

japan day seminar

The Present and Future Role of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland and Japan



Strengthening UK-Japan relations at this years Japan Day Seminar

Japan Day Seminar held in Belfast is a Resounding Success

Continuing on from the success of last years event held in London to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Japan Local Government Centre (JLGC), this year's Japan Day Seminar was held in Belfast on Thursday 2nd February 2006. Members of the British and Japanese local government community, business representatives, and academic researchers gathered at the Europa Hotel in Belfast to attend the JLGC's annual event.

The Japan Day Seminar was held with the support of the Embassy of Japan and was an opportunity for participants to exchange information and ideas on an international level. In particular there was a strong focus on the promotion of exchange and understanding between Northern Ireland and Japan. The theme of this year's event was 'The Present and Future Role of Local Authorities in Northern Ireland and Japan', and our speakers all focused on key issues related to this general theme.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), and Belfast City Council for all of their support in helping us to organise the event. It is our hope that the success of this event will act as a catalyst for further dialogue and the creation of lasting international links between Northern Ireland and Japan.

Shigeru Naiki, Director, Japan Local Government Centre

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Myriad Leaves introduces Japanese local government and related issues to people working in local government in the UK. Its title comes from the earliest collection of Japanese poetry, and means "thousands of poems" or "thousands of leaves".

Japan Day Seminar Schedule

14:00	Welcome and opening remarks Mr. Shigeru Naiki, Director, JLGC CLlr Wallace Browne, The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of Belfast
14:10-14:40	Japan-UK Relations and Northern Ireland Mr Hiroyuki Kishino, Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of Japan
14:40-15:10	'The Big Leap' - Outlining a Vision for Modern Local Government CLlr Peter Weir, President, NILGA
15:40-16:20	Recent Developments in Japanese Local Government Mr Shigeru Naiki, Director, JLGC
16:20-16:50	Belfast - Improvement and Transformation Mr Peter McNaney, Chief Executive, Belfast City Council
16:50-17:20	A Personal View of the Japan Study Tour 2005 Mr Michael Burton, Editor, MJ
17:30-19:00	Reception



Mr Hiroyuki Kishino, Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Japan

The seminar then began in earnest with Hiroyuki Kishino stepping up to the podium to give the first speech of the day. Minister Kishino's talk was entitled 'Japan-UK Relations and Northern Ireland', and he gave the assembled delegates a very

informative introduction to the history of Anglo-Japanese relations and their direction in the future. Minister Kishino began his talk by commenting on the excellent relations that Japan enjoys with the UK, making his posting at the Embassy in London a particularly pleasurable one.

The Minister informed the delegates that at the present time the UK is the biggest recipient of Japanese investment in the EU, and continued by stressing the importance of seeking opportunities for enhancing Japan's business presence in Northern Ireland in the future.

Minister Kishino also made mention of the importance of promoting tourism from both sides, and commented on the great value of grassroots exchange for the continuation of harmonious relations. Indeed, last year saw over 200 events held in the UK as part of the 2005 EU-Japan Year of People to People Exchanges.



This years Japan Day Seminar was opened by the JLGC's Director, Shigeru Naiki. Mr Naiki welcomed all delegates to the event and outlined the programme for the afternoon. He expressed his delight in finally making a trip to Belfast after many years of wanting to do so.

CLlr Wallace Browne, The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Belfast

Mr Naiki was then followed by the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Wallace Browne, who took the opportunity to welcome all of the delegates to Belfast and officially open the event. The Lord Mayor commented on the city's appreciation at being chosen to host this years Japan Day Seminar. He quoted a Japanese saying, 'Change ones ways by observing the behaviour of others', a sentiment which all participants found particularly relevant to the aims of the event, and which set the tone perfectly for the speakers which followed.

The Lord Mayor ended by expressing his belief that the event was a wonderful opportunity to enhance relations between Northern Ireland and Japan.



- 1 Peter McNaney, Director Naiki, CLlr Wallace Browne, Lord Mayor of Belfast
- 2 Q&A session at the seminar
- 3 Minister Kishino gives his presentation
- 4 CLlr Peter Weir presented with a commemorative gift by Director Naiki
- 5 Director Naiki gives his presentation
- 6 Q&A session at the seminar
- 7 Peter McNaney gives his presentation

Local Authorities in Northern Ireland and Japan

Cllr Peter Weir, President of NILGA

Next to speak was Cllr Peter Weir, who gave an enlightening speech focusing on the role of local government in Northern Ireland, its history, and the important function played by NILGA. The delegates learnt of the historical weaknesses in co-operation between the councils of Northern Ireland and of the limited scope for local government at the present time. With the need to work across Northern Ireland government to improve the performance of councils, NILGA is playing a vital leadership role with its mandate from all 26 councils in the region, something that has been historically lacking.



