Welcome to the first edition of Founder’s West, the newsletter for the Department of Politics and International Relations (PIR). We have called the newsletter Founder’s West after our location in the west wing of the beautiful Founder’s Building at Royal Holloway. We hope the newsletter gives you a flavour of life in PIR and a snapshot of the many activities our academic staff and student community are involved in.

2014 marks our tenth anniversary year as a department. Since our founding the department has doubled in size of academic staff and introduced a range of popular undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. We currently have 27 full time academic staff and our numbers have been bolstered by the inclusion of Philosophy in the department in recent years. We offer a very broad range of courses in Politics, International Relations and Philosophy attracting students from across the globe to come and study with us.

We are very proud of the progress we have made since our founding. Our focus is on producing world-class research and delivering an exciting range of degree programmes. We received a score of 92 per cent in the 2013/4 National Student Survey, signaling both our commitment to excellence in teaching, but also our desire to provide a supportive learning environment for our students to develop. Graduates from the department go on to pursue successful careers in a wide range of areas such as academic research, marketing, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, the European Parliament, international organisations and many other fields.

We have a vibrant student community with a range of student societies based in PIR – the Politics and International Relations Society, the Diplomatic Society and the Philosophy Society. The PIR society has a fantastic track record at the annual National Model United Nations at the U.N. Headquarters in New York, winning a distinguished delegation award in each of the last three years. This year’s team will represent the Russian Federation, which should make for plenty of interesting debates in New York!

I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter. For regular updates on what’s on in PIR please follow us on Twitter @rhulpir and read our webpages. Don’t hesitate to get in touch with us if you’d like to know more. I hope that whether you’re a member of our alumni network, a current student, or someone who is considering studying with us that you’ll find something of interest in Founder’s West.

Dr Alister Miskimmon
Head, Department of Politics and International Relations
In late October, students enrolled on the first-year PIR unit ‘Introduction to Politics and Government’ visited the Magna Carta, John F. Kennedy and Royal Air Force memorials in Runnymede. During the walk they used social media to answer questions about the memorials and to comment on the enduring significance of Magna Carta.

To find out more about Royal Holloway and Magna Carta visit royalholloway.ac.uk/MagnaCarta

2015 marks the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, which was sealed by King John in Runnymede, just a stone’s throw from where Royal Holloway now stands. The Department of Politics and International Relations is playing an active part in various events to commemorate the anniversary. Magna Carta is one of the most important documents in British history and is often celebrated as the root of constitutional government in many countries.

In November, PIR academics Dr Kaats Smets and Dr Nicholas Allen, together with several final-year students, organised a deliberative event for young people on the future of Britain’s constitution. Nearly 60 students from a number of local schools participated and contributed their views on the desirability of adopting a written constitution. Their contributions were later incorporated into a formal response to the House of Commons’ ‘A new Magna Carta?’ enquiry.

Speaking after the event, Dr Smets, an expert in youth politics and deliberative democracy, said: ‘Young people often feel alienated and disengaged from traditional politics. By organising this event, we hoped to empower them and spark their interest in politics. We now hope that politicians will pay attention to the voice of the future. After all, it is today’s young people who will be most affected by changes to Britain’s constitution.’

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The ‘new Magna Carta’ debate

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The Midlands Children Hope Project has recently purchased a new site in Gweru where it is looking to build a new orphanage that will also serve as a community centre. Looking ahead to her next visit to Zimbabwe, Anita says: ‘I cannot wait to see the children again. They are so deserving of the same opportunities that we have here as students at Royal Holloway.’
Politics and International Relations Society

The Politics and International Relations Society (PIRSoc) is one of the most active student societies at Royal Holloway. This autumn the society organised a lecture on Conventions Governing Diplomats by Shair Bahadur Khan, Pakistan’s Consul General in Birmingham, as well as a special screening of new documentary film, Unmanned: America’s Drone Wars, and an event on tackling human trafficking.

George Galloway, the former Labour Member of Parliament and now Respect Party MP for Bradford West, gave a talk about Israel and Palestine in front of a packed audience in the Windsor Auditorium. Galloway is well-known for his outspoken views on a range of issues and answered students’ questions about the Middle East and American foreign policy.

