

Hansard Alumni Newsletter

July-August 2007

All Change at the Top!



Since the last edition of the Alumni Newsletter, the Hansard Society has seen some important changes, with Fiona Booth and Peter Riddell respectively becoming Chief Executive and Chair of the Society.

Fiona, previously the Hansard Society's Deputy Chief Executive and Director of the Citizenship Education Programme, is a qualified primary and secondary school teacher, and expert in the development and delivery of political literacy resources and the promotion of wider participation in formal political processes. She has worked closely with MPs and parliamentarians across the political spectrum to ensure that young people's voices are heard in the political and policy-making processes.

"The Hansard Society's reputation and influence in Parliament is second to none. I'm very much looking forward to building on our political research and education expertise and continuing our successful partnerships with other organisations and the wider public. How politics works and how political decisions are made have never been more under scrutiny than they are today. Over the next few months I'll be working with the Hansard Society staff and council to refresh and further develop the Hansard Society's long-standing and highly-regarded work to strengthen Parliament and promote democracy."

Distinguished *Times* political journalist Peter Riddell has been a member of the Hansard Society council for 12 years and served on two groundbreaking Hansard Society Commissions examining aspects of our parliamentary democracy – the Newton Commission on Parliamentary Scrutiny (2001) and the Puttnam Commission on the Communication of Parliamentary Democracy (2005). The recommendations of these Commissions have been highly influential in the reform of Parliament. Commenting on his election as Chair of the Hansard Society, Peter said:



'I'm delighted to be taking over at such a pivotal time in the debate on constitutional and parliamentary reform. I look forward to building on the achievements of Lord Holme and the expert Hansard Society staff. I intend to ensure that the Hansard Society plays a leading role in the public debate about how to reinvigorate and deepen parliamentary democracy in order to strengthen our representative system.'

Scholars Programme Update



In May, the Summer 2007 Hansard Scholars arrived in London, during what is a fascinating and historic time in British politics. The group, made up of undergraduate and postgraduate students from the USA, Egypt, Singapore, Argentina, Holland, Georgia, Poland, Bulgaria and the Republic of Armenia, have recently come back from a political study visit to Edinburgh. During the trip, they toured the political sites, attended seminars and witnessed First Minister Alex Salmond MSP's first Question Time - the first ever by a pro-independence Scottish National party leader. The Scholars thoroughly enjoyed their visit and were privileged to have been so close to events that really will make 2007 (the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union between England & Scotland) an historic year for Scotland!

"Where are they now?"

Monika Beniulyte, Lithuania (Autumn 2004 Hansard/OSI/ Chevening Research Scholar)

After spending three months in London as a Hansard/ OSI/ Chevening Research Scholar (during which time she interned with the Fawcett Society in London), Monika returned to Lithuania where she worked on national investment projects at Vilnius Municipality. She then moved on to the European Commission (in the department of Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities) before returning to Lithuania to work in the Internal Market Coordination Department at the Ministry of Economy. Monika now represents her country in many work European Commission group meetings in Brussels.



Monika credits the Hansard Research Scholars Programme with providing her with an invaluable insight into her chosen career: *"the Research Scholars Programme... really was an incredible experience"*.

Other News from the Hansard Society

2007: A Constitutional Revolution or Just More of the Same?

On June 19th, in a meeting chaired by Hansard Society Chief Executive Fiona Booth, four experts – Sir George Young MP (Conservative Party Democracy Task Force), Polly Toynbee (*The Guardian*), Andrew Hawkins (CommunicateResearch) and Professor Phil Cowley (University of Nottingham) – debated whether this year would prove to be a turning point for constitutional change or more talk than action. While 2007 is unlikely to see a constitutional revolution it seems that it may certainly lay the groundwork for a new tranche of reforms which could come through in 2008-2009.

With parliamentary reform at the top of the political agenda, the Hansard Society has published its recommendations for restoring trust in Parliament. They highlight accountability, scrutiny and transparency as vital components in enhancing the role of Parliament and engaging the public with democratic processes. For further details, please visit: www.hansardsociety.org.uk

Hansard Society gives evidence to the House of Commons Procedure Committee



The Hansard Society is backing calls for the Westminster Parliament to undertake a pilot of online petitioning methods. Ross Ferguson, Director of the Hansard Society's eDemocracy Programme said "After voting, signing petitions is the most common form of political action. Examples from other Parliaments demonstrate that online petitions can be easy to manage, cheap and popular. We back calls for all the parties to work together on a trial of an online petitions system for Parliament; something we believe would help to reinvigorate parliamentary democracy."

