

NOUSE

Est. 1964



No room for avoidable errors

It is a universal truth that when a company are contracted that has made no profit for the past five years disaster will ensure. There is an old French expression that seems appropriate: 'Tout s'arrange, mais mal.'

Heslington East is no exception. A £500million expansion is a huge investment, may gamble, for a University not famed for its swollen coffers. This newspaper is shocked that such mandatory due diligence on a contractor was not fully executed. We must hope that this is a unique occurrence, and not the tip of the financially insecure iceberg.

Indeed, the University has assured *Nouse* that work on the roads and roundabouts on the Heslington East site will re-start in the New Year. But as the proverb suggests: 'it will all work out, but badly.' One may question what good could possibly come out of such a situation, and suggest, perhaps, gross negligence and incompetence on the part of the University.

In typical style, the University is insistent that it has made no mistakes in the employment of the Rand Group – the parent company with the disastrous profit record. John Meacock, the Heslington East Project Director, may have ticked all the boxes when creating a criteria for contractor selection: European Procedural rules followed; selection made on the basis of meeting certain assessment criteria, etcetera etcetera.

Yet he failed to address the key issue; failed to simply scratch the surface and discover an unknown that would, perhaps have saved it all working out, but badly.

The comments of a builder working on a different part of the site were far harder hitting: "I don't know exactly what happened with that construction company but it doesn't send out the best message about the management of the project." Sloppy management and coordination cost private industry millions each year. For the University to select a company so obviously clawing their way back up the business ladder, in a blatant waste of student's fees and Government money, is, frankly unnerving.

Heslington East is undoubtedly well on its way to becoming a well appreciated addition to the University, yet, once completed, rumours of incompetence will assure. The University must learn from this experience.

Letting ourselves down

At first glance, it looks like just another minor detriment to the student population of the University of York. Another letting agency has gone down the tubes. However, this one actually affects us. Many will be prey to the confusion induced by such an aggressive break up. Students will be without information on their letting arrangements, unsure of whom, what or how, exactly, they are paying.

However, there is something to be learned from such an occasion. The break up of such an integral company in the student population, surely must now make us more aware of the dangers of renting and letting. The quest for a house is a minefield. First-year students across the University will, despite pleas by YUSU not to, be looking for a house at this very moment, hoping to get 'that' perfect one with 'the' best deal. But we must be aware of companies that thrive on our naivety. Many times have freshers been lured into extortionate deals earlier on in the year despite the continuous surplus of housing in this city.

Students must take note of this and do thorough research. Without this, situations such as that of YRLA could end up putting them in trouble. Valuable cash from ever more elusive student loans could be saved by just putting in that bit more effort over a bit more time.

Student apathy is arguably at an all time high as more and more students find the effort expended for certain causes, simply not worth it. Students are becoming more economical. However, if there ever was a cause worthy of attention, this is it; we must just take our time.

York Come Donating

Last year this newspaper witnessed York Come Dancing's escapades unfold in a location far too small for the number of attendees present. This year organisers over-estimated the interest in the dancing abilities of an elite group of "campus celebrities", resulting in a half empty Central Hall. Whilst the promotion of the event was strong, this effort from York Dancesport was not reflected in their ticket sales.

Ultra-vires ruling has made it illegal to fundraise for charities other than the RAG nominees. This has had a great impact on the runnings of York Come Dancing; the primary focus of the event lay on raising cheers in correlation to the popularity of its "famous" contestants rather than specifically on the raising of funds for elected charities. The only reminder of the event's altruistic purpose was during a silent RAG slideshow, which in itself emphasised the benefits of being involved in RAG as opposed to where the money raised during the evening will actually going to. The total raised for RAG was a formidable £1,298.95, yet the profits made from ticketing sales for the event went directly to Dancesport and the running costs of York Come Dancing, barely selling enough to break even of running costs.

It is true that we generally attend events like York Come Dancing to support our favourite contestant or friend; however, creating any level of success in such occasions seems possible only when under the pretence of supporting the status of "celebrity". What should be more important is not the number of supporters any given candidate has in the crowd, but rather how generously those people intend to give.

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JCRC election campaigns are worryingly reliant on Facebook



Liz Fletcher

My flatmates grew increasingly restless throughout last week, frustrated about being inundated with Facebook messages advertising Junior Common Room Committee (JCRC) election candidates. They are not without a point. Since the JCRC elections began my Facebook has been barraged with group invitations begging for support.

Sceptics may say that using Facebook is a very lazy way to campaign, despite being effective at generating support. While hustings gave students the opportunity to hear from the candidates directly before voting, the majority of my college chose not to attend. Would it be based on whichever Facebook friend happened to request their support? More importantly, would they vote at all? One candidate admitted to me that voting ultimately comes down to the amount of friends they have who are willing to vote. It raises questions as to whether election promises are truly worth making.

