

# Canning: a President unbound

Henry James Foy talks to Anne-Marie Canning about a year of dirty magazines and class crusades.

**I**f you'd asked me halfway through the year, I would have said it was the worst mistake I ever made," says Anne-Marie Canning, about her year as YUSU President.

"But fuck yeah," she reconsiders, "I'm really proud of what I have done!" she laughs. It is a typical response from the uncompromising 21-year-old from Doncaster.

"Some people think I'm a primadonna," she states defensively. "I'm not, I'm just mouthy. The fact that people know who I am is quite nice, but it's a bit embarrassing at times. The thing I pride myself on is that I don't expect special treatment."

"Brian [Cantor] said today that I was going to be a tough act to follow," she says proudly, "Someone said I was the best AcWelf Officer that we never had. I quite enjoyed that."

Canning's outspoken and, at times, aggressive attitude to campus politics has divided opinion. In February, former 21 Plus Association President Ben Glover resigned after calling her "a waste of space".

"It pisses me off when people slag [YUSU] off," Canning shouts. "It's not always our fault - people need to get behind us. RAG is with YUSU when it's getting money, but when, like Woodstock is shit, it's YUSU that's shit," she adds.

Canning also dismisses claims from some JCRC chairs of a lack of funding; "James had negative £100 when I took over [as JCRC chair] and I left it with £5,000. You should pick your arguments and complaints carefully, you don't want to be the boy who cried wolf."

"The college system needs to sort itself out or pack it in because some people are having a shit time," she says. "There are

50 of us on JCRCs who fucking love it, and the rest don't care."

Canning's workload doubled after she took over the Academic and Welfare role after the departure of Grace Fletcher-Hackwood in February. "Sometimes people don't appreciate that I'm doing two jobs," she says. "I think I should have more support, I think I should have an admin person."

A close friend of Grace during their working tenure, Canning admits that she caused some problems in the office. "It was really stressful. I was the

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glue between Grace and the rest of the team. Everyone paired off and that pissed me off. The inseparable Jo-alition; Matt and Sam; and then me and Grace. That was," she pauses, "sometimes difficult."

Canning has a chart of the highs and lows of the year. 'Gracegate' sits just above 'FHM' - the "sexist" debacle that began her presidency in disastrous fashion. The fresher welcome bags, which contained a copy of the men's magazine, were labelled "inappropriate and offensive" by the University's Equal Opportunities Officer.

"I felt like I had let people down," she admits. "Complaints were focused on me as a person, not a President."

With Matt Burton and Sam Bayley "adamant" that the bags were staying, she took the decision to send the matter to the YUSU Exec - which would



It has been a challenging year for Canning, who steps down as YUSU President next month

be her first meeting as chair.

"There was a moment of horror when I realised it had gone through. I was trying to be a neutral chair, but I realise now, fuck it, I should have just said what I wanted to say," she says, angry at the memory.

Other officers reacted angrily to her opposition to the bags. "[A former Ents Officer] went ballistic at me, screaming in my face. I stayed in Wentworth for the rest of the week to get away from it all."

Former President Rich Croker, who stayed in York for an MA this year, features on her list of low points as 'Meddling'. "Rich had a lot of chat, didn't he," Canning jokes. "It's been hard having him around this year. He thinks he knows your job better than you do."

"It took me the entire summer to realise that I didn't have to be him, and could just be my own President," Canning says.

Canning has enjoyed a good relationship with Vice-Chancellor Brian Cantor. "It's an odd dynamic. He'd never had a female president; we've got a father-daughter thing going on," she says. "I think he likes to use me as some sort of working-class poster girl," Canning offers.

Canning's class and background is, she admits, a large

part of her identity. "When I came to Uni, I had a massive chip on my shoulder about my class," she says. "Everything I do has that hanging over it."

"I got some glasses for my birthday, and a girl on my corridor was like 'that's not a present, that's something that they should just buy for you'. I was like 'fuck you, they're £125!'" she states indignantly.

"One of my tutors in English told me that my accent made her cringe, she told me to change the way that I spoke. I hope she's fucking ashamed now," she says angrily.

Before she came to York, Canning applied to Magdalen College, Oxford. "I got thrown off the lawn because they were playing croquet. I didn't fucking know what croquet was," she exclaims. "I think I was good enough to get in, but I don't think I ever got a chance to discuss literature with anyone," Canning shrugs. "I came from a school where everyone just said 'I don't get it.'"

Having considered working for the University, Canning is unsure about the future. "I'm lost - I'm going to test the water, see what I like; see what I don't like." She has applied for a job at Oxfam, working with British women living in poverty.

"People think this is a career politician position. If this is a career, then fuck me! Careers don't get paid this shit, know what I mean?" she laughs. While rubbishing critics who claim her role is a step to a job in politics, disillusionment with MPs in her hometown has given her ideas. "I've thought about standing in the next election. Doncaster North could have an MP who actually lives there," she says. "I'd be like 'I'm Labour but I'm not, I'm local, and I understand you'. They'd be like 'Yeah, vote Anne-Marie!'"

"I think I have learned how to control the media," Canning tells me. Unfortunately, by this she may mean that during the YUSU checks just hours before this paper went to press she can demand to pull quotes and refuse to answer her phone. It's a shame - this is a far cry from the outspoken and confident President of days before who was so eager to speak her mind.

Using articles of the Media Charter established in 2005 Canning forced the following statement into the end of this article: "I pulled some lines from *Nouse* under Media Charter rules as, having taken advice from staff, I felt they might harm the welfare of certain students."

GEORGE LOWTHER

## IN HER OWN WORDS

### On the University:

"If the university is going to claim to be collegiate, we need to put our money where our mouth is and start giving it a proper look at. They need proper social space, a proper nucleus."

### On JCRC funding:

"I don't like whiners and people that constantly complain... It just gets to a point when you are like 'get out there, make a difference.'"

### On Brian Cantor:

"I think Brian takes a lot of flak, and I think some of it is underserved. He's an alright guy. We've got quite a lot in common: He's from a really working class family."

### On Grace Fletcher-Hackwood:

"I think it all worked out for the best in the end. Obviously, it caused a problem in terms of making sure students are adequately cared for, but in many ways Grace leaving made things easier."