

Dundee's French 'flagship' hailed

by James Williamson

THE FRENCH ambassador to Britain hailed Dundee's Michelin tyre factory as a "flagship" for his country's investment in the UK during a two-day trade mission designed to stimulate more Franco-Scottish business.

But Bernard Emié also called for better teaching of the French language in Scotland's schools after signing a letter of intent on cooperation in education with First Minister Alex Salmond.

Mr Emié was joined by a delegation of more than a dozen high-flying chief executives as part of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain trip, which also took in the Aircraft Carrier Alliance site at Rosyth and later enjoyed a civic reception at Aberdeen Art Gallery.

The visit comes as French call centre firm Teleperformance this week announced 1,000 new jobs at its sites in Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Airdrie and Erskine.

"For France, the UK is an important economic partner—and Scotland is a very important partner," Mr Emié said. "We are extremely committed to this part of the country."



From left, Arnaud Bamberger, president of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain; Michelin Dundee general manager John Reid; Michelin UK managing director Wayne Culbertson; and French ambassador Bernard Emié.

"There are 60 French companies based in Scotland, and we are Scotland's largest foreign investor. Last year, around 10% of investment came from French companies.

"Michelin is a flagship of the French presence in Scotland and in this particular, important part of Scotland."

He said the "economic diplomacy" mission—which included a presentation from the Scottish Development International, a meeting with Scotland Office minister David Mundell and a

"working dinner" with Mr Salmond—was also about cultural relations.

"We are friendly, but we are fighting to have the French language taught in schools much more than it is now," he said.

"Of course, English is the international language, but you do have to be good at foreign languages. It's a priority to make sure that in primary and secondary schools you can get teaching in foreign languages."

A programme of initiatives involving education authorities, the Edinburgh office

of consul general Pierre-Alain Coffinier and Dundee's twin city of Orléans is planned, Mr Coffinier added.

Chamber president and Cartier UK executive chairman Arnaud Bamberger said many more French firms were looking to invest in Scotland. "We wanted to bring a big delegation to show Scotland that we are important players, but also to show our friends and member companies that Scotland is attractive—not just the beauty of the country, but its attractiveness for business," he said.

"We have a few members who are big names, but there are other members that might be interested in establishing themselves here in Scotland."

He said French businesses were watching the ongoing independence referendum campaign "carefully", while Mr Emié said France was also keeping a respectful eye on the UK's debate over a referendum on membership of the EU.

"We would like the UK to remain in the EU, because it's an important part of the EU and of the next phase in terms of being a more powerful presence in the world," he added.

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STOCKS

The spotlight fell on blue-chip Barclays as its secured strong take-up for its mammoth £5.8 billion City fund-raising.

The banking giant reported 94.6% take-up for the shares in the offer, the largest in the City since 2009, with the remainder offered in the wider market by underwriters.

Trading remained cautious on the FTSE 100 Index, closing up 4.8 points at 6,453.9, with America's partial government shutdown continuing.

Barclays shares were 1.7p lower at 271.4p as the market swallowed the 5% of shares not taken up in the rights issue.

Laws in China, Hong Kong, Japan and South Africa are thought to have prevented some investors from taking up their rights.