

Notes from the talk given by the German Ambassador

Organised by Bristol Anglo-German Society, the Bristol-Hannover Council and the Bristol University German Department

Highlights from Ambassador Susanne Baumann's speech:

- UK-German relations are strong and have been for decades. Recently strengthened further by state visit by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's visit to the UK in 2025 And the signing of a Bilateral agreement (Kensington Treaty) by Keir Starmer and Chancellor Friedrich Merz on 17th July 2025. The agreement encompasses a whole range of issues from defence and security to travel, passports, school exchanges, etc.
- In the difficult current situation – wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, unreliable relations with US – efforts towards greater understanding and cooperation are vitally important. Europe must work together - strongly support a UK-EU 'reset'.
- Bristol's links with Hannover go back to 1947 – one of the oldest twinning arrangements between Germany and anywhere! Initiated in the spirit of post-war reconciliation and rebuilding trust. Events to celebrate the 80th year of the twinning in 2027 are planned.
- Relations are not just between the British and German governments but between communities. Twinning is a really important part of this, fostering all manner of exchanges – schools, cultural, etc between people.
- There are 71 partnerships between German and British towns and cities in the South West alone! Some of them are here today, including representatives from Taunton (I got a name check!), Clevedon, Patchway and Bradford-on-Avon.
- Great news that an agreement was signed today to enable young British people to access the ERASMUS scheme (student exchange) again for the first time since it was cancelled after Brexit.
- Interest in Germany, its culture and language is still there. Whilst some universities have closed their German departments due to lack of numbers, Bristol's is the second largest in the country after Oxford (same for the French and Spanish departments too!). Ambassador Baumann then asked some of the students present why they decided to study German. She appreciated the fact that so many young people are still interested to pursue their interest in German language and culture.
- How to continue making twinning relevant to the next generation? (I was going to ask this question, but she raised it herself and initiated a discussion): need to involve young people as much as possible, through learning German early; developing sporting links, musical links, etc. Get some ideas from the Goethe Institute which is responsible for this (not the Embassy) – although this only has branches in London

and Glasgow. Bristol-Hannover Council is producing a 'guide' to Bristol so that people in Hannover can learn more about the city (I plan to follow up with them about that, see if we can do something similar for Taunton).

After the speech, a Q&A session included questions about the Ambassador's impressions of the UK so far (she took up the post in September 2025), her motivation to become an Ambassador, etc and some more discussion about the importance of getting young people interested in learning German, appreciating German culture, taking part in cultural, music and sports exchanges, etc.

Further information can be found on the Bristol-Hannover Council's website:

<https://bristolhannovercouncil.org.uk/2026/04/bristol-fashion-welcome-for-the-ambassador/>