

# Students' degrees are threatened by assessment boycott

By Daniel Whitehead  
NEWS EDITOR

**FINALIST** STUDENTS remain in doubt as to whether they will graduate this year, as the University announced last week that no plans are currently in place to deal with the pending assessment marking crisis following the lecturers' strike.

This comes after a nationwide assessment boycott began on Wednesday 8th March, in which participating members of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) across the country halted all involvement in the assessment and examination process. Dr Simon Parker, a spokesperson for the University of York AUT committee, said the action "will continue

until there is an acceptable solution."

Academics argue that vice-chancellors have gone back on their promise of large increases to their salaries since tuition fees were introduced at the beginning of this year. However, Dr Geoffrey Copland of the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA), which represents vice-chancellors, argues that "the academic unions are trying to force the issue before we have had a single negotiation," adding that "at least a third of the money currently coming in will go to academic staff."

Employers commented that figures from the Office for National Statistics show that academics earned an average of £40,657 in 2004-2005, compared with

national averages of £28,210 for employees and £36,984 for professional staff, adding that lecturers' salaries have increased by 20.3% over the past five years.

Goodricke student Joseph Beckeo said that the strike "is unfair on a lot of people especially third and fourth years," who will be hoping to graduate in the summer, and a final year student who wished to remain unnamed added "lecturers are making students suffer for their employees' actions."

Dr. Simon Parker, who is currently participating in the boycott, argued that "the feeling is that the employers are just being reckless, putting off the time to talk to us till the end of this month, and the longer this goes on, the more it affects the students and potentially risks



Above: lecturers show their discontent during last Tuesday's one day strike. Below: a tutor offers information leaflets to passing students on Heslington Road. Photos: Adam Sloan

graduations.

"We hope that the University will have noted the degree of feeling that exists among colleagues and our determination to get Vice-Chancellors to honour their promise."

UCEA and AUT officials are due to meet at the end of the month to negotiate over the current pay demands. The strike will continue until an agreement is reached.



# Fairfax House attack 'deliberate'

By Jamie Merrill  
NEWS CORRESPONDENT

A RECENT FIRE at Fairfax House in the early hours is being treated as an arson attempt. The incident, which occurred at 3.30am on the 3rd of March, has raised concerns about student safety which have led to one student leaving the University.

The off-campus Vanbrugh accommodation on Heslington Road was evacuated when a kitchen caught fire. The police, who were called to the scene, believe the fire to have been

started deliberately. When it was discovered, all four hobs, the grill and oven had been left burning and a sandwich toaster had been plugged in and placed on top of the gas hob.

Two undergraduate residents, Sam Turner and Gareth Williams, extinguished the blaze before the fire service arrived. Turner said: "All four hobs were burning with the sandwich toaster on top. The fire was started deliberately." The kitchen suffered minor smoke damage and is now back in use.

The police have been involved but no arrests have been made, nor have any suspects been named. The Vanbrugh Vice-Chair Ryan Bennett has suggested that most residents appear to share a view about who did it, but that they are not happy for this person to be named.

The motive for the attack remains unknown, but Bennet said: "It might have been a cry for help or attention."

According to Bennet, a Computer Science student, who cannot be named, has

left the university since the fire due to concerns over his safety. A female, who chose not to be named pointed out that the student's room was at a great risk if a large fire had caught hold and that he "would have had no escape route."

Fresh concerns have been raised over health and safety standards in colleges, as one fire extinguisher failed to work when Turner and Williams attempted to use it to put out the blaze. This equipment failure comes only weeks after fire extinguishers were found to

be out of date in Derwent C block, and just months after two students were hospitalised after a separate fire in Fairfax House.

Fire equipment in Fairfax House has now been tested, and faulty equipment replaced. University authorities are carrying out room inspections to check for flammable materials, and in a move to increase security, CCTV has been installed by the front door.

Bennet expressed annoyance by the way the fire was handled by members of security staff, and plans to

write a letter of complaint to the Head of Security about the matter.

He alleges that a member of the University security staff berated students for having come outside in dressing gowns and slippers, calling them "stupid" and telling them they "should have taken a few minutes to put some warm clothing on."

Bennet said on Sunday: "It was ridiculous. It contradicted everything we'd ever been told about fire safety."

The Provost of Fairfax has launched a full investigation into the incident.

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