The Professor Sir Richard Trainor PhD Scholarships 2017-18

Project Title: Understanding Citizen Engagement with Parliamentary Debates: A computational approach using the Online Hansard Report

Partner Organisation: House of Commons

King's is now inviting applications for one of the Professor Sir Richard Trainor PhD Scholarships in the Department of Informatics at King's College London in collaboration with the House of Commons. The scholarship will commence from October 2017 onwards and is open to new incoming PhD students only.

Project Description:

Debates in the UK Parliament are available online in a report called Hansard, and are shareable and embeddable through extremely specific URLs (e.g., direct links to individual contributions from Members of Parliament can be shared on social media; videos of speeches can be embedded after agreeing to licensing terms), whose accesses are tracked and counted through google analytics and social media searches. Hansard originally came into being through a power struggle between the Parliament and citizens/journalists about the openness of information, and this report will investigate how the report has adapted to today's online world.

This PhD project aims to use Hansard and its URLs as a unique window into understanding the nature of current citizen participation in the UK's parliamentary process, and shine a light on the nature of political discussion online: What do these discussions say about trust of the UK citizens in its Governmental institutions? Is there trolling, either of MPs or of other citizens? What is the "shelf life" of MP contributions – how long after the debate do conversations go on? What are the implications of the borderless nature of online presence -- What do people outside of the UK say, and how does this shape overall discourse? The project will also take a historical perspective and consider the overall political impact of the Internet on interactions with Parliament; and assess how this has developed over time.

The second supervisor for the project, Dr. Blick will add a history and policy perspective to complement Dr. Sastry's computational expertise, and to ground the project in the realities of UK governance practices. The project involves a mutually beneficial and symbiotic collaboration with the House of Commons Library, through Mr. Wood. To enable this, the PhD student will gain access to a unique and nationally important dataset, which will enable novel and impactful research of direct relevance to the UK.

In the 2014 REF, 88% of research activity by the Department of Informatics was assessed as 'world leading or internationally excellent'. It is a research-led department with a strong reputation for contribution to scholarship, teaching and practice. The Department is located on the Strand Campus of King's College London where the studentship will be based.

Supervisors:

Lead Supervisor: Dr Nishanth Sastry

Second Supervisors: Dr Andrew Blick

Partner Organisation Supervisor: Edward Wood

Application documentation: applicants must complete and submit:
- a CV
- personal statement explaining why they would be suitable

to graduateschool@kcl.ac.uk by 11:59pm (UK BST) on 7 May 2017. The subject line of the email should read 'RT Scholarship 1718 – [*include the relevant project title*]'

All documents should be submitted as a single pdf.

Two academic references **must** be received by the deadline for the application to be eligible. Candidates are responsible for instructing referees to submit their references to graduateschool@kcl.ac.uk using the subject line 'RT Scholarship 1718 – [*name of applicant*]'.

Selection: Please note that as part of selection, short-listed candidates will be invited for interview.

Funding Details: The scholarship will provide an annual payment of £15,000 which can be used to cover tuition fees and/or living costs. In addition, £550 per year will be provided towards the student's conference travel.

Length of Award: 3 years (PhD)