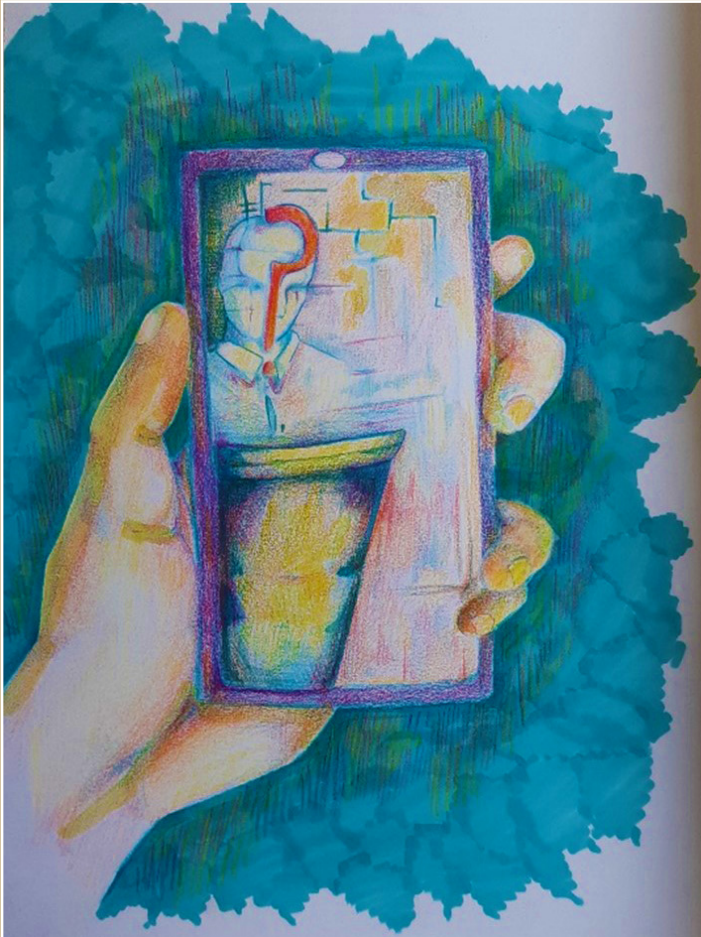# Democracy and Truth

In a world of AI and Social Media

Ursuline High School Sixth Form Conference
Thursday 16th January 2025

WELCOME

Welcome to our conference today in which we will look at the theme of Democracy and Truth in a world of AI and social media. In 2024 over half the world took part in elections. AI has become a powerful tool in modern political campaigns, enabling political parties to better understand and target voters. It has also been used to spread disinformation, through deep-fake technologies creating fake statements or videos, which both distort the democratic process and erode trust in the electorate. Social media platforms from X to TikTok have been a significant part of political campaigning for some time but the use of AI within social media (to manipulate the algorithms that decide what content is shown, for example) was used very particularly in the 2024 elections. This shift of campaigning has potential for good- in particular allowing for more grassroots involvement, but it also introduces challenges regarding misinformation, polarization and, ultimately threatening the integrity of the democratic process. Today we will unpack some of this and look at how we can engage with AI and social media in a positive way to bring about political change in key issues of the day.

We are very fortunate to be joined by excellent speakers who bring a range of perspectives to what it means to impact politics. Our first session focuses on politics from three different perspectives- The House of Lords, The House of Commons and Local Council level. We are very honoured to be joined by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, a Conservative Peer, who will share with us about his journey into politics and his work now in the Lords. We are also delighted to welcome our new MP for Wimbledon, Paul Kohler, from the Liberal Democrats, and to welcome back long-term supporter of our conferences, Siobhain McDonagh, Labour MP for Mitcham and Morden. The final member of our panel is our very own alumna Sheri-Ann Bhim who is a local councillor for Merton (welcome back Sheri!).

Our first keynote speaker is Ben Shields who is the founder and CEO of Know-Me.ai, a company pioneering AI-driven interactive video experiences that transform how people engage with history and culture. He will talk to us about how AI can be used to strengthen democracy, enhance public engagement and tackle global challenges.

In session three we hear from Jonathan Gifford who works at the Cabinet Office and who is a media, crisis and strategic communications expert. He has worked in three of the world's top global PR businesses and for the largest lobbying company in the UK. Within Government he has worked across many different departments from trade to health. He will explore the question of the impact of disinformation on society.

