

Junior Debating Club

Mrs M. Hanna

The Junior Debating Club began this year, meeting every Wednesday lunchtime in F65, under the guidance of Mrs Armstrong and Mrs Hanna. Each week a loyal band of cohorts turned up to debate and discuss wide-ranging, contemporary topics.

As school and education is a subject close to all of our hearts, it was little wonder that it featured frequently in our debates. Lively exchanges hurtled back and forth on the motions that

school punishments do not work, that electronic devices should be used for educational purposes and that school uniform should be abolished.

In the very different world of celebrity, Junior debaters discussed whether or not pop stars are poor role models for young people today and also argued about the excessive salaries paid to footballers. On that occasion, there was consensus that these sportsmen are paid far too much! Thought provoking

speeches were given on the banning of space travel, followed by challenging questioning from the floor. In stark contrast to the seriousness of this issue, whether or not Donald Trump should be president of the United States was debated and it elicited passionately held and humorous opinions, on both sides.

Many thanks to all who attended the Junior Debating Club and helped resurrect it and re-establish it as a thriving, vibrant and stimulating society.

Senior Debating Club

Mrs H.Cartmill

This year the Senior Debating Society benefitted from the opportunity to meet in the Drama Studio for part of the year and the committee opted to use the increased floor space to experiment with a number of different debating formats. Walking debates, paper debates, open floor and line debates all proved enjoyable and ensured that a greater number of those attending took part. Our open floor debates allowed members to bring to the floor motions concerning current news events and to react to national and international issues as they unfolded.

Many senior pupils spoke with impressive style and sincere passion on prepared topics of their choice. Some of the issues under discussion included the UK's moral obligation to refugees and asylum seekers, the ethical questions raised by advances in stem cell research and the potential need for the continued use of nuclear deterrents in the 21st Century. An interesting debate concerning the comparative pressure felt by male as opposed to female teenagers to conform to a stereotypical image of how they should look concluded that, while attitudes are changing, the majority felt that there is still more pressure on girls to conform to a certain look promoted by our society. The relevance and need for the monarchy and the place and significance of Christmas in the modern

world are now regular annual debates which each new committee votes to bring forward and this year proved to be no exception.

The Spring Term brought the Olympics and the potential threat of the zika virus into focus with opinion divided as to whether or not the Games should be postponed or the venue changed. The nationwide debate on Europe was also reflected in our discussions. The final debate was led by two of our most charismatic and experienced speakers and there did seem to be some evidence of lobbying and calling in of old favours ahead of the highly charged final vote that was strongly in favour of the UK remaining in Europe. Although we accurately predicted the outcome of the 2014 Scottish Referendum on Independence, we must concede that our voting did not reflect the overall U.K position post-referendum but, interestingly, it did reflect Northern Ireland's result.

Congratulations to Anna Fleming and Dhivya Suresh for taking third and second place respectively in the competitions they entered. Anna's speech in the Soroptimist Competition on the crisis faced by the NHS looked at the complexity of the choices to be made by those in charge of funding, while Dhivya's essay on Europe ensured Banbridge Academy's third major prize in The Northern Ireland Schools'



Debating Competition's T E Utley Memorial Competition. Dhivya now joins past pupils, Ross McMullan and Radhika Gupta, as winners ensuring that Banbridge Academy dominates the list of prize winners in a competition which has only been running for seven years.

Thanks are due to the hard working committee members who put together this year's programme and took part in many of the debates. It was especially encouraging to have a significant input from Year 11 pupils. We hope to be back next year at lunch time on Tuesdays and extend a cordial invitation to all in Years 11 to 14 to attend.

Essay Competition

Dhivya Suresh

Imagine a Martian observing the happenings in the British Isles in the last year or so, he would be inclined to decipher a rather strange and inexplicable phenomenon filled with chaos and conflicting information – ‘the run up to the EU referendum’. The question of whether to hold or renounce the EU membership has evolved to a polemic of sorts, an anathema infusing much diverse emotions among the generally stoic British public. Although new for the current generation of the voters, the question has already been posed to the British public in 1975 and they have answered with a resounding ‘yes’ – 67% voted to stay with the EU. However, the relationship between Britain and the EU has been convoluted and ambivalent, to say the least. Compelling arguments, coupled with impressive facts and figures have been presented on both sides of the argument. The end result is that the general public is rendered in a state of confused dither as to which is the right path to choose for themselves and the generations to come. At this juncture it behoves us to reflect and critically evaluate the worthiness of our relationship with our neighbours, the EU. Has this indeed been a symbiotic relationship? Or, as the people in favour of Britain leaving the EU claim, have we been scammed to believe that this was an advantageous affiliation? When T E Utley discerned way back in 1962, questioning the, perhaps over-hyped, claims of the diplomatic and economic benefits to be incurred in return for the loss of power – was the sacrifice worth it? Was Utley right in his concerns? In order to answer the above, let us investigate the subject

from various perspectives – the history of how they got to this point, the pros and cons of Britain being a EU member from various standpoints economy, immigration, safety and last but not the least, the impact of their decision on the sovereignty of the proud island nation.