There is no consistent policy across colleges to cover online cam-

paing for JCRC elections. Some do not allow use of certain features, some have no restrictions at all. When the results are out for all races, and the dust has settled, perhaps the variations in turnout and competitiveness will offer some insight into the wisdom of which policy is better.

"For many of us, a Facebook invitation is the extent of our involvement in these elections"

The consensus of the enthused electorate that I know (many of whom stayed in to watch *I'm a Celebrity... Get me out of here!* during the college hustings) agrees that they will vote for anyone familiar, if they even bother to vote at all, making the whole process more of a popularity contest than an election

Camilla Aparc

Deputy Comment Editor



New fees may make social divisions worse

The University of York could soon be turning into a real-life social melodrama based on college accommodation. The recent proposition from the University to introduce rent banding will have social consequences beyond the financial worries we currently face.

Rent banding can only suggest impressions of social class division. We're already under extremist misconceptions that the inhabitants of Alcuin are snobby rich kids who don't understand the concept of weekly budgeting and that those in Derwent walk around campus like filthy tramps because they're unable to take a shower more than once a week. And these stereotypes exist even before any financial banding.

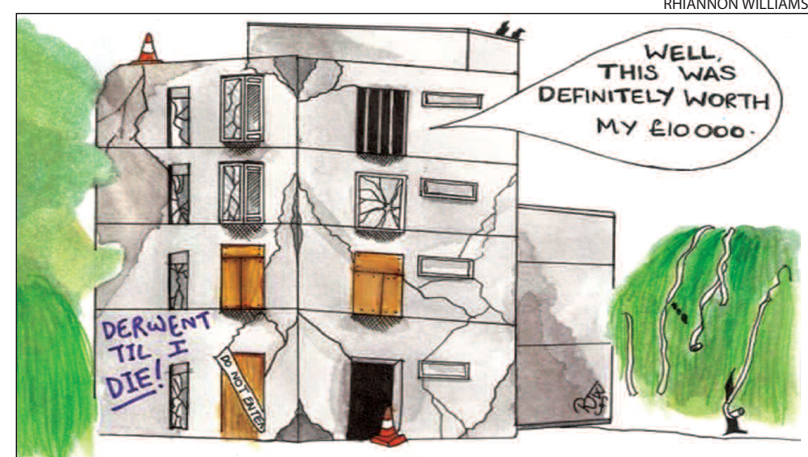
Those in the highest band will assume the stereotype of having an aristocratic superiority complex, and presume the lower bands to be disgruntled and jealous. It may be wrong, but everyone's guilty of being judgmental at times. The University should recognise these implications as separate from their own concerns about generating more income. Students don't need to be reminded of disparity within campus accommodation – we already know. But this doesn't mean that the actual students living in various colleges are any different from each other.

If (or more likely, when) banding comes into practice, I have visions of next year's freshers from the lowest band standing on Central Hall bridge, above its blue glow, giving sorrowful renditions of 'Part of that World' à la Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. In reality, only

when they get to know people from other colleges and avoid judgments based on living standards, will they realise that banding provides nothing more than a label.

In fairness, the concept of rent banding may be necessary in some cases. It's unreasonable to be paying the same amount for the same type of room in Langwith as in new Goodricke; where the latter would clearly be nicer. However, it's the subsequent segregation of students because of their financial means that is unfair. By using a few bands as possible, we will be able to promote equality – aren't we meant to be living in a society attempting to overcome prejudice based on financial income?

It seems that the plan to turn the lowest band into catered accommodation is somewhat flawed. For those with financial restrictions, being forced to pay for a school dinner-esque food package at nearly £5 per meal, we could budget our



RHIANNON WILLIAMS

based on a candidate's merits.

For many of us, a Facebook invitation is the extent of our involvement in these elections. It could mean that candidates who are not quite so Facebook savvy are less likely to win, despite what they could do to enhance our JCR, bringing down the potential quality significantly.

