

Demanding more contact

Art students: lazy or subject to a raw deal at the hands of the Uni?



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From day one of Freshers' Week, I was the laughing stock of engineers and computer scientists for the comparative lack of contact hours on my course. For some, more lecture hours somehow equates to working harder, yet every student at York is expected to put the same number of hours – lecture, seminar and personal study – into their course.

Nevertheless, there are valid

reasons for the variation in lecture hours. It is given that an English Literature student needs more essay and reading time than a Physician. However, I know many arts students would gladly swap a third of the turgid photocopy packs doled out at the beginning of term for another three hours of contact time involving the same content.

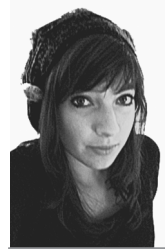
York is no exception to this rule. Students at Durham, Nottingham and Warwick have all complained of wild variations in course hours. At Bristol last year, History students campaigned for more contact hours. Their claim was that arts subjects were being financially constrained in order to fund the sciences. I can't help but sympathise with their protest. Reading is all very well, but I won-

der why my subject isn't receiving funding for more lectures and seminar discussion time. We should be paying for an education from leading academics, not for a library membership.

As my tutor pointed out in a seminar, "You get out what you put in." The focus for arts degrees seems to be emphasis on personal study. I did not arrive at University hoping to doss around, and I speak on behalf of every BA student when I say that our lack of contact hours is not our fault, or choice. Although five hours of contact with academics may be fairly ridiculous, we are justly given a lot to do in-between. As long as we don't feel as if we are wasting our time here, then there should be no overt reason to rock the boat. Or at least not too hard.

Five words just aren't enough

Defining ourselves as British is irrelevant and exclusionary



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Five words are all it takes, apparently. Or so says a particular Mr Brown, whose recent campaign aims to hold the mystical unifying power of Britishness over us. Five words he decrees: five words by Brits for Brits that will hold us all together.

I have two main problems with his plan. Firstly, what does Britishness even mean in our increasingly multicultural society? Secondly, isn't the whole exercise

just another political gimmick? Akin perhaps to a nineteen year old MP or hugging a hoody?

It seems to me that Britishness is increasingly un-British. National pride is a little too brash and, frankly, a little too American to stand up against your average self-deprecating Briton. The stiff upper lip lives on; flashing a flag about is considered uncouth, even racist, and this is as true on campus as it is on a national level.

York University is in its most international year ever. When we have students of nearly a hundred different nationalities studying on one campus, a pre-occupation with Britishness doesn't really come off as the happy group hug it was meant to be. Quite the opposite, in fact; it leaves international students feeling somewhat left out.

In addition to the exclusionary nature of this concept, it somehow

seems irrelevant. We come away from home looking to expand our horizons. Students all over York are sitting in kitchens, drinking cheap wine, denying their middle-class upbringings and refuting their British identity. When we are increasingly concerned with reconciling our disparate backgrounds, why is Brown now dragging us back down?

And even if we do define Britishness in its increasingly multicultural sense – five words? I had trouble constraining my rambles to this paltry three hundred. I'm sure Brown didn't mean this exercise to be an end to the situation, but I'm so bored of the government over-simplifying complicated situations for us proles. People should be asked to address the issues in their entirety. Don't just give me five words: that's not even a useful starting point.

Rethinking drink

Is it time to face up to how much we drink?



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Another day, another reported incident of drink spiking. Of course, it's highly likely that the number of times drink spiking actually takes place is far greater than reported. Not only because far too often accusations of drink spiking are simply put down to people forgetting how much they've actually drunk, but because drink spiking doesn't have to involve a combination of rohypnol and a sinister motive. If you buy your mate a pint and slip a shot of vodka in it, that's drink spiking. You're not going to be locked up for this little misdemeanour, but that doesn't make it okay. In fact, a majority of the drink spiking that does occur, including those with malicious intent behind them, are done simply through adding more alcohol to drinks.

