



Furniture Industry Research Association

ANNUAL REVIEW 2010/2011

World leaders in research and
innovation for the furniture industry



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"We joined FIRA to enhance the recognition and respect for our products and ultimately help increase sales. FIRA is recognised in the industry as having the best facilities in all aspects relating to furniture, from testing to complaint management."

Camilla Harrison
Operations Director
MFC Group



I am delighted to be writing the introduction to the Furniture Industry Research Association's new Annual Review.

This document replaces the yearbook and gives a clear picture of The Association's activities over the last 12 months and, in addition, how

we have used the income from members' subscriptions. The review will show that we have been extremely busy on your behalf and the results speak for themselves.

The most important message is that FIRA has been growing strongly despite the tough economic climate: membership has grown considerably both in terms of subscriptions and the number of companies now in The Association. This remarkable growth was achieved through the combination of subtle rebranding, energetic engagement with members and improved communications.

The Council has formulated and approved a five-year strategy for The Association that we believe will produce sustained growth. However, what is important is how we use the increased revenue to help improve the industry. A key part of this will be Specifiers Guide; probably the most ambitious project that FIRA has ever undertaken. Its aim is to educate all contract furniture purchasers to enable them to make informed purchase decisions and thereby ensuring they source material only from suppliers of best value added furniture, but this is looking into the future.

This year has seen the delivery of the Competitiveness Study, the Contract and Non-domestic Flammability Guide; both major projects which could not have been delivered by any other organisation. The conclusions of the Competitiveness guide laid the foundations for both the FIRA strategy and the five-year strategy of the British Furniture Confederation (BFC) and therefore will have lasting and significant impact on the wider industry. The flammability guide, an eagerly awaited sister document to the 2009 domestic flammability guide, has made the industry aware of a number of safety issues. In addition, the FIRA website was completely overhauled resulting in a much simpler and

more user-friendly format; it is already showing a 25% increase in traffic and there is a programme of ongoing improvements to membership benefits and technical updates.

The appointment of Stevenage MP, Stephen McPartland, as the Chair of the newly formed All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group (APPPG) is excellent news and testament to the importance of FIRA to the local community. I am sure Stephen will work with FIRA and the BFC to champion the Furniture industry and maximise Government support where possible.

I would like to thank the members of The Association Council for all their hard work and dedication on your behalf: they have worked tirelessly to represent the whole industry and ensure that subscriptions are being spent in the most effective way possible. In particular, the efforts of Alan Marshall, Peter Oldfield-Murray, Russell Baillie and my predecessor Ken Fullalove who all retired from the board this year after many long years of service must be noted.

A new FIRA chapter has started, and I believe it makes excellent reading so far...

Michael Powell, Chairman, FIRA
December 2010

Our people



FIRA's strategy is set by our 17-member Council. Throughout the review, we feature executives who are leading the underpinning service delivery.

Members of FIRA Council

Pictured at FIRA's Council meeting in December 2010 are (from left):

Jessica Alexander *	National Bed Federation Limited
Paul Critchley	Home Retail Group Plc
Mark Richardson	Blum UK Limited
Jeff Gwilliam	Burbidge & Son Limited
Colin Watson	British Contract Furnishing Association (BCFA)
Michael Powell (Chairman)	formerly MD of Blum UK Limited
Wendy Shorter	Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers (& Wendy Shorter Interiors)
Stephen Perkins *	Herman Miller Limited
Alan Bennett	Knightsbridge Furniture Productions Limited
Hayden Davies	BM TRADA Group
Dr Peter Beele	FIRA International Limited
Jonny Westbrooke	FIRA International Limited
Anne Gardner	Tesco Stores Limited

Not present:
Bob Lee (Vice Chairman)

Rodney McMahon *	Eurotek Office Furniture Limited
Steve Barton *	Morgan Contract Furniture Limited
	Raventree Limited t/a
	The Premiere Kitchen Company
Andy Corbett	Vita Cellular Foams UK Limited

* New members of Council since December 2009

Jessica Alexander is Executive Director of the National Bed Federation, the trade association for UK bed manufacturers and their component suppliers, which also runs The Sleep Council.

Stephen Perkins is Director of International Research and Design for Herman Miller Limited.

Steve Barton is the Production Manager of the Premiere Kitchen Company.

