

Hansard Alumni Newsletter

November - December 2007

Logo Launch!



In September, following the appointment of a new Chief Executive and a new Chairman, the Hansard Society launched its new logo. This will be followed very shortly by a new website incorporating plenty of innovative developments, including a dedicated Hansard Alumni section (see below). Make sure you take a look!

"Where are they now?"

Michael Sterchak, USA (Hansard Scholar, Spring 2006)



Michael Sterchak participated in the Spring 2006 Hansard Scholars Programme. During his time here in London, Michael interned with Oliver Heald MP, then Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs.

Michael recently told us that, on his return to the USA, he graduated from Marist College in May 2007 and is now working in the global financial market field. Michael is currently working at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, in New York City where he analyses the international capital flows of all US banks which have business interests abroad.

We are always delighted to hear from our previous Hansard Scholar, so do please drop us a line to tell us what you're up to! Email: study@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Hansard Alumni Website

It's great to hear how Hansard Alumni are doing and we will shortly be launching a dedicated Hansard Alumni website to give all our Alumni a chance to get back in touch with each other and with us!

On the new Alumni website, we will be featuring short articles (100 words) written by our Alumni on their home parliaments or legislatures. Our aim is to have articles on all of the 50+ countries where our Alumni are based – from Albania to Zimbabwe. If you'd like to join in, please email us at: study@hansard.lse.ac.uk

In the meantime, we'll be sure to keep you posted on all Hansard Alumni developments in this neck of the woods!

Autumn Scholars Bring the Sun with Them!



After a rather wet and windy summer in London, the Autumn 07 Hansard Scholars arrived bright and enthusiastic to start the Programme in September.

The group, one of our largest ever, is made up of undergraduate and postgraduate students from the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Romania, Kosovo and Uzbekistan.

Since arriving, the Scholars have been at the heart of political developments as their internship hosts began to make preparations for a snap general election (that was never called!). Internships this semester include placements in Parliament, across Government (Dept. for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; Dept. for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform; Dept for Work & Pensions; and the Dept for International Development) and the NGO sector.

Other News from the Hansard Society

Hansard Society at Party Conferences and Election Talk

Since the last edition of the Hansard Alumni Newsletter, it has been a fascinating period in British politics - the Autumn 07 Scholars simply could not have arrived at a better time.



Throughout the autumn party conference season, speculation had been mounting that Prime Minister Gordon Brown MP would call a November election. There was a flurry of opinion polls, declarations from key political figures that they were ready for an election and Parliament was said to be on an "Election Footing". Election fever featured heavily on the news agenda. However, at the beginning of October, Gordon Brown declared that he would not hold an autumn election as he wanted a chance to implement his "vision" for the country.

With Channel 4 Television, the Hansard Society held fringe events at the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat conferences on "Are Political Parties a Waste of Time?" Currently, there is much talk of the electorate feeling disconnected, alienated and apathetic towards politics and the blame for this state of affairs has been heaped on political parties. Parties remain central to the functioning of the democratic system in the UK yet their membership has dropped dramatically in recent decades. Their relationship with the public is widely seen as being in crisis.

All three events were a great success, with delegates and panelists debating issues including: whether individual MPs should have more freedom from the party whip; methods to engage supporters using new technologies; and how the parties can be more representative. Commenting on people's perception of MPs, one of the panelists, Lembit Opik MP, said that the public, "would rather see failed dreamers than people with no dream at all".

Other panelists included: Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP (Cons. Shadow Leader of the House of Commons), John Healy MP (Minister of State, DCLG), Jackie Ashley (*The Guardian*), Peter Osborne (*The Daily Mail*) and Kevin Maguire (*Daily Mirror*).

The Society also held a fringe meeting at the Scottish National Party conference in Aviemore, the first SNP conference since they controversially came to power in May. During the session, the Hansard Society's Dr Laura Miller, Alasdair Allan MSP and others discussed opportunities for elected representatives, parliaments and local councils to engage with the public using new technologies.

Hansard Society shortlisted for international eDemocracy award



We are delighted to announce that the Hansard Society has been shortlisted for the Politics Online & World E-Gov Forum 7th Annual Award for those who are changing the world of internet and politics.

The Hansard Society eDemocracy team has been working very hard on evaluating the Government's use of ICT to bring the public into the policy making process and this has been duly recognised.

At the Forum, our eDemocracy Programme Director, Ross Ferguson, will be given a presentation on tools for active citizenship as part of a roundtable organised by the Council of Europe.

To find out more about the awards and the shortlist, please visit www.politicsonline.com

Leader of House of Commons addresses Hansard Society



At a recent Hansard Society briefing, the Leader of the House of Commons, Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP, laid out her priorities to make the House of Commons more representative, more topical and more inclusive.