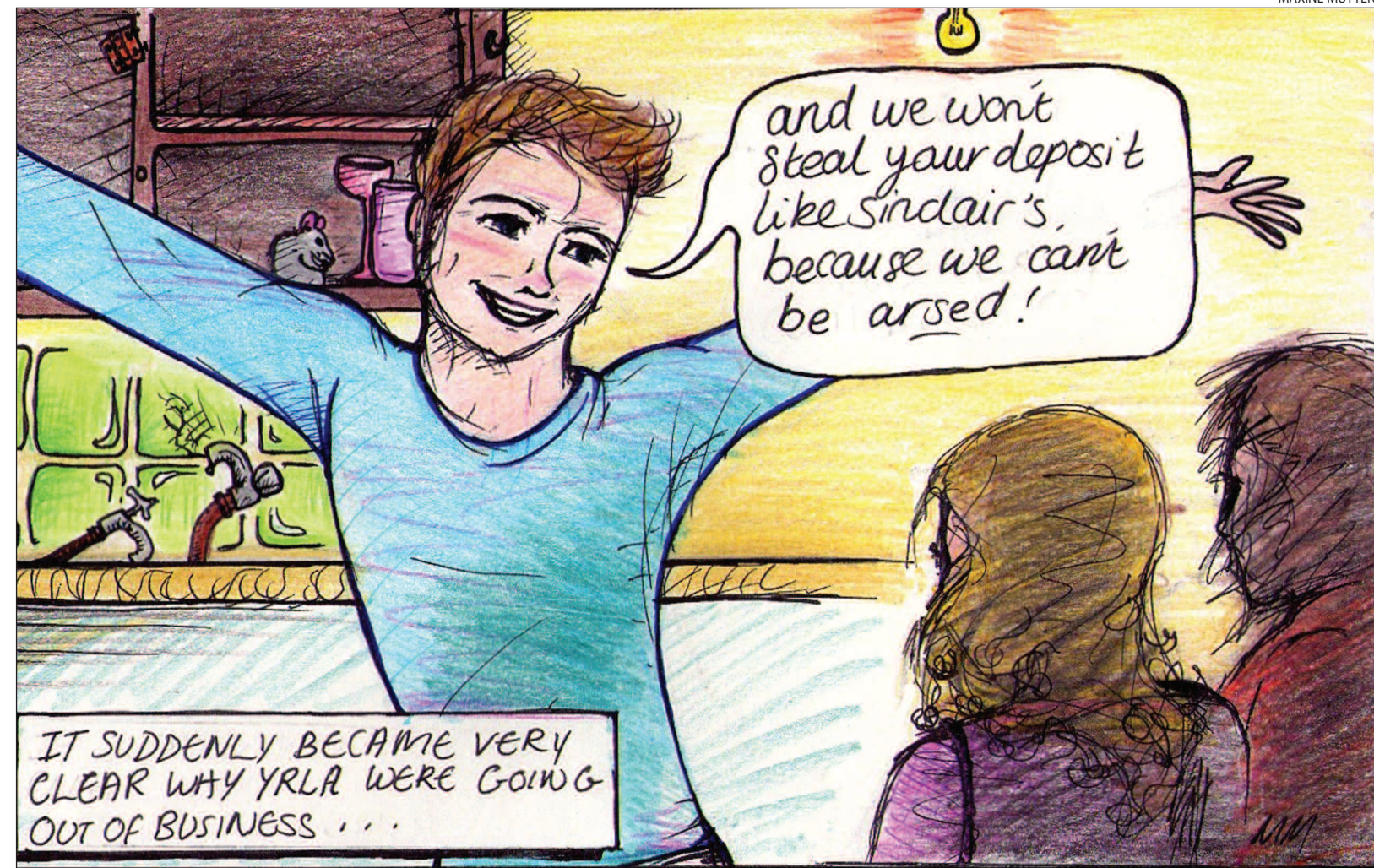
So does that make Facebook the best way to win a campaign? It seems so. I know I will more than likely vote for my friends after being made aware of their campaigns online. I cannot say though that I have questioned the promises that they are making or considered the likelihood that they will follow them through if elected. But what if Facebook had not been used as part of the JCR campaigns? Then I, and no doubt many others, would probably not be voting at all.

Of course perspective must be maintained. While they are not world changing elections, a bad tone is being set for those of us, myself included, for which these are our experience of university democracy. Let's hope it does not contin-

James Cousins



While issues of women's inequality have long been rife, men are increasingly at risk of being on the end of injustices



MAXINE MUTTEN

Gender agenda: why men deserve consideration too

As a male literature student you get used to being told by proponents of the feminist school of thought that you are – by the sole virtue of being in possession of a Y-chromosome and a penis – automatically and irredeemably of the devil.

One particularly ardent subscriber to this critical stream railed, rather memorably I might add, against the presence of fathers at childbirth as "a penetration – and I use the term intentionally – of the female sphere". Quite.

Nobody's denying that females, historically, have had a pretty rum deal in the equality stakes: from Aristotle's description of women as "a kind of mutilated male" a couple of thousand years ago things didn't perk up much, and I use the term intentionally, until sometime last century.