Rodney McMahon is Chairman and Finance Director of the British Contract Furnishing & Design Association, and he is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Edward Barnsley Educational Trust devoted to training apprentice cabinetmakers.



Jonny Westbrooke, Chief Operating Officer, outlines (opposite) FIRA's five-year strategy and where the focus of effort and resources will sit in order to achieve it.

The Furniture Industry Research Association (FIRA) has been a key part of the UK furniture establishment for over 60 years and is the only association representing the entire industry. The current economic uncertainty and commitment from Government to reinvigorate British manufacturing offer an opportunity for FIRA to become an even more relevant and significant institution to help bind together and develop a key, but somewhat fragmented sector.

Mission

To provide furniture businesses with the services, support, information and knowledge they need in order for them to compete effectively in their chosen marketplace.

Strategy

FIRA's growth strategy will generate funds that will enable it to sustain and expand its knowledge base and generate demand for furniture by influencing specifiers and consumers.

Knowledge

Expertise and industry knowledge, particularly technical knowledge, remain central to FIRA's offer. This unique capability differentiates FIRA from any other association or business. The partnership with FIRA International Ltd allows both organisations to share the benefits and costs of industry experts.

FIRA will identify industry's knowledge gaps and ensure that it has the expertise necessary to provide advice and consultancy to members.

It will monitor trends from its position at the forefront of technological, legislative and business development and will extend its knowledge base to reflect such trends.

One of the aims will be to nurture young talent both from within the business and from the wider industry.

Core areas of expertise are:

- ergonomics
- business process improvement
- structural testing
- flammability
- finishes
- environmental
- industry intelligence
- product quality and performance.

Information and research

FIRA will extend its knowledge to industry and communicate information in readily digestible packages.

Significant focus for future effort will be directed at specifiers, both directly and indirectly. This will include the production and long-term dissemination of a Specifier's Guide and the development of a carbon footprinting benchmark, which would form the first part of a broader 'sustainability' measure for UK furniture. FIRA will educate specifiers, retailers and consumers to properly understand what 'good' looks like and encourage them to ask for it, thus driving demand for members' products.

The strategy for technical research will be to utilise a proportion of The Association's funding to focus on projects that will deliver information of direct benefit to members.

Standards

Technical expertise and international recognition is fostered through FIRA's involvement with standards making. Leadership of, and attendance at, a wide range of British, European and ISO standards committees remains a core component of the strategy. This unique function facilitates a two-way dialogue between FIRA and its members; disseminating future changes to standards and ensuring that they reflect the views and technological developments of members.

The technical forums for the office and retail sectors have proved to be invaluable mechanisms for ensuring that the industry benefits from FIRA's commitment to standards making. We will develop a specifier forum in tandem with the production of the online Specifier's Guide.

Making FIRA work for you

A strategy for growth, continued

Business information

FIRA is committed to providing industry with business information and intelligence. It will develop reports, in partnership with other associations where appropriate, in order to provide senior management with timely, industry-specific information and analysis. Members will be consulted and monitored to ensure that the data provided is relevant and user friendly.

British Furniture Confederation (BFC) and industry leadership

The BFC is the unifying industry voice to government, representing the whole industry through their various associations. FIRA is committed to the BFC through the provision of the secretariat as well as the technical and financial support for critical projects, and to working with all sectors of the industry to ensure that it has a strong, credible and influential dialogue with government.

FIRA will attract industry leaders to commit to the FIRA Council and harness their abilities to develop strategic initiatives and resolve industry-wide issues.

Growing membership

Ambitious service development requires sustained growth in subscriptions. Sustained growth will be driven by improved service deliverables, combined with effective marketing and sales.

FIRA's recent growth in membership bucks the trend being experienced by many other associations and it will require continuous improvement and effort from FIRA staff and Council members to recruit worthy organisations from across the industry.

The recent rebranding exercise has contributed significantly to both membership retention and recruitment. Continuous improvements to marketing communications, particularly the redeveloped website, will continue, as will other initiatives aimed at raising FIRA's profile.

Key services to members

There are five key pillars of FIRA membership:

The first is *government lobbying*, which we undertake in association with the British Furniture Confederation.

The second pillar is *technical knowledge and expertise*, relating to new product and safety standards.

The third is *business information*, from trends for long-term strategic planning to up-to-date performance data.