HeadsUp Climate Change Debate

The most recent HeadsUp debate on climate change finished on Friday 29 June and heard from a range of policy makers who discussed the significant issues with young people on the HeadsUp forum. A summary report will be disseminated to young people, parliamentarians, the media and other interested parties. HeadsUp is taking a break for the school holidays but it will be back in September with an exciting new debate. Young people are voting to decide the topic to be discussed. For further details on HeadsUp, please contact Barry Griffiths at: b.g.griffiths@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Young people debate in the House of Lords

The House of Lords Chamber opened its doors to a public debate for the first time on 12 May. The final of the English Speaking Union's *Schools Mace Competition* was held in the Lords, with four teams participating and many more members of the public watching from the red benches.

Lord Putnam, who chaired the Hansard Society's Commission on parliamentary communication, welcomed the initiative: "Parliament must not isolate itself from young people's disengagement with politics. I am therefore delighted that the House of Lords is opening its Chamber for young people to debate in. This is a political first and shows that the House of Lords is willing to take steps to encourage political participation. We now look to others to do the same."



The Hansard Society is currently evaluating the process of opening up the Chamber for young people and should you wish to express your view on whether the Chambers should be used for debates of this kind, please contact parliament@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Big Ben and All That!

A free CD Rom developed by the Hansard Society and the Association for Citizenship Teaching, *Big Ben and All That!* gives teachers the inside scoop on what goes on in Westminster through interviews with MPs, Peers and teachers as well as archived footage from Parliament.

Interactive, fun and informative, it's the perfect tool for bolstering knowledge of the UK Parliament so teachers can approach the teaching of political literacy with real confidence. You can order a free copy by contacting: citizenship@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Articles & Publications

Law in the Making: A discussion paper – by Alex Brazier, Susanna Kalitowski & Gemma Rosenblatt



This discussion paper is part of the Hansard Society's ongoing research on the legislative process. It is an in-depth study into how law making is influenced by external consultations, how much impact Parliament has on shaping new legislation and the ability of Parliament to challenge the government when it comes to proposing new laws. This report includes five case studies that underpin the research into the variety and effectiveness of influences on legislative outcomes. A final report looking at Parliament's impact on legislation will be published in spring 2008. To request a free copy please email: hans_admin@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Conferences & Events

Democracy and Intervention

Tuesday 17 July 2007, 6pm – 7.30pm House of Commons

A debate to launch the fifth publication in the Hansard Society Democracy Series. *Democracy and Intervention* by Lord Bhikhu Parekh looks at the complex question of whether and how democracy can and should be exported from one country to another. How can democracy best be promoted and sustained? How can we resolve the tensions between religious based democracy and liberal democracy? Speakers: Lord Bhikhu Parekh; Mike Gapes MP (Chair, Foreign Affairs Select Committee). Chair: Virginia Gibbons, Hansard Society. For further details, please email: hans_admin@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Hansard Society at the Party Conferences

This year the Hansard Society is being generously supported by Channel 4 in its series of events at the party conferences. The topic to be discussed at the conferences will be: "Are Political Parties a Waste of Time?"

The debate will focus on the role of the parties in a changing political landscape; Are parties still relevant to politics in the 21st Century? Has the position of political parties been usurped by single issue groups? How can political parties re-engage with the electorate? What must parties do to rebuild trust in their activities, amongst their members and the electorate?

Liberal Democrat Party Conference – Brighton

Tuesday 18 September 2007, 6.15 - 7.30pm, Albert Room, The Grand Hotel

Speakers include: Ros Taylor (*The Guardian*), and others TBC

Labour Party Conference – Bournemouth

Monday 24 September 2007, 6 – 7.30pm, Bourne Suite, Bourne Hall Hotel

Speakers include: Kevin Maguire (*The Mirror*) and others TBC

Conservative Party Conference – Blackpool

Tuesday 2 October 2007, 5.45 – 7pm, Windsor Bar, Winter Gardens

Speakers include: Peter Osborne (*Daily Mail*), Iain Dale (18 Doughty Street), Ed Vaizey MP and Priti Patel (Conservative PPC for Witham, Essex)

British Politics Group Conference – "Britain after Blair: The Legacy and the Future"

Wednesday August 29, 2007 - The Gleacher Center, University of Chicago Business School

This Conference will look at the legacy of the Blair government, both in terms of politics and public policy. What will be the likely directions of new Prime Minister Gordon Brown? Panel topics include: Anglo-American Relations and the Bush-Blair Axis, Democracy post-Blair: Parties or Groups?, The Vision and Reality of Devolution, and UK Foreign Policy under Blair. For full registration details, please email Terrence Casey at casey1@rose-hulman.edu

For further details on any of the stories covered in this newsletter, please email the Hansard Alumni team at: study@hansard.lse.ac.uk