

Victory for “In” campaign as PolSoc hosts first EU debate

A snap Twitter poll, conducted after the Politics Society event, indicated that 80% of audience members agreed that the pro-EU panellists had best presented their arguments, invoking panic from student Leave campaigners



By [Finn Judge](#), Editor (2017)
Monday 29 February 2016



Tory MP Neil Carmichael outlines his case for Britain to remain in the EU. Image: Henry Honeywood

Last Thursday’s debate on Britain’s membership of the European Union saw 200 students and four influential panellists, three of whom MPs, debate the country’s future in both Europe and beyond.

The sold-out event was one of the first of its kind to be hosted by York’s Politics Society. Its popularity came as no surprise, with the European question having divided campus already. The university’s In campaign “York’s Stronger In Europe” has mobilised over 250 students on social media, with four months to go until the referendum date. “York Students for Britain”, the university’s Out campaign, has been less successful, with just over 80 online supporters.

On the Remain side, MPs Tom Brake (Liberal Democrat) and Neil Carmichael (Conservative) put forward a pragmatic, economic case for the UK to stay in the EU. However, Carl Chambers, Regional Chairman for Business for Britain, and Conservative MP Philip Davies were able to be much more imaginative in their projections of the country’s future.

“

[Philip Davies] claimed Britain would have to build “three cities the size of Birmingham” to cope with the incoming strain on public services and house prices from the EU’s open border policy

”



Politics Lecturer Sofia Vasilopoulou, who specialises in European Studies, chaired the event. Image: Henry Honeywood

The Leave campaign were given the advantage of opening the debate. With merciless precision, Philip Davies outlined his three core reasons for a Brexit vote: democracy and accountability, as he purported that the majority of laws are now initiated by an unaccountable European Commission; curbing migration, as he claimed that Britain would have to build “three cities the size of Birmingham” to cope with the incoming strain on public services and house prices from the EU’s open border policy; and simply that taxpayers would be “better off out”, citing the £18 billion annual fees for EU membership.

“We built our wealth in this country by being global traders,” Davies stated, before asserting that we “should be ashamed” of our country’s complicity in “propping up inefficient European businesses”. He later went on to denounce France and Spain as “economic basket cases” and “anti-American” in a bid to promote Britain’s potential to establish trade links with the rest of the world as its fifth largest economy, instead of giving preferential treatment to the continent.



Liberal Democrat MP Tom Brake delivered a pragmatic, cautionary account of the stability provided by European Union membership.
Image: Henry Honeywood

Against this, Tom Brake asserted that a British exit from the European Union would simply cause the country to be at the “back of the queue” for trade deals. TTIP, the EU’s prospective trade deal with the United States was referenced, as well as President Obama’s refusal to entertain the notion of a bilateral UK-US trade deal in the event of a Brexit. Neil Carmichael criticised the efficiency of trading with non-EU states, anecdotally explaining that a “snow manufacturer” in his constituency may “take days” to do business with Norway, whilst this is not an issue when the company trades with Sweden, an EU member state.

This was when Carl Chambers’ business experience, himself a Non-Executive Director of Leeds Teaching Hospitals, provided a calm voice of reassurance for a Leave vote. Dismissing EU trade deals for taking too long to be devised and implemented, Chambers touched upon the inherently bureaucratic nature of the European Union, claiming that the UK would be able to do deals more quickly. Alongside this, he noted that British exports to the European Union had been in decline over the last 10 to 15 years, thus dismissing the importance of the single market itself.

The border question was also on the agenda. “Free movement of people is a part of the single market,” Neil Carmichael was quick to point out. He commended the apparent flexibility it provides for the labour market, noting that unemployment appears to continually fall in his constituency – thus dismissing any possible correlation between higher unemployment rates and increasing net migration levels. Carmichael also made reference to the “emergency brake” on EU migration the Prime Minister has been offered from his renegotiations in Brussels – a policy rebuked by Carl Chambers on the grounds of its effectiveness. Chambers highlighted a need for the “right level of skills” when accepting migrants from both the continent and elsewhere: indeed, the UK is unable to discriminate against incoming migrants earning lower incomes from within the EU, yet it actively does so against those from elsewhere.

“
“People [from the EU] are flying into Leeds Bradford Airport to commit crimes, and are on their way home before the police can even investigate.”

”



Philip Davies proved the more outspoken of the two Tory MPs throughout the debate, with businessman Carl Chambers to his right. Image: Henry Honeywood

However, this question was not confined to mere economics. The most controversial claim of the debate came from Philip Davies, stating when questioned on border control and crime: “People [from the EU] are flying into Leeds Bradford Airport to commit crimes, and are on their way home before the police can even investigate.” Although the audience broke into stifled laughter, Davies was keen to remind them of the apparent severity of the situation. Tom Brake, contrastingly, was more optimistic about the European Union’s abilities to curtail international crime, commending the EU-wide convictions database that is currently in place, as well as the European Arrest Warrant.

Overall, reactions to the debate were largely partisan. Students for Britain York accused Tom Brake of “peddling the myth that the EU has stopped wars” and proclaimed that “NATO, not the EU has kept the peace in Europe.” However, the majority of negative attention was directed at Davies. “I am an outer,” Bethany Wright, who posed a question to the panel on trade deals, stated, “But Philip Davies needs to get his act together.” When first year Politics student Callum Delhoy produced a poll on Twitter using the “#YEUDebate” hashtag, audience members voted by 44% that Neil Carmichael had been the strongest performing panellist, thus heavily assisting the “In” campaign in securing the confidence of York students.

“
Every vote is of equal worth in this referendum, and so both sides will continue to battle it out for the hearts and minds of York students over the next four months.
”



Audience members remain unequivocally in favour of continued EU membership. Image: Henry Honeywood

Whilst the rest of the nation appears much less certain about Britain’s future with Europe, the ongoing debate on campus is inherently slanted by a liberal student demographic. However, this will not deter the campaigning. Every vote is of equal worth in this referendum, and so both sides will continue to battle it out for the hearts and minds of York students over the next four months.

Credit to the Politics Society for hosting such a momentous event, and attracting such high-profile speakers.



Most Read Discussed

1. [What is the difference between tax evasion and tax avoidance?](#)
2. [Review: Little Mix - LM5](#)
3. [Penalty for submitting work up to an hour late halved](#)
4. [UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)
5. [How to depose a Conservative leader](#)
6. [Led Astray - The Case Against Greta Van Fleet](#)

Write for Nouse Politics

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

More in Politics

[UK government in contempt of Parliament ahead of key Brexit vote](#)

[How to depose a Conservative leader](#)

[Aufwiedersehen: Merkel plans her departure](#)

[US turnout surges in Midterms](#)

[Trans-Atlantic spats overshadow Centenary](#)

[Up to a million Muslims imprisoned by China](#)

- [About Nouse](#)
- [Who’s Nouse](#)
- [Website Credits](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Student Discounts](#)
- [Print Editions](#)
- [Mini-Sites](#)
- [Nouse on Twitter](#)
- [Nouse on Facebook](#)
- [Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