The fourth pillar is the development of *projects and research* and the funding that goes with them.

The fifth and final pillar of The Association is FIRA's *certification schemes*, recognised by manufacturers and buyers alike.

Big plans for 2011

Our strategy for growth underpins our ambitious plans for projects and research in 2011, and for providing enhanced services to our members.

Key to the BFC's five-year strategy for communicating with the Coalition Government is developing a more dynamic and lively All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group, attracting more MPs to the regular industry meetings. We will lobby to influence the revised flammability regulations, to support exporting, reduce 'red tape' and improve future environmental legislation.

We will extend our representation on key standards committees, with several new FIRA employees sitting on appropriate committees. New technical forums alongside the Office furniture manufacturers and Furniture retail forums will include Environment and Hospitality forums. The FIRA website will host virtual forums that will reduce the time, cost and environmental impact of face-to-face meetings.

We are developing a quarterly business performance report for publication to for all participating members commencing in the second half of 2011. Feedback on this new free service is very positive.

Projects for 2011 include the Specifiers Guide and the International Standards Project that will simplify and publish the relevant requirements in terms of standards and legislation for some 30 key countries.

A thriving membership organisation

FIRA is the only organisation that represents the whole of the UK furniture industry, from manufacturers through to importers, retailers, specifiers and suppliers across all market sectors. It is also the centre for research and information within the furniture industry.



Phil Reynolds, Senior Technical Manager

“*Confounding the economic downturn, FIRA attracted 49 new members, thus boosting our resources to deliver projects and research.*”

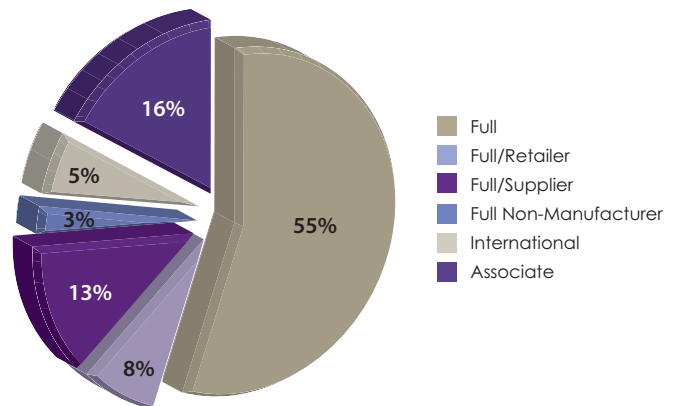
The new members come from retail and commercial sectors, and major supermarket chains Tesco and Sainsbury's have added their names to the FIRA list.

Other big names we welcomed included suppliers JJO plc, Knoll International Limited and Senator International Limited as well as furniture purchasers Findel Education Limited and Hilton International.”

Members benefit from many activities including:

- long-term research projects such as the recently published Competitiveness Report
- FIRA's representation on standards committees, which ensures the standards requirements meet the needs of the industry
- research partnering
- publications and online information.

The following chart shows the breakdown of membership by category.



Enhancing the respected FIRA brand

We updated elements of the highly valued FIRA branding in 2010. This included refreshing the existing logo and to clearly identify our services so that communicating what we do is simple and transparent.

AskFIRA, our previous website, contained a wealth of resource and detailed industry information. Nevertheless, as this data has expanded over the years, feedback suggested that it was not always an easy task for people to find exactly what they were looking for.

With this in mind the new website continues to provide all the essential industry technical information but it is more user-friendly with a strong emphasis on improving functionality and navigation, as well as being more visually stimulating.

The new layout makes it easier to find our key services and improves the user journey through the site.

On the new FIRA website, members can:

- access their accounts, including details of voucher credits
- participate in the technical forums
- use the standards database
- update their entry in the suppliers' guide
- find suppliers and business partners
- access technical and business information
- keep up to date with industry news
- publish free advertisements for recruiting staff (new in 2011).

Making FIRA work for you

FIRA's annual event at the House of Lords

More than 220 people from all sectors of the UK's furniture industry attended FIRA's annual event at the House of Lords in October 2010, hosted by Lord Hoyle of Warrington.

