

UK – CY Alumni reception

Your Excellency President of the House of Representatives and acting President of the Republic, Mr Dimitris Syllouris, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I apologise for disrupting the DJ. I hope you've been enjoying his music, as well as the fish and chips, and the gin, and perhaps feeling a little nostalgic for those student days and perhaps some misspent nights in the UK.

On behalf of myself and my wife Denise I extend a very warm welcome to this very special gathering of very special people. That's you: the Cypriot alumni of British universities, from around the island.

In some ways it's surprising we've not had a reception like this before. With over 40,000 Cypriot alumni of UK universities it's not easy to organise an island-wide gathering of you all: the garden simply isn't big enough, especially on a wet evening. But I'm delighted to start with this select group this evening: you are obviously the most active and ambitious alumni!

Having studied in the UK you don't need me to tell you about the benefits of a UK education. Perhaps like me you saw the recent report which reveals that Cyprus is the 10th most important source country for international students in the UK. My guess is that means Cyprus sends more students to the UK per head of population than any other.

High Commissioner delivers his speech alongside HE the President of the House of Representatives and the Director of British Council Cyprus.

Not that education collaboration is a one-way street. UK institutions are increasingly looking to deliver British education here in Cyprus – through Cyprus-based campuses and departments, joint degree courses and distance learning. And I would like to pay tribute to President Syllouris for the strong personal support which he has offered for these transnational education initiatives, which are helping position Cyprus as a higher education hub in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Meanwhile research collaboration between Britain and Cyprus goes from strength to strength. We're showcasing many of these research collaborations and educational partnerships this evening, and welcoming representatives of three of the biggest research collaborations in Cyprus, which are all with UK universities: KIOS, RISE and Maritec-X with Imperial, UCL and Southampton respectively. You'd be surprised if as High Commissioner I didn't mention Brexit. As you know events appear to be reaching a climax, with some increasingly positive indications about the prospects for reaching a deal at the European Council in Brussels.

Whatever your views on Brexit, I want to assure you that the UK Government is fully committed to an even stronger and deeper relationship between Britain

and Cyprus, based on shared values, shared membership of the Commonwealth, and the wealth of personal connections of which you are part. While we have chosen to leave the EU, we are not leaving Europe. We were close partners before Britain or Cyprus joined the EU, and with your help and support, I am confident that we will be even closer partners in future.

Let me close with a few words of thanks:

To our sponsors for this evening: PWC Cyprus and Laiko Cosmos Trading

To the representatives of over 30 UK universities who have joined us here: they are in Cyprus for the British Council's annual Study UK Fair.

To the UK university alumni groups on the island. They have well-established networks of alumni, and are enthusiastic proponents of staying in touch with their institutions and keeping alive the connections they made there. We have joined forces in organising tonight's reception, and I thank them for introducing many new faces to the High Commission.

And above all, to you Your Excellency, Mr President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for joining us tonight. I encourage you to stay in touch with us, directly, through your university alumni groups or through our UKalumniCY page on Facebook.

Thank you very much.