

Powerful presence



Last month saw a gathering of some 200 members of industry drawn from the Manufacturing Technologies Association (MTA) and the Engineering And Machinery Alliance (EAMA – of which MTA is a member) at the House of Lords. It was hosted by Lord Martin O'Neill of Clackmannan (parliamentary advisor to the MTA), and attended by five other peers and 41 MPs.

The event was arranged primarily to help those in industry understand how to get the best out of their MPs: invite them to your factories/offices, share your successes, highlight your contribution to the economy and to employment, for example. Basically, align your interest with theirs.

Guest of honour was Minister for Industry Margaret Hodge, and Member of Parliament for Barking, whose address seemed latterly to fail to connect with the audience.

It started off well enough. She said she was pleased that many SMEs were represented as they were the "oxygen of growth in the UK economy" and "vital in the supply chains to the aerospace and automotive sectors"; that "manufacturing is not on its knees"; that it contributes one-seventh of national wealth; is responsible for two-thirds of UK exports and for three-quarters of all private investment in R&D; employs well over 3 million directly and another 3 million indirectly; that we are making as many cars in the UK as we ever did.

But then 3fi minutes into the 12-minute address it was onto what the Government has done to help industry, and the audience grew increasingly restless as the Government PR machine got into gear. We heard about a stable macro-economic environment; the challenge of China and India; building on UK science, innovation and design; our dynamic, flexible labour force; the Government's manufacturing strategy, particularly the Manufacturing Advisory Service; R&D tax credits; manufacturing skills initiatives; regulation reduction; the business support regime; plus more. Too much of the same old generic cut-and-paste stuff.

Apparently the audience made a greater impact on the Minister than she did on the them. Tellingly, before she got into robot mode, the MP for Barking opened her address to the crowded room by admitting that there were "many, many more people" in attendance than she had expected. A point well made on behalf of manufacturing industry, then. □

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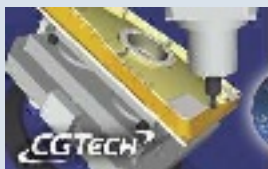
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