Michael Powell, who had recently become Chairman of the FIRA Council, said:

“I was MD of Blum UK for 23 years and have been working in the furniture industry for 37. Over the years, I have witnessed the industry modernising, and through modernisation requiring more and more sophisticated tools to handle the complexity of manufacturing, the commercial aspects of business, and the mass of legislation companies have to contend with. FIRA provides essential support in a number of these areas. The industry recognises the part FIRA plays - as shown by a 7% growth in membership in the last 12 months.”

Jonny Westbrooke, FIRA's Chief Operating Officer, said:

“The evening was a huge success. It is always good to meet up with the new members and clients, and to catch up with old friends. This year was especially important to us as we were able to introduce our new Chairman to the wider industry.”

FIRA Gold Award

Fibreline

Encore fibre filled cushion with foam insert

JC Kitchens Ltd

Beech and walnut frontals of their contract kitchen range



From left: Michael Powell (FIRA), Jason and Fred Finley (JC Kitchens), Lord Hoyle, and Jonny Westbrooke (FIRA)

Ergonomics Excellence Award

BMA Ergonomics BV

AXIA and AXIA ProFit task chairs

Ergonomic Cafe

Smart Sleeve and Smart Shell

Humanscale

M2 and M8 monitor arm

Okamura Corporation

Leopard chairs

RH Form

Ambio task chair



Clive Wilkinson – Okamura Corporation, John Andrews – Ergonomic Cafe, Levent Caglar – FIRA International, Pakize Nasuh – Humanscale, and Jörgen Josefsson – RH Form

Innovation Award

NuBax Ltd

ProBax seat cushion system

S-Box™

The S-Box pop-up storage unit
S-Box pop-up storage unit



Ian Moore – NuBax, Jon Hall – NuBax, and Peter Brook – S-Box™

Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme

The following companies attained full membership of the Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme through an independent audit by FIRA:

- Bene Austria & UK
- Knightsbridge Furniture Productions Ltd
- Woodstock Leabank
- Yonga Mobilya.



Turkish furniture manufacturer, Yonga Mobilya, is the first non-EU based manufacturer to become a full member of The Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme, and the first from the Marks & Spencer supply chain. The membership certificate was presented to Yonga's factory manager, Gokhan Sertdemir, by Lord Hoyle of Warrington at FIRA's 2010 reception at the House of Lords.

Yonga was founded in 1974 by Turkish guest workers in Germany; today the company, based in Turkey, employs 230 people and is an exclusive supplier to Marks and Spencer.

As a Marks and Spencer supplier, Yonga is fully committed to the retailer's 'Plan A' scheme to reduce the environmental impact of the goods and services, and ensuring that it becomes the world's most sustainable major retailer by 2015.

Interiors Show

FIRA exhibited at the 2010 show to raise and maintain the profile of The Association and to recruit new members.

FIRA will be out in force again for the Interiors Show 2011, when we focus on the new-look FIRA Gold Certification Scheme, the ultimate mark of product excellence within the furniture industry, which will have a new look and refreshed criteria.

Lobbying on your behalf

Engaging with government is a key strand of FIRA's membership offer. We do most of this through the British Furniture Confederation (BFC).

Having been one of the driving forces behind the formation of the BFC, FIRA continues to formulate policy and target lobbying activities. FIRA's Dr Peter Beele is the BFC Secretary.

The BFC's strategy, published in 2010, is "to sustain a strong and influential dialogue with Government, ensuring that its policies support a thriving UK furniture industry".

All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group

The All Party Parliamentary Furniture Group (APPPG) provides an invaluable conduit for this dialogue and enables the industry to meet and communicate with influential politicians and civil servants.



Stephen McParland, MP

“As MP for Stevenage and newly-elected Chair of the APPFG, I'm delighted that both FIRA and The Furniture Ombudsman are based here in Stevenage. In my role

at the APPFG, I will be championing the furniture industry and looking to promote world-class expertise such as that offered here. ”

Credit insurance campaign

The uncertain political scene surrounding the 2010 General Election made Government communication difficult. Prior to the election, and as the financial crisis began to bite, the BFC initiated a "Credit Insurance Campaign". This culminated in a meeting with politicians and civil servants, which ensured Government support for the scheme and an improvement in lending facilities to industry.

Ensuring fire-safe furniture

The UK flammability regulations ensure that furniture destined for the UK domestic market is among the safest in the world. Flammability requirements are less stringent in the rest of Europe and the BFC has made representations to the Government to ensure that there is no dilution of the UK position.

