

Focus: Consular Association of Northern Ireland

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What do Consuls do?

Consuls are official international government representatives accredited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the United Kingdom and covered by the international treaty - Vienna Convention of Consular Relations.

Consular officers are either members of a country's foreign civil service or local residents appointed by the foreign government to perform Consular activities. All Consuls must formally be accepted by the FCO to allow them to act in their official capacity.

Consuls have two primary duties:

1) To officially develop economic, commercial, educational, cultural and scientific relations between the country they represent and the area in which they are posted. This involves promoting commerce - trade, technology and investment - both ways (Northern Ireland and the represented country). Consulates facilitate scientific, academic, education, cultural, business and professional exchanges. They make arrangements for official visits in both directions. Consulates are a unique source of information on the country they represent: economy,

education, society, culture, and tourism.

2) To safeguard the interests of the sending country and its citizens travelling or resident in their Consular area. This may include issuing passports, visas and other official documents, helping travellers in distress, signing birth, death and marriage certificates, legalising or delivering official documents, and assisting travellers who have trouble with law enforcement or immigration authorities. Some Consulates have considerable responsibility for supervising their national flag shipping.

What Consuls don't do

Consular functions may vary greatly from post to post. Each government has different policies to the duties and responsibilities it assigns to each post. The work of a post depends on its location, the country's interests/needs and on local requirements (tourism vs. trade vs. promotion of culture vs. registration of shipping vs. assistance to citizens, etc.) Nevertheless the Consulate post is an excellent place to begin all inquiries.

Relations with local authorities

Consular officers establish official contact on behalf of their governments with central and local

government officials within their Consular district. Stakeholders utilise Consulates as a convenient and direct link with foreign governments for purposes of trade, technology, investment & cultural exchange, and for other negotiations. Although Consulates are primarily concerned with protecting and assisting their own citizens, they can often be of considerable help to local authorities, and individuals, in the resolution of specific problems.

Consular Association of Northern Ireland (CA-NI) It is a body without legal standing to act collectively as each government must act for itself. For convenience, CA-NI creates a central point for all Consuls to meet, exchange information and engage with key parties on general matters. For more information please contact the Consular Association of Northern Ireland's Secretariat - Dr Christopher Stange on 028 9187 4697 or visit the website: www.ca-ni.org.

