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Northumbria's innovative students and staff in Japanese collaboration

Students from Tsukuba University in Japanese recently teamed up with Northumbria's MDI (Multidisciplinary Innovation) students and staff for a research project funded by Northumbrian Water.

The junior students, Kai Shimada and Manami Mochizuki, and senior students

Kaori Itoh, Kaede Sasaki, and Shoto Hayakawa, were accompanied by their professors Sayoko (Okamoto) Tanaka and Yamanaka Toshimasa, for the two-

day course.

The students joined Northumbria staff and students, including Design PhD candidate Shiro Inoue, for the innovative workshop. Shiro, who is trained as an industrial designer, was initially brought into the programme to act as a translator for the student visitors, but went on to play a significant role in the project, supporting the students from Tsukuba to develop their ideas and communications.

Their task during the two days, as set by Northumbrian Water, was to investigate customer engagement strategies utilising a mobile hub. Students then pitched their ideas for review to an academic team on the second day of the course.

[Dr Nick Spencer](#), Programme Leader for the Multidisciplinary Innovation programme and [Mark Bailey](#), Principal Lecturer in Multidisciplinary Design innovation and Design for Industry, both hosted the visitors and reviewed their presentations.

“The work from the Japanese visitors was excellent and added a unique dimension to the overall collection of the research, which received outstanding feedback from the client”, said Dr Nick. “I think the students and academics felt enriched throughout this experience.”

“Shiro did a terrific job of presenting the Tsukuba students’ work to Northumbrian Water”, added Mark. “The feedback they received from them was great and they really appreciated the Japanese input.

Shiro said of the experience: “I was very happy to be involved in this project. The Japanese students truly enjoyed the programme and the results were absolutely fantastic. I think this type of engagement as an experience really incentivises the design students.”

Despite Tsukuba students being able to speak little English, all of the MDI students tried to communicate with them in a simple language and this allowed them to feel they are part of the MDI teams. This certainly affected the Tsukuba students’ motivations for the project as well.”

Among the Northumbrian Water team was Northumbria’s Design for Industry

graduate Lucy Denham, alongside a mix of Northumbria Masters and Undergraduate students.

A Northumbrian Water spokesperson said: “Students really tied into our brand and our key messages and grasped that we really want to engage with our customers in very innovative ways – all ideas were innovative and impressive.”

Visiting Professor Sayoko (Okamoto) also expressed her content with the visit. “I’m really pleased with the results of our visit with the students, and would like to deepen the exchanges between Northumbria University and Tsukuba University in the future.”

Northumbria offers a range of courses in design and was ranked Top 10 in the UK for art and design research power following the Research Excellence Framework 2014.

For more information about Northumbria’s School Of Design please visit: <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/academic-departments/northumbria-school-of-design/> or sign up to one of our upcoming Open Days.

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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