FIRA's technical expertise has been critical to the BFC in its dealings with Government and in ensuring that the regulations, first issued in 1988, are effective. A full review of the regulations is underway. FIRA's Phil Reynolds is a member of the Government's advisory group and chairs the sub-group covering the scope of the regulations.

Government buying standards for furniture

In addition to its work with BFC, FIRA represented the furniture industry in the development of new Government buying the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In 2010, DEFRA published new mandatory standards for furniture purchasing by central government bodies.

During the consultation, FIRA challenged the draft on three issues by:

- stating that it must be the specifier who buys/uses re-used/re-manufactured products, rather than the onus being put on the manufacturer
- rejecting the 5% limit for volatile organic compounds on surface finishing, which would prevent the use of most UV lacquers
- rejecting the use of eco-label requirements for textiles and mattresses being used to assess fabrics and foams, which disadvantage the UK industry.

FIRA's input was accepted on the first two issues, but not the third. This further emphasises that the industry needs a seat at the table developing eco-label schemes to ensure that the requirements that disadvantage the UK furniture industry are not included.

Currently, FIRA researches and publishes facts and figures for the furniture industry at two levels:

- **long-term strategic (typically on a five-year cycle)**
- **annual industry statistics.**

Work is underway on a new quarterly information service, based on statistics from members.

Competitiveness report

Our current long-term strategy paper is *Competitiveness of the UK Furniture Manufacturing Industry*, which we published in 2010. There is more about this report on page 12.

Annual statistics

In 2010 we published *Statistical Digest for the UK Furniture Industry* online, an essential read for anyone operating in the furniture sector.



It is a distillation of information sourced from government bodies including the Office of National Statistics (ONS), HM Revenue and Customs, and the Communities and Local Government web sites.

Quarterly statistics

This report summarises confidential quarterly financial data submitted by UK furniture manufacturers. Financial and key performance indicator trends are presented in graphical format enabling you to visualise the performance of your own company and to benchmark this against the rest of the industry. The graphs comprise historical and current information including minimum, maximum, mean and median values for all participants.



Dr Peter Beele, Technical Development Manager

“The compilation of the *Competitiveness Report* has re-highlighted the lack of statistical data for the furniture industry. Annual Government

figures are not published until 10 months into the subsequent year. Also, calculating key performance indicators using companies' annual accounts is both difficult and subject to similar time delays.

“The compilation of a small amount of data, on a quarterly basis, from companies' own financial accounts would provide a more up-to-date and accurate picture of furniture manufacturing performance.”

Setting and maintaining standards

Standards govern so much day-to-day business that it is essential for members to be actively involved in shaping standards and keeping staff up to date. That is where FIRA eases the burden.

Our standards activities are in three strands:

- being engaged and, and often chairing, standards committees
- delivering updates to members
- facilitating technical forums.

Standards committees

FIRA plays a crucial role in representing the industry on all relevant British, European and international standards committees. FIRA's participation ensures that

British standards committees		
FW0	Furniture	Chaired by Dr Peter Beele (PR, SC, LC)
FW0/1	Common test methods for furniture	Chaired by Sue Calver (PR, LC)
FW0/2	Domestic and contract furniture	Chaired by Phil Reynolds (SC, LC)
FW0/3	Office furniture	(PR, LC, SC)
FW0/4	Educational furniture	Chaired by Levent Caglar (PR, SC)
FW6	Fire behaviour of upholstered furniture	(HP, PR)
CW1/5	Childcare articles - nursery furniture	(PR)
B/543	Round and sawn timber	(SC)
PRI/076	Laminated sheet for decorative purposes	(SC)
PRI/24	Testing of flexible and rigid urethane foam	(SB)
PRI/071	Cellular urethane foam	(SB)
TCI/024	Textile testing methods	(SB)
TCI/066/02	Furnishing fabrics	(SB)
TCI/66/-/08	Burning behaviour of textiles	(SB)
TCI/69	Footwear/leather/coated fabric – testing methods	(SB)
STI/010	Test methods for paints	(SC)
STI/028	Pain systems for non-metallic substances	(SC)

the UK industries views are fully represented during the generation and revision of standards. In addition, FIRA members get advance knowledge of any changes that may happen.