Cllr Weir ended his talk by commenting that the present discussions taking place on the future role for local government in Northern Ireland should be seen as an opportunity for positive change and not a threat. In response to a question raised by the Chairman of the Japan Society of Northern Ireland, Cllr Weir agreed that there was a lot that could be learnt from the study of systems of local government abroad in relation to the level of services offered to citizens.

Mr Shigeru Naiki, Director, JLGC

Our Director, Shigeru Naiki then gave a presentation regarding current trends in Japanese local government. The talk gave the delegates a general background to the system of local government in Japan including a detailed analysis of its legal

status, and the varying roles of the national government, the prefectural and municipal governments. Mr Naiki followed this with a rundown on some of the key issues facing local authorities at the present time.



Particular issues which Mr Naiki mentioned in his talk included the current programme of municipal mergers which has seen the total number of municipalities in Japan go from over 3000 in 1999 to under 2000 by the end of March of this year.



Mr Naiki also touched on some of the pioneering schemes being put in place by local authorities in Japan, such as the measures against diesel engine exhaust emissions, and the Basic Resident Register Card. Mr Naiki then took questions from the audience on a wide range of topics including the nature of international links currently in place in Japan, and the ways in which the relationship between central and local government in Japan is managed and facilitated.

Mr Peter McNaney, Chief Executive, Belfast City Council

Belfast-Improvement and Transformation was the topic of the extremely lively presentation given next by Peter McNaney. He began by giving the audience a brief introduction to the history of Belfast, and followed this with a detailed account of the massive regeneration projects which have been undertaken in the city in the past decade.

He discussed some of the problems still facing Belfast, and the vital role which the council must play in the future regeneration of the city. He also touched on the challenges facing local government in Northern Ireland to develop along the lines of the outcome of the Review of Public Administration. Mr McNaney ended his speech by comparing the differing powers held by local authorities in Northern Ireland and Japan, and made the vital point that despite the differences the overall aim of all local authorities must be the same, to offer the best service possible to every citizen.



Mr Michael Burton, Editor, MJ

The final speech of the day came from Michael Burton. Mr Burton was one of



the participants on the JLGC's annual Japan Study Tour last year, and he took the opportunity to talk about some of his experiences and impressions of Japan in his talk entitled 'A Personal View of the Japan Study Tour 2005'. Centred around some of the stunning photographs which he took whilst in Japan, Mr Burton gave the audience a fascinating insight into both the local government system and the culture of Japan. The trip focused on local government related visits in Tokyo and in Okayama located in western Japan. Mr Burton returned from the trip an 'enthusiastic ambassador for Japan', and this was certainly reflected in his lively

presentation which had all of the delegates enthralled.

With a few moments to spare the floor was opened to Mr. Hiroyuki Nagasato of the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), and Mr. Nagatoshi Morikawa of Japan Airlines (JAL), to give the assembled delegates a brief introduction to the activities of their respective organisations in the UK.

The day's events then drew to a close with those in attendance continuing their discussions at the evening reception. The event was deemed a great success: with over 60 British and Japanese guests present from a wide range of fields. We hope that the success of the event will prove to be a catalyst for the continuing development



of exchange relations between Northern Ireland and Japan. Special thanks are due to NILGA, and Belfast City Council for their support.



- 8 Michael Burton gives his presentation
- 9 Participants at the seminar
- 10 The seminar reception



The Japan Local Government Centre is the UK office of CLAIR – the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations. Founded in 1988 with the support of Japan's Ministry of Home Affairs, now the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, CLAIR is a joint organisation of local authorities, working to promote and provide support for local internationalisation.

With its head office in Tokyo, CLAIR has branch offices in each of Japan's 47 prefectures and 14 designated cities, and also has 7 overseas offices – in Beijing, New York, Paris, Singapore, Seoul, Sydney and London. Each overseas office is responsible for a specific area; the London office covers the United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

The main functions of the JLGC in London are to conduct research on local government in the UK and northern Europe, and to promote exchanges between individuals, including government officers and local government representatives, in the UK and Japan. We are also involved in implementing the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) programme, which employs UK graduates in the fields of international exchange and English language education in Japan.



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