If I were to come out and chastise all drinkers for their habits, I would be quite the hypocrite, but I still do believe that students as a group really do need to re-evaluate the relationship they have with alcohol. You may have read on the beer mats placed around campus bars that the facts and figures concerning University of York students and alcohol are not that shocking. At least they don't appear to be. '4 in 5 students never let their drinking get in the way of the academic work' is emblazoned on one. An acceptable figure, until you turn those numbers around. If four in five are tucked up in bed the night before their 9:15 seminar, that means that there are one in five, or a rather large 20% who are downing shots in Rumours, even though they've got a half finished essay waiting at home for them. And it's

due in tomorrow. Sure, everyone turns their back on their responsibilities once in a while, but even if you're lucky enough to be an arts student with few contact hours and a first year that doesn't count towards your overall marks, you still need to pass the year, or you might find yourself politely asked to leave your degree.

There is no denying that alcohol plays an integral part in student life. It probably shouldn't, but for most of us, this is the first time in our lives when we've been in a position to go out every night and drink our body weight in vodka, and really, who wants to waste an opportunity like that? But not everyone wants to drink, nor does everyone want to spend tomorrow morning (and probably tomorrow afternoon) regretting the night before. If, when it's your round, your friend asks for an orange juice, it's probably for the best if you respect that decision. Yes, it's no fun drinking on your own, but hilarious alcohol based games never really turn out as planned. Plus, if you're going to add a little extra to the drink of a friend whose decided that they're already drunk enough, you might be the one cleaning up after his body decides to reject all that alcohol. And they tend not to let people into Toffs if they've got vomit on their shoes.

Drinking in moderation is fine. Drinking a little too much can also be the start of a very good evening, and I'm in no position to pass judgement on excessive drinking by any individual. But what needs to change is the way people respond to other people's drinking habits. Some people can drink more than others. Some people might be able to drink just as much as you, but might just choose not to. And do you know what? That ought to be perfectly fine. Let other people make their own decisions when it comes to their own alcohol consumption. No good can come of anything else.

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YUSU don't give books the time or money that we do

By bringing Your:Books into the twenty-first century our Union could have prevented its demise



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They cost virtually every student hours of their time, not to mention copious amounts of cash and, ultimately, end up gathering dust on a shelf somewhere. Books: not perhaps the most exciting element of university life but, let's be honest, not really something from which any of us can escape. And, while we can't spend all of our time in the pub, there's no harm in counting the pennies when it comes to reading lists so you can enjoy a nice quiet round – or six – in The Charles with your mates.

The planned closure of Your:Books has the potential not only to severely damage bank bal-

ances across campus, as the paltry second hand selection in Blackwells doesn't really compare, but undermine the integrity of campus services. The little profit Your:Books made was pumped straight back into YUSU and therefore was for our benefit. The way to turn it around now is surely to pursue with running it as the valuable service it is. By better supporting Your:Books YUSU have the chance to make it as widely used as it deserves to be, so that in the long run it can become a profitable company.

So how is it that Your:Books ended up in this situation? To start with, it's shockingly advertised, fail-

ing to take advantage of the hordes of Freshers this year who neglected to acquire their personal libraries before the start of term. The shop was given barely a mention in the welcoming talks. Had they capitalised on this captive market, Your:Books might have avoided its impending doom.

Another prudent option might have been for YUSU to recognise the dawn of the digital age. With a little time and effort, Your:Books could have plumbed the hitherto barely resources of the internet and reaped the rewards. Our cyber-savvy but apathetic generation would surely have assuaged their

guilt and supported the student organisation over global retailers like Amazon had there been an online facility.

Then, of course, there's the loss of revenue for every penniless student at the end of the year when all are lumbered with piles of books that even Oxfam won't touch with a ten-foot bargepole. Gone will be the days of forty percent re-purchases; even if Blackwells does offer this service, it's highly unlikely that student interest will be at heart. Clearly we will all have to submit ourselves to medical testing over the summer in order to fund next year's book habit.



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