There has been much activity in Europe in 2010. Not only are many key standards under revision, but the whole structure of the main furniture technical committee – CEN TC207 has been re-organised. FIRA staff play key roles in all the furniture committees and chair several:

Abbreviations: *Dr Peter Beele (PB), Sue Brighten (SB), Levent Caglar (LC), Sue Calver (SC), Harshad Patel (HP), Phil Reynolds (PR)*

Initials in brackets indicate committee member.

European standards committees		
CEN TC207 WG1	Requirements for domestic furniture	(PR)
CEN TC207 WG2	Requirements for children's and nursery furniture	(PR, LC)
CEN TC207 WG3	Requirements for office furniture	(PR, LC)
CEN TC207 WG4	Requirements for outdoor furniture	(PR)
CEN TC207 WG5	Requirements for contract furniture	Chaired by Phil Reynolds (LC)
CEN TC207 WG6	Requirements for educational furniture	Chaired by Levent Caglar (PR)
CEN TC207 WG7	Requirements and test methods for furniture surfaces	(SC)
CEN TC207 WG8	Requirements and test methods for hardware for furniture	(PR)
CEN TC207 WG9	Common test methods for furniture	Chaired by PR (LC)
CEN TC207 Adhoc group	Merging of bunk bed standards EN 747 and EN 13453	(PR)
CEN TC139	Paints and varnishes	(SC)

International standards committees

ISO TC136 WG1	Office seating	(PR, LC)
ISO TC136 WG2	Office desking	(PR, LC)
ISO TC136 WG3	Storage furniture	(PR, LC)

Standards update service

While FIRA appreciates the importance of representing the views of the industry on the various standards committees, it also recognises that the transmittal of standards data to the members is vital.

FIRA has developed a standards database on the website that contains information on all furniture standards. This fully searchable database is a major benefit to members, allowing quick access to key standards.



Inga Wells,
Head of Marketing

“Having access to up-to-date information and standards is essential for the industry.”

The Standards Plus database on the FIRA website is a great tool allowing members to search for all current standards by product type or manufacturing sector.”

Because FIRA considers access to standards as ‘mission critical’, the improved website offers a faster, simpler way of accessing changes to standards.

Technical forums

We believe it is important to communicate with members, and the wider industry, to disseminate information about changes in standards and legislation. To this end, FIRA supported two technical forums in 2010.

Both forums meet regularly, but also function online in order to act quickly in response to problems.

Office furniture manufacturers technical forum

Run in conjunction with the British Contract Furnishings Association, this forum represents the UK’s office furniture industry.

“This Technical Forum is invaluable for the office furniture industry. It allows us to be kept up to date with changes in standards and legislation, making sure we are ahead of the game. It also allows us to feedback our views on key issues affecting the industry – ensuring that standards and legislation reflect the needs of the industry. I would like to thank FIRA, on behalf of the industry, for their hard work in setting up and organising this forum.”

Bob Lee,
Chairman of Eurotek Office Furniture

Furniture retail quality group technical forum

This forum, chaired by FIRA, comprises technologists from the major UK furniture retailers

“The Furniture Retail Quality Group has been a valuable forum for Next. Not only are we able to keep up to date with standard and regulatory changes, we are able to influence the development of standards, and indeed publish our own industry standards. By working together with other retailers we can ensure that common industry interpretations are accepted across the board, and this strengthens our position with our suppliers from across the globe.”

Tristine Anderson
Next

Projects and research

Research leading to practical projects, information and guides are at the very heart of The Association. UK Government and European funding has all but dried up and there is little prospect of this changing in the foreseeable future. This means that we are reliant on membership funding to deliver the major projects like those described in this review.

We are delivering a range of projects that will directly or indirectly benefit the entire furniture industry. Clearly non-members will benefit from our efforts, but the consequent growth in FIRA membership generates funds that enable bigger projects with even greater impact. At a time when the economic recovery is in difficulties, FIRA membership helps improve the market and better positions British furniture manufacturers, retailers and suppliers for the future.

Competitiveness report

UK furniture manufacturers face challenging market conditions, but have proved resilient and capable of embracing change, according to FIRA's report *Competitiveness of the UK furniture manufacturing industry*, published in 2010.



The study combines an analysis of the industry's economic status with anecdotal evidence from leading industry figures to formulate a comprehensive assessment of UK furniture manufacturing and its relationships both up and down the supply chain.

