



Ron Behrens CBE meeting Northumbria Law School students.

Jan 24, 2018 13:30 GMT

Speaking "truth unto power"

Robert Behrens CBE, the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in the UK, has delivered a public lecture at Northumbria University, Newcastle, on the need for trust in public services.

Speaking at Northumbria Law School, Mr Behrens addressed students, academics and members on the public at a well-attended lecture. He discussed the virtues and challenges of speaking "truth unto power", and why doing so was crucial for any public body wishing to gain public trust.

Mr Behrens focused on the vital role played by ombudsman services, in particular the Parliamentary & Health Services Ombudsman, in establishing, restoring or maintaining trust in public services. He reflected on challenges facing the Ombudsman today and the need for independence, impartiality and transparency. Drawing on examples through history, he gave context to the current situation when trust in public services was often under considerable strain. He also considered what the future holds for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and the wider ombudsman landscape.

During his visit to Northumbria Mr Behrens was also able to meet and talk with law students.

He said: “It was an honour and pleasure to be invited to speak at the University of Northumbria. The audience raised important questions about the meaning of independence and transparency in public services, particularly when filtered through the media and MPs. This is valuable reflection as we work to improve the culture and professionalism of what the national ombudsman seeks to achieve. I was also struck by the vibrant, constructive, engagement between the Students Union and university staff. This gives authority and competence to the way in which complaints are handled at the university. There are lessons here for other sectors.”

Mr Behrens began his career in public service and standards as an academic in social and public administration at Coventry Polytechnic and the Civil Service College. He subsequently served as the Director of the International Public Service Group at the Cabinet Office from 2001, before becoming Secretary of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. In 2006, he was appointed Complaints Commissioner at the Bar Standards Board for England and Wales.

Between 2008 and 2016, he was Independent Adjudicator and Chief Executive Officer at the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education in England and Wales. Mr Behrens is also a Visiting Professor at the UCL Institute of Education and Chair to the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education.

Professor Peter Francis, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Northumbria University, said: “We were honoured to welcome Rob to the University for his insightful and highly thought-provoking lecture. Through his many prominent roles Rob

has made a wealth of positive contributions to disciplines including law, politics and public affairs and is now doing do so in health and social care - all areas in which Northumbria holds multiple interests. His contribution to higher education has also been remarkable.”

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

If you have a media enquiry please contact our Media and Communications team at media.communications@northumbria.ac.uk or call 0191 227 4604.

Contacts



Rik Kendall

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Business and Law / Arts, Design & Social Sciences

rik.kendall@northumbria.ac.uk

07923 382339



Andrea Slowey

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

Engineering and Environment / Health and Life Sciences

andrea.slowey@northumbria.ac.uk

07708 509436



Rachael Barwick

Press Contact

PR and Media Manager

rachael.barwick@northumbria.ac.uk

07377422415



James Fox

Press Contact

Student Communications Manager

james2.fox@northumbria.ac.uk



Kelly Elliott

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

kelly2.elliott@northumbria.ac.uk



Gemma Brown

Press Contact

PR and Media Officer

gemma6.brown@northumbria.ac.uk