The year was 1946; the portly British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was addressing a delegation of heads of states from various European countries in Zurich, vehemently putting forward a case for a united front of Europe: “Great Britain, the British Commonwealth of Nations, mighty America, and I trust Soviet Russia - for then indeed all would be well - must be the friends and sponsors of the new Europe and must champion its right to live and shine.” Fast forward a few years, by 1969, the French President Charles de Gaulle rejected Britain’s application to join the Common Market twice; he argued that Britain, a traditional island nation, was not suited to be part of a European ‘superstate’. Finally, in 1973 under the auspices of the then British PM, Edward Heath, Britain became a member of the EU. Why did Britain join? The decision to join the EU was more or less economically impelled – the commonwealth was fast disappearing with the Indian independence, decolonization of other countries within the Empire and the British Economy was in doldrums. So, has joining the EU really stabilised the British post-war economy and delivered the promised utopia? Let us look what we have gained and forfeited on various fronts, to this account.

Perhaps the greatest determinant of



the success of this relationship can be gauged by the economic impact alone. When Britain joined the EU, it was not out of purely altruistic or hegemonic inclinations, rather it was out of economic compulsion. In 1950, UK’s per capita GDP was almost a third larger than the EU6 average; in 1973, it was about 10% below; it has been comparatively stable ever since. On this basis alone joining the EU seems to have worked – it helped to halt Britain’s relative economic decline in comparison with the other EU states. The positive economic implications is an amalgamation of the benefits accrued through free trade, common market place and increased job opportunities. However, this comes at a fee – a hefty one at that! Every year the UK pays about £13bn as a membership fee, but also receives £4.5bn worth of spending, making a net outgoing of £8.5bn – this is about 7% of the Government’s annual expenditure on

Essay Competition

the NHS. People in favour of 'Brexit' the term coined to indicate the campaign for Britain's exit, have called this fee as atrociously wasteful – money that could be spent on many ailing causes within the country. Although this appears to be a valid argument, many economic think-tanks, trades and businesses have warned against taking a hurried decision based solely on the membership fees. They claim that the benefits outweigh the costs, in the long run. For example, a study by the think-tank Open Europe, found that in case Britain left, the UK economy would shrink by 2.2 per cent of its total GDP by 2030. However, if we stayed and renegotiated our free trade deals, the GDP could rise by 1.6 per. Also, the EU is currently negotiating with the US to create a historic, largest free trade area – exiting at this crucial juncture may jeopardise Britain's long-term economic health. Thus from the economic standpoint alone, it makes sense to stay.

The core of the EU agreements lies in providing a free trade marketplace – has this been fulfilled? Yes, indeed! The EU is a single market in which no tariffs are imposed on imports and exports between member states. According to the Sky News, more than 50 per cent of our exports go to EU countries and forsaking membership could imply increased tariffs and unwieldy price, eventually leading to huge losses. This fear has been reiterated by car manufacturers like BMW who have that business in UK will no longer be viable if they exited EU due to the fact that the vehicles could not be exported tax-free. With regards to investments, Britain's position as a top financial centre will be diminished if we are no longer seen as a gateway to the EU for the likes of US banks. While Brexit campaigners claim that free from EU rules and regulations, Britain could

reinvent itself as a Singapore-style supercharged economy, unless backed by a solid plan, this is more akin to day-dreaming about the Shangri-la rather than a pragmatic approach. Thus in terms of trade, investment and economy, it is safer to stay within the EU rather than taking a leap in the dark, with just wishful thinking to escort us.

The topic of immigration has been a pet peeve of campaigners for Brexit. An already sensitive subject, immigration, specific to EU immigration has resulted in the most emotive, acrimonious and sometimes baseless arguments both for and against. Being a Christian country, our position as a friendly neighbour and an asylum for the destitute is enshrined both within the Bible and our constitution. Under EU law, anyone from the member states can live and work, freely, within the UK. This has resulted in a huge increase in immigration into Britain, particularly from eastern and southern Europe. According to the Office for National Statistics, there are 942,000 eastern Europeans, Romanians and Bulgarians working in the UK, along with 791,000 western Europeans – and 2.93m workers from outside of the EU. This has, understandably, led to difficulties with housing and service provision, however, the net effect has been overwhelmingly positive. Despite the fear mongering of the Brexit group, who claim that immigration is taking way 'British jobs' from British people. However, figures from early 2000s, have indicated that there are three million jobs linked directly to our membership of the EU. It is true that immigrants from the EU are entitled to the same benefits as British citizens, however, David Cameron has secured concessions while renegotiating Britain's EU membership which will reduce immigration as new arrivals will receive a lower rate of child benefit. Writing for the London



School of Economics, Professor Adrian Favell warns that leaving the EU would deter the "brightest and the best" of the continent from coming to Britain. Thus from immigration perspective, staying with the EU would be a sensible exercise in self amelioration.

In summary, albeit at first reluctant to compromise some of sovereign powers to the new EU government, over half a century of being a member has taught us the value of being together. The benefits of fostering a seamless partnership in terms of economy has been realised by the state of the British economy post- membership. Another important aspect to consider, especially in view of the turbulence of war and terrorism and the real threat posed by ISIS and other such groups, is that team-work and collective intelligence is imperative to ensure the safety of all the nations. If the UK leaves the EU, it would still be a member of the UN and NATO but might lose its political clout on the world stage. Thus despite the fees, despite the detractor's claims of abeyance or indeed relinquishing of sovereignty, it is in our own best interests to stand united with our neighbours and the Christian ethics of true neighbourliness.