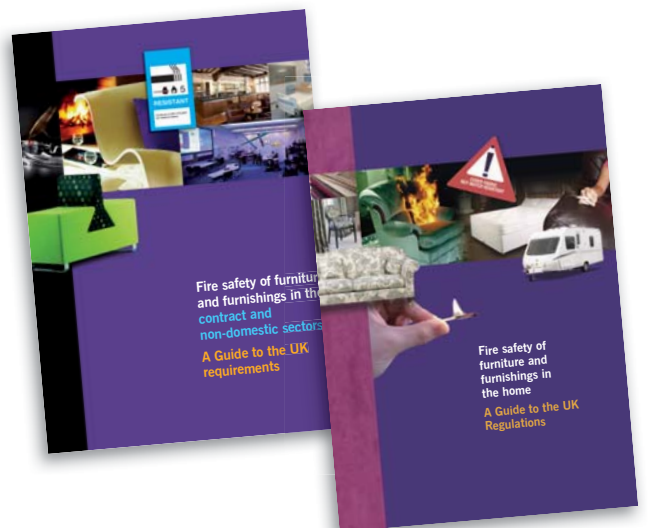
Flammability guides

The launch of our guide to the flammability requirements of domestic furniture in 2009 was a great success. Specifiers and manufacturers in the contract and office sectors were soon clamouring for their own version.

The new guide for non-domestic furniture was compiled by FIRA's flammability specialists on behalf of the British Furniture Confederation (BFC), with valuable input from BFC members and other industry experts.

The guide shows clearly how furniture should be considered in a risk assessment, and how this impacts on different types of usage, together with the obligations of manufacturers, suppliers, specifiers and end-users.

Both publications are available to download at the FIRA website.



Design and innovation competition

FIRA was pleased to announce that Blum UK (a subsidiary of Blum GmbH, a family owned company set up in 1952) had been awarded a prize in the FIRA 60th Anniversary Design and Innovation Competition launched earlier in 2010.

Their winning application was to investigate the actual use of kitchens within the UK and to compare them with usage elsewhere in Europe.

The project is an extension of a European wide project

that Blum has been operating for the last 25 years. It will monitor a broad selection of kitchens over three years. The monitoring involves recording the number of times a drawer or door is opened over a year and also the weight and type of contents.

Blum will combine this UK data with its European data. As well as strengthening the validity of the research, the project will help to pinpoint if, and where, the use of kitchens in the UK differs from that across Europe.

As part of the project, FIRA will be publishing the results at regular intervals, together with Blum's European data – making this valuable resource widely available to the furniture industry for the first time.

Carbon footprint benchmarking

The UK government's aim to move into a low carbon economy will encourage companies into understanding the carbon impact of their business and the products they are manufacturing.



Matt Butcher,
Environmental Management
Consultant

“Carbon footprinting is a recognised tool for establishing the environmental impact of a product, service or company. However, while it's relatively straightforward to produce a furniture footprint, it's not always easy to understand what this means in relation to a product - not everybody uses the same boundaries for collecting data, and there's currently no benchmark enabling legitimate comparisons between products”

FIRA is working with manufacturers to produce over 300 product footprints across a variety of different product areas. This footprint data will be analysed and benchmarks produced. Each participating company will gain a carbon footprint for their business and up to ten externally verified product footprints.

We expect to have our benchmarking data ready for the industry in 2011.

Specifier's guide

A cornerstone of FIRA's strategy for growth (see page 03) is to “generate demand for furniture by influencing specifiers and consumers”. The logical result is demand for ‘good’ products. FIRA aims to offer advice to specifiers, retailers and consumers to properly understand what ‘good’ looks like and encourage them to ask for it, thus driving demand for members' products.



Harshad Patel,
Technical Services Support
Manager

“For specifiers, the benefit will be a simple-to-use guide explaining what is important when specifying product, and up-to-date information. It will make their life easier and they have the re-assurance that their tender has effectively been reviewed by FIRA.

For manufacturers and suppliers, the guide offers a more consistent approach to tendering, making it quicker, easier and thus cheaper to respond to tenders. The re-assurance that the right requirements are being specified and that everybody can compete on a like for like basis.”

We know from feedback during production of the guide that its launch in 2011 is eagerly awaited.

Certification

FIRA's certification schemes are recognised as a valuable evaluation aid by manufacturers and buyers alike.

