



Honorary Consuls visit Northumbria University

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Honorary Consuls meet international students to discuss their role – and Brexit

The Honorary Consuls for Sweden, Germany and France have visited Northumbria University to discuss their consular and cultural diplomacy initiatives, and how they can support international students.

Organised by the Faculties of Business and Law and Engineering and Environment, the event attracted considerable interest among students from a range of disciplines, nationalities, social and ethnic backgrounds.

During a lively questions and answers session, students asked about the role of an Honorary Consul in the UK – and implications Brexit may have for this.

Honorary Consuls are volunteers who hold professional roles and are selected and appointed by the countries they represent to work outside capital cities, in the UK and all around the world.

The event at Northumbria was hosted by Richard Kotter, Senior Lecturer in Geography and Environmental Sciences, and Ian Fitzgerald, Associate Professor with Newcastle Business School. It was attended by students from across Northumbria's faculties, with future events, featuring Consuls representing other nationalities, now planned.

Richard Kotter said: "Cultural and consular diplomacy is an area growing in importance globally, with particular relevance in Europe with Brexit approaching. It also has attracted much more academic research attention in recent years.

"For our students across business, law, social sciences and the humanities, this is a key area to be aware of and connect with. We promote the idea of our students being global graduates and support them in gaining the skills, global and cultural awareness, knowledge and values needed to achieve this.

"Honorary Consuls are special kinds of professionals who carry out responsible and also creative roles as unpaid diplomats. However, although they can offer valuable support to international students in the UK, often their role and work is not known by the student population, which is why we decided to hold this event."

Ian Fitzgerald added: "Honorary Consuls perform an important, often unnoticed, role in the North East, always there when needed by visiting tourists and resident foreign nationals.

"Significantly, as we discovered during this event, they also perform a key role during this current period in our history, when it has become ever more important to have strong cross-cultural links leading to successful business outcomes.

"Northumbria University has vibrant groups of foreign as well as resident

students, who are keen to engage in cultural issues and learn more about the links between our region and the rest of Europe, as well as globally.”

Tatiana Sundqvist, a graduate of Northumbria’s Newcastle Business School who has lived in Sweden, said: “I was delighted to have been invited to meet the honorary consuls from Sweden, France and Germany. I found the session very useful and feel it would be beneficial to arrange these on a regular basis.

“I think dialog between foreign students and the consuls of their country should be encouraged as it re-establishes the cultural links with the student’s home country and provides a sense of support in the frantically pulsing political environment where the UK finds itself now.

“The other nationalities should undoubtedly take part in this dialog since it raises awareness of our countries’ values and promotes a healthy cooperation and friendship between various nationalities.”

Peter McGowran, a recent graduate of Northumbria’s Disaster Management and Sustainable Development Masters programme, added: “Thank you to the honorary consuls for visiting Northumbria and being so open with the questions that were asked. I certainly learned a lot from the afternoon.”

Attending the event was Eric Donjon, the Honorary Consul of France; Manuela Wendler, the Honorary Consul of Germany; and Caroline Theobald CBE, the Honorary Consul of Sweden.

Caroline Theobald said: “The French and German honorary consuls for Newcastle and the North and I, representing Sweden, would like to thank Northumbria University for taking the initiative and inviting us to speak to international and European students about the role and challenges of honorary consuls on the changing European scene.

“We all feel privileged to act as honorary diplomats, providing services to the citizens of the countries we represent as well as promoting trading and cultural strengths. We were delighted to answer the students’ insightful questions about our roles and would be pleased to repeat the experience again.”

Honorary consuls carry out their roles on a voluntary basis, providing advice

on in-country matters, signposting citizens to up-to-date help and advice, offering help and support if citizens get in trouble, organising passport collections from consular offices and providing general in-country enquiries and promotion.

For more information about studying at Northumbria as an international student, please visit <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/international/>

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