



West Midlands Chamber Group Quarterly Economic Survey

1st December 2001

It would be impossible to comment on this quarter's economic survey results without making mention of the events of the 11th September in New York. This horrific attack has created shockwaves across the world; and the thoughts of everyone at Allied Irish Bank (GB) go out to those directly affected by this outrage.

As appalling as this tragedy is for New York, the repercussions are global. Since the attack on the World Trade Center, we have seen share prices plummet and businesses worldwide experience unprecedented difficulties. However these crises are not universal. Many industries have recovered some kind of equilibrium, supported by timely and essential interest rate cuts on both sides of the Atlantic.

Closer to home the same rule applies: confidence is key. The findings of the survey, albeit conducted before the 11th September, do show some causes for optimism which should not be overlooked. Despite manufacturing businesses reporting a slide in sales and forward orders, the future of the Midlands service sector brightened with improved forward orders. This is a strong indication that the service industry in our region is increasingly playing an important role in the UK economy. It is also pleasing to note that Midlands businesses are continuing to increase their international profile with an increase in export orders.

Allied Irish Bank (GB) has been working with businesses across the West Midlands for the last thirty years, and we have seen our customers through difficult economic times before. At Allied Irish Bank (GB) we have always worked closely with individuals, focusing on each operation as well as the wider market. By growing these close relationships, we can make our decisions based on criteria wider than the immediate financial circumstances.

While global events are a considerable cause for concern, we should not forget our region's strengths. We have to work together to play to those strengths, and to support our many successful and profitable industries.