trust, the North West has the key ingredients to thrive in the low-carbon economy. We hope to see many other local businesses join us in ensuring the future of the region's economic growth."

ACAL has a string of investors, including the Rising Stars Growth Fund (RSGF), NorthStar Equity Investors, Porton Capital, Synergis Technologies, Solvay and an unnamed Japanese corporation.

### Brammer sees return to profit

Wythenshawe-based industrial products distributor Brammer returned to profit in 2010 after market share gains led to a 10% increase in sales to £468.4 million. Brammer supplies products to larger firms from 300 locations in 15 different countries. It said it had benefitted from consolidation in the market and its focus on key account customers. As a result of higher revenues, the firm was able to turn a £1.5 million pre-tax loss in 2009 into a profit of £19.3 million from its continuing operations. It also reduced net debt by £3.2 million — to £36.7 million.