

Comment & Analysis

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This latest Government mistake may cost them dear next election

Graduates will not vote for a Labour government that fails to deliver on promises for University development

The news that York will be prevented from taking on new British students at more than current levels is disheartening after a few good months for the University's profile. York was becoming more and more associated in my mind with success after the RAE results, rapturous reception to the opening of the Courtyard, and headway made in student-academic relations.

Perhaps most disconcertingly after three years of criticising both the University and YUSU on an almost daily basis, a small but definitive sense of pride had begun to develop in some dark corner of my brain. I had even started defending York when my friends from home reacted with shock on seeing it at the top ten universities every year. York, the hapless, underrated but eccentrically brilliant place we all attend, was... whisper it... going up in the world.

This is why I am seething that a combination of bad timing, economic downturn, and financial mismanagement on both sides is preventing the full potential of the Heslington East development from being realised. The reality may be either that places for new students will have to be filled from overseas or postgraduate applicants, or the new colleges and classrooms of Hes East will lie empty.

John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills told the Vice-Chancellor in a letter that the reason for the change of policy was that "the number of students receiving full or partial grants was exceeding projections". One would have thought that if Gordon Brown was

serious about his target of 50% of young people in higher education then the Government might have anticipated that more people from middle and lower income backgrounds would apply for loans. More joined-up thinking from New Labour, the party who increased our tuition fees and are doing nothing to help new graduates with unemployment and debt.

The new campus may well now become one of those expensive Christmas presents you felt constantly guilty about for never using. However, unlike an ice-cream machine or set of golf clubs, Hes East has the potential to lift the profile of the University to unforeseen levels. This would allow us to take on the big hitters of Oxbridge and the London Universities not just in research and academia, at which we already frequently outclass them, but in the arenas of overall student satisfaction and facilities. York frequently loses out in University rankings because our spending to student ratio and careers prospects scores are comparatively low. Hes East would tip this imbalance to our favour, allowing the flourishing Law and Theatre, Film, and Television (TFTV) departments to make use of a dedicated space, and of specialist equipment in the latter case. Furthermore, the new swimming pool and student venue which have been much vaunted ever since the embryonic planning stage will also contribute to the kind of student experience that our peers at other universities currently take for granted.

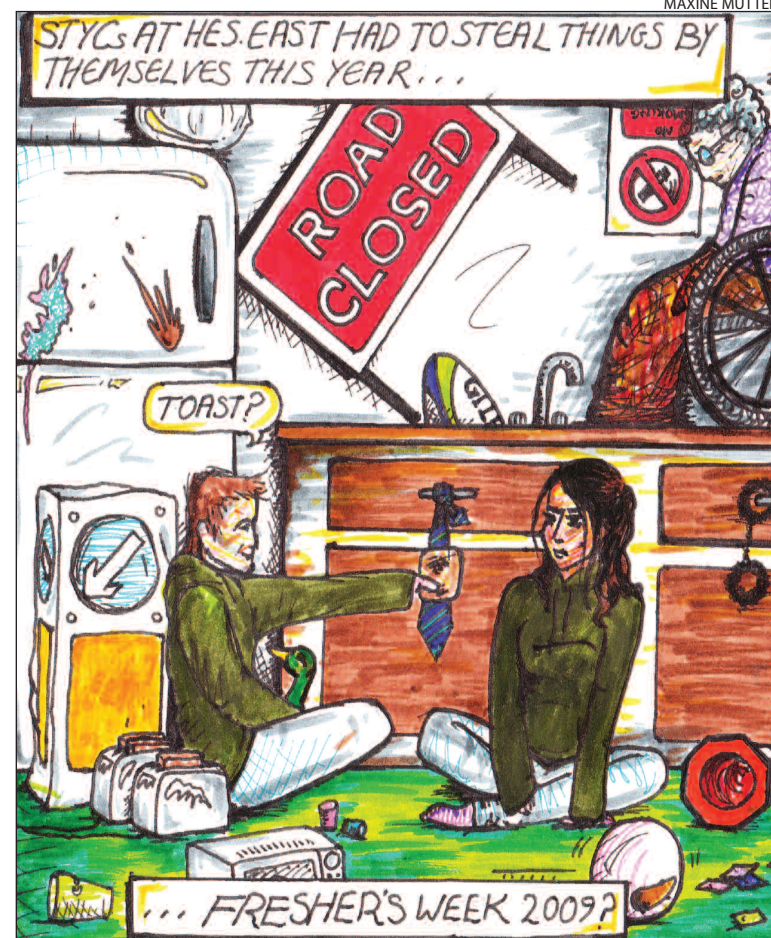
David Garner expresses this in typical blasé marketing jargon: "In

the context of the Heslington East expansion, the undergraduate home market is only part of the picture". The loser here is the British student who needs financial assistance, or exactly the kind of person the Government claims to be encouraging to attend university. This change will mean the applicants with the money, rather than the raw talent to come to York, and the "home market" may

simply look elsewhere.

Once again, young people have been let down by Labour. The ones who will bear the brunt of this policy mismanagement will be the teenagers who have strived for their A-levels at poor quality state schools, for the promise of something better for their efforts. York deserves better than a Government whose legacy of broken promises may lose them the graduate vote.

MAXINE MUTTEN



Raf Sanchez



Marriage of convenience for the GSA

It has by any standards been a rough year for the Graduate Students' Association (GSA). Of three sabbatical officers elected in the summer, two resigned before even taking up their posts, leaving a beleaguered Internal Officer to run the organisation single-handedly, organise fresh elections and salvage her PhD. The subsequent by-election ended in farce when Wentworth Edge reached capacity during the voting event, disenfranchising anyone who didn't show up for a cocktail.

This was surpassed by the next election in which both presidential candidates were disqualified for breaching election rules.

We are now in our fourth round for positions that should have been filled last summer.

But the problems seem to run deeper than shambolic elections. A consultant's report from September said the GSA's "lack of connection with the membership is unacceptable for a members' organisation", and claimed there is "no clarity of who is in charge of what" from either a democratic or managerial perspective". Last year's Executive achieved virtually nothing aside from nursing a long-term grudge against the over-funded undergraduates at YUSU (Former President Anne-Marie Canning was allegedly told to "run along"

after one meeting).

All of this begs the question: Why not scrap the GSA and bring it under YUSU? The idea is tempt-

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ing. Staff salaries and administrative costs last year were in the region of £70,000. There are huge economies of scale to be had in a

merger. A single student representative body would also close the gap between YUSU and the GSA into which the University can divisively wedge in negotiations.

Ultimately the question is: could YUSU effectively represent the needs of postgraduates? Do you know what a Thesis Advisory Panel is, or a PGWT? The difference between an MPhil and a PhD? I don't and I'm a final year undergraduate, the same as many of those now poised to become sabbaticals. While it's dangerous to talk of 'typical' undergrads, the postgraduate community is far more diverse and so are their needs. There is a real danger they

would get swallowed up by the concerns of an undergrad majority. Even if there were a sabbatical postgrad position it's unlikely a high-calibre person would take it and risk having their PhD topic printed elsewhere.

In recent years the GSA has failed as an organisation. The current field of candidates is promising and the pace of reform is picking up. Cooperation with YUSU is increasing and handover procedures are being strengthened.

Regardless, for whoever takes over the stakes are high. A choice between imperfect representation by YUSU or none by the GSA is no choice at all.