Manufacturers can enjoy the marketing advantage that comes from the recognition that they have developed first class products and specifiers can determine eligibility requirements by demanding that standards be met as part of a tender document.

FIRA Gold rebranding



The FIRA Gold Certification is the mark of product excellence within the furniture industry. This scheme provides solid reassurance that a product meets all necessary standards. The scheme requires comprehensive testing and ongoing auditing programmes, for a complete range or item

of furniture, thus ensuring that it has been manufactured to the highest possible standards.

Companies producing kitchens, worktops and office furniture components, as well as furniture installers have achieved FIRA Gold standard.

For kitchen suppliers, 2010 was a landmark year when BSI abandoned its Kitemark approval schemes for domestic kitchen equipment and worktops, leaving FIRA Gold as the only certification scheme for furniture.

FIRA Gold is, in fact, a more rigorous testing regime than the Kitemark scheme, requiring not only that the carcasses are tested for structural strength, but that they, and the frontals, are also assessed for safety, finish performance, ergonomics and workmanship. This ensures that a product, audited to FIRA Gold standard, is truly fit for purpose.

Recent FIRA Gold holders are listed on page 6.

We will be launching the new-look FIRA Gold Certification at the Interiors Show in January 2011.

Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme



Differentiating one supplier from another has become increasingly difficult, as most have now adopted stringent quality management systems. But we are now seeing tenders and retail specifications that ask a supplier

to prove that they have sustainability at the heart of their operations. The Furniture Industry Sustainability Programme (FISP) is the easiest way of demonstrating this, and can be used as a valuable marketing tool to differentiate a business from its competitor. We are delighted that more and more companies are recognising its value.

Membership has grown by more than 47% in 2010 – there are currently 69 full members, representing both manufacturers and retailers, and six associate members.

Recent FISP awards are listed on page 7.

Ergonomic Excellence Award



In 2010 we re-launched our Ergonomics Excellence Award with a new logo and a new marketing campaign to help specifiers understand the benefits of ergonomic excellence.

Recent Ergonomics Excellence awards are listed on page 6.



Levant Caglar
Senior Ergonomics
Consultant

“Consumers respond positively to the term ‘ergonomically designed,’ and manufacturers therefore

use the term freely. FIRA's recognition of genuine ergonomic excellence in the design and manufacture of products will provide distinction from competitors.”

Innovation Award



In 2010 we refreshed and updated our Innovation Award, with new guidelines and a completely new look, as part of our aim to encourage new creativity and thinking in the furniture industry.

Achieving the FIRA Innovation Award offers considerable competitive advantage. It allows companies to differentiate their product from others in the marketplace, establishing it as unique both in concept and quality of design and manufacture, as well as excellent in terms of practicality, usability and safety.

Recent Innovation awards are listed on page 7.

"We're delighted to achieve this award for S-Box™. It means our product is not only unique – it has the credibility of having been comprehensively tested via FIRA's experts."

Mark Auty
Director, S-Box™



S-Box™ – a revolutionary new storage concept for the kitchen

Certification

FIRA testing in Hong Kong



FIRA-CMA Testing Services Ltd, FIRA's new joint venture in Hong Kong, offers a

comprehensive set of testing services for the furniture industry in the Far East.

The operation, which has been offering flammability testing since May 2010, is now able to offer structural and safety testing of beds, chairs and tables to the latest British, European and International Standards. The laboratory also offers textile performance and chemical testing.

According to Chapman Chan, CEO of CMA Testing and Certification Laboratories, the new FIRA-backed service will help local companies provide the right quality of furniture to European markets.

Some 20 guests, mostly international buyers, attended the official opening in September.



Phil Reynolds,
Director, FIRA-CMA

“Being able to offer genuine FIRA testing services close to the point of manufacture is going to bring significant financial advantages and reassurance to our clients who source from Asia. All the equipment has been supplied, commissioned and calibrated by FIRA's engineers and key staff have been trained by FIRA in the UK, ensuring that the same level of quality will be achieved whether you are testing in the UK or Hong Kong.”

“The level of interest in this new venture is astounding, and shows there is considerable value in having products properly tested.”



FIRA-CMA directors celebrating the official opening: Dominic Lam, Phil Reynolds, David Webb, Chapman Chan and Stephen Lam

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Furniture Industry Research Association



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