Ms Harman stressed the importance of Parliament being representative and how diversity is a political imperative. She also stressed that scrutiny of Parliament can be increased and she pledged to draw on the

expertise and experience of the public. Plain English versions of bills without legal phraseology to make it easier for the public to understand should also be considered, she added. Ms Harman paid tribute to the work done by her predecessors as Leader of the House and said she aimed to build on that work to strengthen Parliament.

Government getting better at digital dialogue, says Hansard Society

Digital Dialogues, a new report from the Hansard Society, evaluated the Government's use of social media to connect the public with the policy making process.

It concluded that the Government had made good progress in the past 18 months from a 'standing start' and noted that key lessons had been learnt. Amongst these it found that opportunities to engage online had attracted citizens who had not been active in the policy process previously.

Ross Ferguson, author of Digital Dialogues, commented: "The case studies we looked at were examples of Government innovation. They demonstrate the value in encouraging progressive forms of political engagement. Digital Dialogues suggests that continuing to do so will make for better policy, more effective engagement, and pump the life-blood of our representative democracy".

The report is downloadable from:

www.digitaldialogues.org.uk

What can MPs do to engage with young people?

With the Democracy Coalition for Children and Young People, the Hansard Society held a breakfast briefing at Westminster to discuss the work of the British Youth Council and YouthNet in challenging stereotypes of young people. Natasha Engel MP responded to these findings and discussed what MPs can do to engage with young people in their constituencies. Many voluntary organisations with an interest in youth democracy attended the event which was well received.

The Hansard Society's Citizenship Education Programme continues to work industriously with young people through schools and colleges to educate and inform them about parliamentary democracy. They are continually developing innovative ways to involve them in participatory democratic activities.

The Programme's student-friendly projects include the website *HeadsUp* where young people actively discuss and explore political issues and ideas, and find out how they can make a difference. You can visit the website at www.headsup.org.uk

For more information about the Programme please contact Barry Griffiths at: b.g.griffiths@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Articles & Publications

Parliamentary Affairs - essential reading for anyone interested in contemporary politics



Parliamentary Affairs is a long-established quarterly journal published by Oxford University Press in association with the Hansard Society. The October 2007 edition includes articles on Devolution, Coalitions and the Liberal Democrats, Youth Participation in Politics in the UK, The impact of the internet on Parliament and many more.

For further details, please visit:

www.hansardsociety.org.uk

No overall control?



The Hansard Society's Parliament & Government Programme is hard at work on a publication looking at the implications of the House of Commons without a single party majority (a 'hung parliament').

In the past year, there has been increasing speculation that the next general election will produce a Parliament in which no single party holds a majority of seats in the House of Commons.

Although a hung parliament might revitalise interest in politics, it might also bring uncertainty to a system which has been traditionally stable. Britain's constitution offers little guidance in the event of a hung parliament and the rules for governing it are bound up with the issues of royal prerogative. It is therefore vital that a debate on the rules governing a hung parliament, as well as its implications, takes place well before the next general election. A book bringing together a group of varied and distinguished commentators from across the political spectrum to discuss what impact a hung parliament might have on British politics will be published in early 2008.

For further information about the project please email Susanna Kalitowski at s.kalitowski@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Conferences & Events

eDemocracy Conference 2007



The UK's only dedicated eDemocracy Conference takes place for the third year in a row on Thursday 8th November in London.

The conference is organised by Headstar, in association with the Hansard Society, and is shaping up to be the most substantial and well-attended yet.

Topics to be discussed include: the rise of e-petitions; local councillors' use of the web; how the internet is being used in campaigning; and the future of eDemocracy.

Speakers include: Martha Lane Fox, Theresa May MP, Professor Stephen Coleman, Ross Ferguson, Ed Davey MP and Richard Allan.

To find out more and to register please visit www.headstar-events.com/edemocracy07

Constitutional Reform: The central role of Parliament

On Monday 26th November, the Hansard Society will be hosting a debate in Parliament on the central relationship at the heart of our political system - namely that between Parliament and Government, and the public that they represent and serve.

The debate will cover issues including: the promotion of an independent and effective Parliament; improving Government accountability to Parliament; and engaging Parliament and Government more closely with the public. Speakers will include:

Michael Wills MP - Minister of State, Ministry of Justice
Rt Hon Theresa May MP - Shadow Leader of the House
Lord Tyler - Lib Dem Spokesperson for Constitutional Affairs
Alex Brazier - Director, Hansard Society Parliament & Government Programme
Chair: Peter Riddell - Chair, Hansard Society

To receive further information or to register for this event, please email hans_admin@hansard.lse.ac.uk

Channel 4 Political Awards in association with the Hansard Society



On Wednesday 23rd January, Channel 4 will host its 10th Annual Political Awards, in association with the Hansard Society. Before an invited audience of Members of Parliament, Press and journalists, this year we will be presenting the Hansard Society Democracy Award for the individual organisation which has advanced understanding of parliamentary democracy. Coverage of the event will be shown on prime time Channel 4 on Thursday 24th January. Further details to follow...

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