PIRSoc has announced its team for the upcoming National Model United Nations (NMUN) conference, which will be held in New York between 25 March and 4 April 2015. The conference will bring together over 6,000 delegates from universities across the globe. Royal Holloway’s delegation, comprising 28 students from across the university, will represent the Russian Federation. PIRSoc is one of the top 10 most successful NMUN teams, winning the Outstanding Delegation Award in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Current students Lottie Anstey and Edward Jackson are this two Head Delegates. Lottie said that “for those participating, this represents a huge opportunity to develop skills relating to public speaking, debating, research and the drafting of political documents, such as resolutions and treaties”. Edward added “we are thrilled by this year’s team and will do our best to achieve the Outstanding Delegation Award once again”.

Student experience: Politics in Action

Our Politics in Action module gives third year students the chance to gain valuable work-experience for a political organisation as part of their degree. One of our students Kristin Ostensvik describes her experience at the Intergenerational Foundation:

“The Intergenerational Foundation (IF) is a non-profit charity with the goal of encouraging policymakers and the general public to improve prospects for young people and future generations in the UK and Europe. They provide research on a range of topics, including the UK’s position on EU policy, government spending on education, employability, housing and environment. IF consists of professionals from different industries, including economists, journalists, photographers, political science researchers and students, and works closely with Members of Parliament (MPs) and other professionals with an interest in improving intergenerational fairness.

I was introduced to the IF in February this year, and I attended several of their monthly meetings before my placement started in September. This was a great way to meet the members and supporters of the charity in a more informal setting, and it has given me insight into the variety of projects and research IF is working on. I have also experienced other aspects of IF’s work, including meetings with MPs in the House of Commons and attending networking events with sister-organisations. This has allowed me to get a glimpse into how politics and lobbying works in real life.

My role as an intern in IF primarily involves assisting the writing of a European-wide index and compiling a comprehensive assessment of the state of play across EU-countries in respect to the prospects of young people. The report assesses the performance of states on topics such as public spending on education, youth participation in national elections, income levels for young graduates and efforts to decrease environmental damage for the next generation. The process involves data analysis and disseminating the main findings.

Another aspect of my placement includes writing blogs for the organisation’s website. I have been able to draw on the knowledge gained during my studies at Royal Holloway and my experiences as an international student on topics such as the similarities and differences between British and Norwegian cultural policies.

The whole experience was very challenging to begin with. However, the knowledge gained through my degree has been of great help in getting to grips with the tasks I have been assigned. The degree of independence this placement demands also allows me to use my own ideas and take the initiative, which has helped me to develop skills, which are also very useful for my dissertation.

Overall, my experience of working at IF has been great so far. The office is composed of interesting staff from a variety of backgrounds and the placement has also given me many opportunities to network, which will be important for my future career. Finally, I am given a high-degree of freedom to contribute ideas to projects outside those which I take direct responsibility for. I am excited to see what the rest of the year will bring!”
Digital Politics in Western Democracies: a Comparative Study (2014)
Dr Cristian Vaccari, Lecturer in Politics

In this book, Dr Cristian Vaccari analyses the presentation and consumption of online politics in seven advanced Western democracies—Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States—from 2006 to 2010. His study not only refutes claims that the web creates homogenised American-style politics and political interaction, but also empirically reveals how a nation’s unique constraints and opportunities create digital responses. An earlier Italian version of the book won the Italian Political Science Association award for the best book written by an Italian political scientist under 40 years old.

Images of Africa: Creation, Negotiation and Subversion (2015)
Dr Julia Gallagher, Lecturer in International Relations

This edited book challenges the widely held idea that Africans are powerless in the creation of self-image. It explores the ways in which image creation is a process of negotiation entered into by a wide range of actors within and beyond the continent—in presidents’ offices and party headquarters, in newsrooms and rural authorities, in rebel militia bases and in artists’ and writers’ studies. Its ten chapters, written by scholars working across the continent and a range of disciplines, develop innovative ways of thinking about how image is produced. They ask: who controls image, how is it manipulated, and what effects do the images created have, for political leaders and citizens, and for Africa’s relationships with the wider world?

Precision Strike Warfare and International Intervention: Strategic, Ethico-Legal and Decisional Implications
Dr Tom Dyson

This book explores whether the new capabilities made possible by precision-strike technologies are reshaping approaches to international intervention. Since the end of the Cold War, US technological superiority has led to a more proactive and, some would argue, high risk approach to international military intervention. This volume examines three key and interrelated dimensions of these new precision-strike capabilities: (1) the strategic and foreign policy drivers and consequences; (2) the legal and moral implications of the new capabilities; and (3), the implications for decision-making at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.