Our final keynote speaker is Paulette Waton MBE who is the Founder and Managing Director of Academy Achievers. Paulette has spent her career advocating for diversity and inclusion, with a particular focus on underrepresented communities. Paulette's work addresses critical challenges at the intersection of social media, AI, and inclusion. Her book "She Disrupts: A Black Woman's Journey in STEM and AI Industries" combines personal narrative and practical insights, exploring systemic inequities in technology and showcasing the resilience of Black women in tech. She will join us to discuss Inclusion and Diversity in AI and Social Media and will get the students thinking about how we can attain a more balanced, and less dominant white and male, voice in our political discourse. We are sure there will be great conversations started here!

We will end with a debate on Democracy, AI and Social Media, and we invite students to participate fully with speeches from the floor. Thank you to Tom Rattner and Daniel Brookes from the English Speaking Union for joining and facilitating for us.
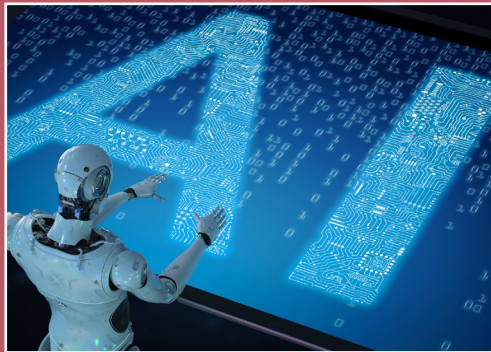
We hope the students will also better understand the range of ways in which they can engage politically both now and in the future- whether they might want to be an MP or a councillor or engage at a grass-roots level with an issue which is significant to them.

I would like to thank all our speakers for giving their time today. Your commitment to the students here today and lasting impact of your service today is really valued and important. We thank too Loredana Roberts for chairing and TEAM Global for their generous support of the day.

We are delighted to be joined by City of London Academy, Mulberry School for Girls, Raynes Park High, Ricards, Rutlish, Wimbledon College, and our sister Ursuline schools in Brentwood and Ilford, and hope you all gain a great deal from today. Thank you for coming!

Eoin Kelly

Headteacher
Ursuline High School
Wimbledon

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AI or Not, June 16 2023

PROGRAMME

9.15am	**Registration**
9.30am	**Welcome:** Mr Kelly to open the conference
9.35am	Student introduction
9.45am	**Session 1**: The Commons, the Lords and the local council- panel discussion with those involved with politics at a national and local level. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Conservative peer), Siobhain McDonagh MP (Labour- Mitcham and Morden), Paul Kohler MP (Lib Dem- Wimbledon), and Sheri-Ann Bhim (Merton Councillor- Labour).
10.30am	**Session 2**: AI and the changing face of democracy. Ben Shields (co-founder of Know-Me.ai).
11.00am	Break
11.20am	**Session 3**: Disinformation and its impact on Society Jonathan Gifford (Cabinet Office)
12.05pm	Lunch
12.40pm	**Session 4**: Inclusion and Diversity in the world of AI and social media. Paulette Watson MBE (founder and managing director of Academy Achievers and author of "She, Disrupts")
1.05pm	Reflection activity to allow students to consider solutions for inclusivity.
1.15pm	Follow up discussion
1.25pm	**Debate**: "This House believes that social media and AI are a force for good for Democracy". Tom Rattner and Daniel Brookes (English Speaking Union)
2.10pm	Reflection and evaluation
2.20pm	**End of the conference**

OUR SPEAKERS

Lord Ahmad

Lord Ahmad is a prominent British Conservative politician and life peer in the House of Lords, ennobled by HM Queen Elizabeth II in 2011. He is an experienced and widely respected Foreign Minister, diplomat, British businessman, and community leader. He is recognised for his outstanding contributions across various domains, but most notably in foreign policy and Interntaional relations, where he became the longest serving British Foreign Minister in over 50 years, serving under 5 Prime Ministers. As a practising Muslim, he has been an advocate in interfaith dialogue and is a vocal advocate for religious tolerance. His work often focuses on fostering understanding and cooperation between different faiths, which he has championed both within the UK and in international forums.

Lord Ahmad was educated at Rutlish School and went on to study at both London South Bank University (LSBU) and the Chartered Institute of Financial Services. He was Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations between June 2017 and July 2024.

Siobhain McDonagh

Siobhain McDonagh has been the Labour Member of Parliament for Mitcham and Morden for the past 25 years – the constituency in which she was born and still lives to this day.

