

survey highlights apathy towards Union

Poor turnout in college elections begs questions of JCRC viability

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FOLLOWING A poor turnout in recent JCRC elections, concerns have been voiced regarding the involvement of students at York in the running of university life.

After elections at the beginning of this year, several colleges found themselves with incomplete JCRCs and unfilled positions, leading to subsequent by-elections. Two colleges in particular felt the dearth of political involvement on campus: the Goodricke JCRC was left with 15 empty positions and had to resort to by-elections. Such a lack of involvement was also evident in Halifax, where 15 places were also left without representatives.

Somewhat prophetically, following his election last year, YUSU President Tom Scott commented that "the majority of students just don't care about

campus politics because it doesn't affect them that much. No that's wrong, because it doesn't seem to affect them. Most people just want to get on with their degrees and their lives. They don't see it as a problem, they are quite happy as they are."

The YUSU elections of last March showcased an unprecedented degree of student political participation. The total turnout rose from 2007's 1,723 voters to 3,703. This was 33% of the university, the highest turnout at a British University that year. Anne-Marie Canning, Referendum Coordinator at the time, declared "I'm happy that we had a fantastic turnout. Clearly York students have made their voice heard."

However, a similar turnout was not seen in the smaller JCRC elections this year. Commenting on the situation, Halifax Chair, Roberto Powell stressed the importance of college JCRCs for all

students: "Student politics are integral to university life. As a force, it needs to raise its profile significantly," he said. Currently, JCRCs are responsible for much grass-roots welfare and representation of students.

YUSU Academic and Welfare Officer, Charlie Leyland, was keen to emphasize student involvement in Union politics, calling on the creation of the Courtyard venue and the large turnout of students to the last YUSU elections as signals of an involved student body.

"This year, after many years of hard work, is somewhat of a landmark year for us, I believe. With the bar we're mobilised to turn revenue into more student services, and with one of the highest election turn-outs in the country, we are able to sit and declare true student representation through democracy at the highest level of decision making in the University."

MICHAEL BRUNSDEN



Students always flock to YUSU hustings, but too few have been willing to run for positions on college JCRCs

"IS HE THAT PIRATE KID?"

58% of students do not feel represented by YUSU

28% do not support YUSU

45% have never met a YUSU Officer

24% are not aware of where the Union office is

15% think YUSU is an unelected body

21% do not know York has a Students' Union bar

29% do not know who President Tom Scott is

70% do not know who Societies and Communications Officer Rory Shanks is

73% do not know who Student Development and Charities Officer Jamie Tyler is

53% do not know who Service and Finance Officer Matt Burton is

57% do not know who Academic and Welfare Officer Charlie Leyland is

49% do not know who York Sport President Alex Lacy is

21% only know Tom Scott as "that Pirate kid"

3% of students think Matt Burton is President, while another 3% know him as "the Langwith bar guy"

Nouse surveyed 100 random students in Langwith and Vanbrugh on February 3-4



league tables

dents to know, I think that the results of the Times Higher Education survey have been looked at and analysed by a small group of senior management group members and we did note the issues. There are no quick fixes, and the speed of change is slow if you are an undergrad, but be patient."

Grenville added that YUSU's score was "probably more to do with 'the students' union' as in the SU building that most universities have and we don't." She expressed hope that the new Courtyard venue would help make up for the lack of official SU building.

Charlie Leyland, Academic and Welfare Officer was keen to express her belief in YUSU despite the results: "I have so much confidence in this Union and the amount of work, passion and time that goes into it from so many students who choose to engage with it: whether by sitting on Union Committees, joining a sports club or society, having coffee in the bar, or going on the Student Action Kids camp. We're all ears, and well keep on working and working to improve the Student Experience for every member of our Union at this University."



YUSU has been a Working Class Hero, rising from little and making the most of what it's got

Rory Shanks
YUSU Societies and Communications Officer

When Tom Scott gave a recent ten-minute presentation to the University's most senior committee about what we do, many of its members looked genuinely surprised. He ran through the presentation at break-neck speed, covering our achievements in the past few years one at a time, each one seemingly more impressive as he went on. To anyone listening, it was apparent that the Union was a resource that in some ways was underused, underestimated and indeed slightly undervalued by its parent body. Even the Vice Chancellor himself, a man that is frequently distant from his student representative body, seemed slightly dumfounded by how much we actually do - especially when he was reminded that we do so out of a converted squash court. So this considered, why haven't we achieved a great score of more than 4.4 on the TES survey?

Well, it is of course probably a combination of things, the most potent of which I believe is that we've been in the First

Division of Unions in the past forty or so years, massively hampered by the fact that our turnover is so low. We actually get a reasonable grant from the University, but because we lack any real estate that is usually gifted upon other SUs like any other academic department, or indeed any commercial ventures of any significance, we've actu-

"Even the Vice Chancellor himself seemed slightly dumfounded by how much we actually do - especially when he was reminded that we do so out of a converted squash court.

ally lacked the resources to undertake some of the projects that York so very much deserves. What about some more academic case-workers? Proper society storage? Or perhaps even a student centre on Heslington East? We simply can't afford, nor are we afforded such things at this point in time and therefore, our impact is to some extent limit-

ed.

But of course the times they are a-changing. The Courtyard not only brings us a new place to eat and drink, but it also opens a new chapter for this Union. It reminds students, staff and those in Heslington Hall that we are here, and that this is what we can do. And whilst it doesn't quite bring us up the Premier League yet, it does get us a bit closer, where our bottom line will increase and as a result, student officers have some spending power behind them to really make more of the impact they'd like. And although Charlie won't quite get her Welfare Centre, I won't get my Big Yellow-style society storage and Tom won't get his gold doubloons just yet, we can all get a bit closer, and hopefully improve a bit on that 4.4. In many ways, YUSU has been the Working Class Hero, sitting underneath its richly bestowed counterparts, rising from little and making the most of what it's got. But now we've got something to shout about, the Loughboroughs out there better watch out.