But it is the male of the species that has been looking haggard and under threat as of late. The Sunday Times examined recently the rise of stay-at-home fathers, in the context of both the recession – wiping out many traditionally male-dominated jobs – and longer-term educational trends that have seen females outpace males from GCSEs through to employment. Female undergraduates now outstrip their male counterparts by almost 50% and there is a corresponding disparity in numbers of entrants into high-paid jobs such as medicine and law.

While you could easily, and not entirely incorrectly, argue that such changes are a long-overdue swing towards economic gender equality,

the fact is that the playing field is changing fast and such rapid transformations inevitably bring with them a new set of only partially-anticipated problems. These abrupt changes are accompanied by a background trend of single-parent families, often lacking a male role model, and alarming rates of male-perpetrated crime – in 2006, 80% of crimes were committed by men.

The writer of the Sunday Times piece, in her attempt to make sense of these shifts, revisited the

"It is the male of the species that has been looking haggard and under threat as of late"

works of the influential feminist Simone de Beauvoir, venturing so far as to posit that it may now be the male who is "the second sex". And that is a radical claim indeed.

In the light of the looming obsolescence facing the hunter-gatherer you'd think that the creation of the first ever men's society in Manchester University (MENS society - Masculinity Exploring Network and Support) would be greeted with cautious nods of approval, provided that they avoid the stigma of macho Bullingdon-esque drinking clubs of yore. And in theory at least, this newly founded group does so admirably, taking a

proactive approach that aims to foster responsible masculinity and raise awareness of male issues, from testicular cancer to the high rates of male depression and suicide.

But no, the NUS women's officer Olivia Bailey has found it in herself to be suitably outraged, claiming that "discrimination against men on the basis of gender is so unusual as to be non-existent, so what exactly will a men's society do?" Clearly she hasn't been reading *The Times*. She continued in similar terms, adding, "To suggest that men need a specific space to be 'men' is ludicrous, when everywhere you turn you will find male-dominated spaces".

Such reactionary responses are unhelpful. This isn't a conspiracy to ensure the continuance of some kind of centuries-old male hegemony – the MENS society does not discriminate on the grounds of gender (almost a third of its members are women), it's just that the focus is on masculinity and what this means in contemporary society.

Surely anything that encourages an open and honest conversation about our roles and our responsibilities can only be a good thing? After all, males – especially British ones – have never been renowned for being especially emotionally forthcoming and whatever tentative steps we can take towards bettering ourselves ought to be welcomed with open arms. There's no dark secret lurking at the heart of masculinity, just a grubby, slightly dazed teenager wondering what to do next.

Maintaining perspective on privacy



Hannah Ellis-Petersen

Privacy is a pretty dubious concept at university. You just have time to accept that when sharing one shower between twelve people, you get used to finding your flatmate passed out naked on the kitchen floor, and you eventually learn to block out the questionable noises drifting through paper thin walls late at night. It's all part of the experience.

However, there are certain privacies in life in general that I like to think are a given. Our mail isn't censored and our phones aren't tapped – it's one of the advantages of living in a liberal democracy. Except perhaps not. It has recently come to light that the University in fact owns all the emails received and sent from all student university e-mail addresses. This means that we are fully accountable for everything we put into writing.

The number of people who are conducting illicit affairs or organising secret revolutions through their university e-mail is likely to be pretty limited, so it is easy to question why this lack of privacy even matters. After all, should the University wish to trawl through my 421 e-mails, all they would find is hundreds of updates from everything from cheerleading to knitting society (I may have got a little carried away at fresher's fair). But, for me at least, the issue lies in the principle of the matter.

We live in a society where we are caught on CCTV an average of 300 times a day, where our DNA is taken from us at every given opportunity and where the introduction of ID cards is imminent. It's no big brother state but it certainly doesn't promote individual freedom and privacy in any shape or form.

So why on earth does the university feel more surveillance is justified? Yes, they can go on and on about student safety and welfare, but it makes me shudder to think of all the atrocities that have been committed in the name of 'citizen protection'. While I am sure militarising the University isn't on the cards just yet, they seem to be going to unnecessary lengths to keep tabs on us. Besides, where is the fun in life without some risk?

As a student it is your role to send angry e-mails rallying against the University administration and planning to overthrow 'the man', or whoever happens to occupy the biggest office in Heslington Hall. It's a rebelliousness and a passion that should be allowed to thrive in the university environment rather than be restricted by overzealous security policies. We have our parents for that already.

Do not let this be the start of a new trend for the University. Possession of our e-mails may be one thing, but we cannot allow further intrusions into our privacy to become a simple fact of life.

Join the debate at
nouse.co.uk/comment