

Final Report

Name of BritInn Fellow: Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Ludger Helms

Home Department: Department of Political Science **Home University:** University of Innsbruck

Guest Department: Institute of Commonwealth Studies

Guest University: School of Advanced Study, University of London, UK

From: 04.02.23 **Until:** 12.02.23

Title of the Research Project: Women Leaders of the Opposition in Westminster Systems

Report about visit and future plans (max. 200 words, English, written for a general public, please):

This has been a most wonderful, and fruitful, experience. I had the great opportunity to develop and complete a comparative research project on four Westminster systems (UK, CA, NZ and AUS, which are all part of the family of Commonwealth nations). There can be few, if any, better places to discuss developments in four different Commonwealth countries than the Institute for Commonwealth Studies (ICWS), which actually brings together scholars and students from this particular group of nations. This project has been in the making for quite some time; a first draft paper of this research has been submitted to a major international journal ("Party Politics"; Web of Science and SSCI-listed) in October 2022. I received three substantive reports shortly before Christmas and worked on the manuscript while preparing for my scheduled visit to ICWS. At my guest-talk at ICWS, held in person on 8 February 2023, I presented the advanced draft of this paper which I had carefully revised on the basis of the three anonymous expert reports received. At this occasion, and several other more informal exchanges with fellows and graduate students at the Institute, I presented and discussed the core findings of my research as well as remaining problems that the reviewers had identified and which, I felt, I could not solve completely on my own. After this academic visit, I am more convinced than ever that real (rather than virtual) academic visits and meetings in person can make a difference. Beyond all scholarly expertise and scientific excellence, it remains fascinating and challenging to deal with the gut reactions of people from the countries studied. I have tried to absorb all this different kind of feedback when completing a final draft of my research paper, which I resubmitted to "Party Politics" just a few days after my return. The paper has been accepted for publication on 11 March 2023, and will be published very soon. I obviously made

sure to mention BritInn and my core contact persons at ICWS (its Director Dr. Sue Onslow, and Dr. Kirin Hassan) for their generous support in the Acknowledgments section of the article.

I am keen to add that the scholarly value of this visit to London extends well beyond this particular research project and paper. As an ‘old school’ Political Scientist, I have always believed in the value of visiting real-world countries under study to capture how society in different countries really works. The major Public Transport strikes early in February, and to see how Londoners dealt with it, belonged to this category of experiences. The devastatingly high costs of living in London were another element of first hand-experience that made a lasting impression on me. In any case, my longstanding fascination with, and passionate interest of, British politics and society has been deeply revitalized.

Last not but least, I have tried to keep in contact with several ICWS people after my return. Specifically, I encouraged Dr. Kirin Hassan (based as ICWS, who is an accomplished expert in Climate change policies and political communication) to apply for a BritInn fellowship to visit the Political Science and/or Media and Communication Department at the University of Innsbruck in the not-too-distant future. Considering the rumors about a possible ending of the programme, I can only conclude with postulating ‘long live BritInn!’.

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