Paul Kohler

Paul Kohler was elected MP for Wimbledon in June 2024. He first entered Politics as a Liberal Democrat local councillor in 2018. Before going into politics he worked as a lawyer both in the City and as an academic (including at UCL, SOAS and New College, Oxford).

OUR SPEAKERS

Sheri-Ann Bhim represents the Graveney Ward as a Labour Party Merton Councillor. Sheri-Ann is a past student of the Ursuline High School Wimbledon and we are delighted to welcome her back to the school.

Sheri-Ann Bhim

Ben Shields is the founder and CEO of Know-Me.ai, a company pioneering AI-driven interactive video experiences that transform how people engage with history and culture. A graduate of Brown University, where he studied Public Policy, Ben has a deep understanding of the intersection of technology and governance. His work focuses on leveraging artificial intelligence to enhance public engagement, strengthen democracy, and tackle global challenges.

Ben Shields

Jonathan is a media, crisis and strategic communications expert in the UK Government.

He has worked in three of the world's top 50 Public Relations businesses, and the largest lobbying company in the UK, helping businesses from Royal Mail to startups with communications campaigns. Since moving to Government, he has worked on everything from post-Brexit trade comms in the Department for International Trade to asking the public to lockdown during the pandemic in the Department for Health.

Jonathan Gifford

Most recently, he has worked in the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office. In the MOD, he oversaw comms for all UK operations overseas; from the collapse of Afghanistan to the deployment of Carrier Strike Groups. In the Cabinet Office, he advises Governments from the Baltics to the Balkans with their fight against disinformation.

OUR SPEAKERS & CHAIR

Paulette Watson MBE

Paulette Watson MBE is an internationally recognised leader in education and technology, dedicated to empowering young people and transforming lives through innovation. With a distinguished career spanning roles such as Head of E-learning, Director of ICT, and Associate Dean for Advanced Technology in Switzerland (in collaboration with Google), Paulette has consistently championed education as a catalyst for change.

As the Founder and Managing Director of Academy Achievers, Paulette has spent her career advocating for diversity and inclusion, with a particular focus on underrepresented communities. Paulette's work addresses critical challenges at the intersection of social media, AI, and inclusion. Her book "She Disrupts: A Black Woman's Journey in STEM and AI Industries" combines personal narrative and practical insights, exploring systemic inequities in technology and showcasing the resilience of Black women in tech. The book inspires young women globally to see themselves as leaders and change-makers in the technology sector.

Loredana Roberts CHAIR

Loredana has worked across both the private and public sectors. She started her career in the media industry with The Guardian newspaper and then as a Board Director of a multi media organisation. In 2008 she moved into the education field working as Director of Global Learning and Communication for a state secondary school. She has held the position of exec member of Team Global (the charity sponsoring this conference) and as part of her volunteering work, she also mentors refugees for a London charity.

OUR DEBATERS

Tom has been involved with debating since he started it at school in year 7. He went on to be part of the University of Bristol's Debating Union and participated in many of their competitions as well as mooting and advocacy competitions.

**Tom Rattner
(English Speaking
Union)**

Daniel has taught Literature both in London and abroad for the majority of the last twenty-five years. He is experienced in teaching students how to debate, and mentored many students for debating competitions as well as Model Union Nations conferences.

**Daniel Brookes
(English Speaking
Union)**

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO...

All our student leaders today.

The conference was planned and led with the help of our wonderful sixth-formers.
Thank you to Alicja Wilniewczyc for designing the conference poster, and to our
year 12 Politics students who helped present and lead the conference (including
being in charge of the Q&A). You've done a great job!

Our schools for joining us!

- City of London Academy
- Mulberry School for Girls
- Wimbledon College
- Ricards and Rutlish
- Raynes Park High School
- Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School
- The Ursuline Academy, Ilford

TEAM Global for supporting this event!

TEAM Global was founded over fifty years ago to promote understanding
of how countries could cooperate for their mutual benefit, focusing on the
whole global community and on issues such as human rights, democracy,
the environment, the economy and international development.

TEAM Global has earned the support and goodwill of representatives of
universities, emphasizes, the media, NATO, as well as Members of the
House of Lords and MPs.

TEAM Global's two main activities are arranging workshop-
conferences for sixth form students & other students at
schools and universities and organising study tours for
school and university students.

QUESTIONS FOR SPEAKERS

Session 1:

Session 2:

Session 3:

Session 4:

NOTES FOR DEBATES