Vince Cable - Unplugged
By Dr Mark Shanahan

More than 160 students and staff gathered on October 28th for the second 'Political Voices' event organised by the Department of Politics and International Relations. Introduced by the VC, Sir David Bell, the former Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Rt. Hon. Sir Vince Cable addressed the audience and then took questions on subjects as diverse as company law reform, macro-economics and the future of the Liberal Democrats.

"Both Sir Vince's speech and many of the questions he dealt with were a little more focused on economics and less on politics than I had expected," remarked event organiser and moderator, Dr. Mark Shanahan. "That shouldn't really have come as a surprise, as he was using material from his new book 'After the Storm' which looks at the British and global economy after the 2008 crash, and of course, by profession, he was an economist before entering parliament."

Before his talk, Sir Vince took part in a book signing at Blackwell's where two Part 2 students on the media and politics module, Felix Johnston-Brunn and Jacob Tovey, interviewed him for the Politics Radio Show, which goes out from 7-8pm each Tuesday during term-time on Junction 11. "He was very open and friendly," said Felix, "and more than happy to answer our questions."

Sir Vince's visit got very positive feedback from attendees, which reflects well on the department's Events Co-ordinator, Aleiah Potter. Mark Shanahan commented: "As I was walking Sir Vince back to his taxi, he commented that this was the best organised university visit he'd ever made." It struck a chord with the VC too. Sir David Bell wrote after the event: "I enjoyed Sir Vince Cable's lecture very much and am only sorry that I couldn't stay for what, I am sure, would have been a very lively Q&A session."

The 'Political Voices' talks are enabled by a Small Project Teaching & Learning Award Dr. Shanahan received this year from CQSD. "I'm using the remainder of the award to take groups to the Welsh Assembly in December where we have a Q&A with Plaid Cymru Leader Leanne Wood, and in March we are off to Westminster where we have a session booked in to grill the speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow. And between those external visits, I'm also hoping to welcome another high-profile guess to talk about Britain's special relationship with the USA - more details shortly. All the events are designed to break down the barriers between our students and political practitioners."

Head of Department letter
By Dr Jonathan Golub

After a hectic summer of restructuring, it has been an exciting start to the year. The department welcomed several new members to the administrative team, and three new members of academic staff -- Dr. Martin Binder (international relations), Dr. Robert Jubb (political theory), and Dr. Sarah von Billerbeck (international relations) -- with two more set to arrive before the end of term -- Dr. Tom Long (international relations) and Dr. Damian Raess (international political economy). The auspicious £1m Leverhulme Trust Doctoral Programme in Climate Justice, under the direction of Prof. Catriona McKinnon, accepted its first cohort of scholars, several of whom will present their work at an international conference.

New Part 3 Parliamentary Studies module for 2016-2017!
The department is delighted that our new Parliamentary Studies module will start in September 2016. This is a very unusual module because it is co-taught by staff from Parliamentary Outreach. The Department is one of only a small number chosen to run a module of this kind which expands further our existing range at Part 3. This is clearly a fantastic choice for students interested in British politics and compliments our popular Part 2 module, British Government and Politics.

Radio Broadcasting
On Tuesday 6th October, Faye Harland, the News Editor from Radio Berkshire and Peter Castle the University’s Press Officer came to talk about broadcasting to the Media and Politics Students. Students taking this module learn about radio broadcasting and do two broadcasts on the Junction 11 Politics Show which runs on Tuesday night between 7.00 and 8.00 throughout the academic year. The two guest speakers talked generally about how news stories are gathered for production and also about some of their own personal experiences of working in broadcasting and journalism over the years. We are hoping to get these two speakers back in the New Year.

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Have we closed the ‘feedback loop’?
In September the Politics Department became the third in the country to trial the new student feedback platform, Unitu. This gives Politics students the opportunity to discuss issues and ideas amongst themselves on their own discussion board. Course reps pull through suggestions to the department board which enables the School Director of Teaching and Learning, Emma Mayhew, to respond. Everyone can see how the department has actioned each issue as they are pulled from the ‘open’ column to either ‘in progress’ or ‘closed’). Feedback is now continuous all year. Departmental actions are visible and often completed within hours.
We have already seen a great discussion on the pedagogical value of presentations and addressed requests relating to dissertations, coursework submission dates, exams, SOP, lectures slides and assessment.
If you haven’t done so already please activate your Unitu account using your Reading e-mail (made up of your username e.g. lps07eam@reading.ac.uk) and see what everyone has been talking about!

Publication News
Tim Vlandas recently published a paper with Daphne Halikiopoulou entitled “Risks, Costs and Labour Markets: Explaining Far Right-Wing Party Success in European Parliament Elections” in the Journal of Common Market Studies. He also published (joint with Chiara Benassi) a paper on “Union inclusiveness and temporary agency workers” in the Journal of European Industrial Relations. On the 15th October, he gave a talk on “Labour market reforms and unemployment in France” at the European Trade Union Institute in Brussels. He was also invited to present his research at the Paris School of Economics on the 6th November 2015, at the University of Konstanz on the 23rd November and the University of Geneva on the 25th of November.


Trip to the Imperial War Museum
140 Part 1 and 2 students visited the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum on Monday of Enhancement Week on trips fully funded by the department. Despite our coaches being stuck in London traffic and rather scary negotiation of narrow London streets, we all had a great time. Part 1 students particularly enjoyed the Egyptian and Celts collections at the British Museum while Part 2 students found the First World War galleries at the Imperial War Museum especially moving.

Our next major trip is running on 3rd December. Mark Shanahan will be leading a large group of Part 3 UK Politics students on a fully funded visit to the Welsh Assembly. We will be enjoying a tour, a select committee session and a Q&A with Leanne Wood, leader of Plaid Cymru.
Learning outside the Seminar Room:
Part 1 and 2 students visit London!

Summer School Story
By Freddy Farias
My name is Freddy Farias, a second year student of BA Politics & Economics. Over the summer, three other students and I were able to attend the International Summer School 2015 at Renmin University in Beijing, China – thanks to the Vice Chancellor’s Scholarship. When I came across this incredible opportunity I was amazed at the amount of resources and financial help that was available to us to assist in our experience. How could I not apply?
During my time there I was able to learn new ideas and subjects I had not covered in the UK before. One of the modules I partook in was ‘Latin America in the world’, whereby we learnt the economic and social challenges the region was currently facing. From my personal experience, Latin America has little exposure in the UK, both academically and in the media, and it was refreshing to finally learn about my native continent abroad.
Furthermore, I learnt about Traditional Chinese culture and this was a great way to understand the way other people see the world, each other, and life in general. It helps build an understanding that creates an otherwise absent bond.
And for me, this is the most important lesson that I personally took away from this whole experience in studying abroad. The internationalisation of higher education helps open our minds and increase our awareness of people and foreign events. They make people on the other side of the world ‘real’ – rather than just people who are so far away that they are irrelevant to us over here.
I encourage all students to look for and grab opportunities to study abroad like the one I had. The University of Reading for me has mainly been about ‘Limitless Opportunities’ - and it is also that for you.

Events: What’s coming up...

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>01/12/2015</td>
<td>Seminar: Megan Blomfield from the University of Bristol will present her research on “Credibility Assessment in the Asylum System: A case of Epistemic Exploitation?”</td>
<td>4 - 6pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/12/2015</td>
<td>Winter Graduation Ceremonies</td>
<td>12pm onwards</td>
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Find out more at www.reading.ac.uk/speir/News-and-Events/SPEIRNewsandEvents or email a.r.b.potter@reading.ac.uk

Keep in touch...
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Thinking of postgraduate study? Fill in our quick survey!