

Ambassador Daniel Pruce's Op-ed on UK-Philippines Friendship Day

I am very happy to be observing the 19th UK-Philippines Friendship Day which we commemorated on 20 October. We have a lot to celebrate in our relationship, and one element in which our partnership is growing stronger, richer and deeper is in education. We have for many years enjoyed hosting British students in the UK, who travel from the Philippines to schools and universities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to take advantage of the world class education offered there. Recent changes to the UK immigration system which will allow for a new two-year post study visa option will, I'm sure, be advantageous to Filipino scholars considering the UK as an education destination.

Also, through our Chevening scholarships scheme, the British embassy in Manila has been sending students to the UK to study for their master's degrees on a wide array of topics since 1983 – 468 Filipinos have been awarded this opportunity to date. Chevening scholars are selected on their leadership qualities and their desire to make a real difference. They return to the Philippines at the end of their studies, and continue to make a difference as leaders in their field and in the further development of the country. I recently waved off the most recent batch of 28 scholars who are studying in such diverse fields as sustainable fashion, health, plant taxonomy, energy management, policy and, happily, education.

In the field of Science and Technology we collaborate under the Newton Agham Programme with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to offer research grants and PhD scholarships for the UK. And with the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) as our key partner, we jointly awarded 10 large-scale three-year research grants that focus on health and environment. Newton Agham also provides support to DOST-funded researchers through the Leaders in Innovation Fellowship Programme, an intensive training course on innovation to build capacity for entrepreneurship and commercialisation.

And even yet, as our relationship in the field of education matures, and in collaboration with the British Council, we continue to open up enormous opportunities for Filipinos to access UK education. There are currently 24 higher education institutions here in the Philippines offering Trans-National Education programmes authorised by the CHED; this includes partnerships with nine UK universities. In partnership with the British Council we are proud to have contributed to the development of the new Transnational Education Act which was recently signed by President Duterte, which will support the expansion of such partnerships between foreign and local universities.

We have also been working closely with Philippine institutions such as the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority in sharing the UK's strong expertise and experience in Technical- Vocational Education and Training (TVET) where UK companies, TVET colleges and higher education institutions have for many years provided international capacity building to

raise the quality and relevance of skills development. The UK's strengths in finance techniques in this field make it more accessible to women and low-income youth.

So we are going from strength to strength in our education relationship, but education is only one element of the mature friendship between the UK and the Philippines which stretches back many centuries, based on honesty and trust, and the strong bonds between our peoples.

We are two, proud, island nations, committed to each other and to making a positive contribution to the wider world. Friendship Day is an opportunity to celebrate how we work together to make the world a better place, such as our collaboration on tackling climate change, where we are powerful partners. And how we support each other, as we do in fighting the sexual exploitation of children, where we succeed. Every friendship has the opportunity to grow, to challenge each other, to help each other, in good times and bad. With our historic collaboration and multiple partnerships, the solid foundations of our friendship are unshakeable.

We are, indeed, closer than you think.