



NOUSE

Est. 1964

Heslington East

Next January marks the culmination of years of planning by University chiefs, as a public inquiry returns a verdict on plans to build a second campus on greenfield land, a move that will eventually see student numbers swelling by as much as 50%. Complaints that the inquiry has been prejudiced from the beginning toward developers and against local residents, coupled with the University's knowing confidence that Government backing will be secured, suggest a foregone conclusion that ought to be alarming to all whose main concern is that York maintains its high academic standards, and offers the best possible experience to future students.

Equally important is how the expansion will affect the ten thousand or so students already here, and those who will arrive in the years to come before the new campus opens for business. Although York's minor slip in this year's league tables is hardly cause for panic, it might be a harbinger of problems to come if resources are diverted away from day-to-day concerns to pay for spiralling construction costs. This must not be allowed to happen, and bland assurances from University bosses will not suffice to ensure that it doesn't.

If handled properly, expansion could be a great step forward for the University and its students: indeed, as often as they might seem at odds, the two have mutual interests that run far deeper than the skirmishes that so often distract from them. The University needs to attract the best faculty, who want to teach the brightest students; in turn, students want to be taught by academics who are capable of exciting and inspiring them. So it is that staff and students depend entirely on each other: both are equally crucial to the University's success.

The challenge is to satisfy all the competing concerns that are involved in any change of this scale, a balancing act that University bosses must acknowledge in deed as well as word. That means working to improve the lot of students today who, behind all the petty complaining, have genuine grievances that are being ignored. Like what? Try a library preserved from the 1970s, residences stuck in the 1960s, and a campus social life moored securely to the 1920s. In short, if things don't get better now, campus two won't change a thing. A kick up the arse? Take note, Brian: we'll keep on kicking until we're moving into a shiny new *Nouse* office, built upon Heslington's green and pleasant land.

A matter of principle

If this edition seems unusually high in moral fibre, it shouldn't come as a surprise. Blame Bob Geldof, blame Al Gore, but ethics are no longer the preserve of German philosophers and smoke-damaged beatniks. Nowhere is this more true than on campus, where students are increasingly looking for a worthier outlet for energy once expended on the older, nobler pastimes, like casual sex, and binge drinking.

An argument often made is that once moral standards are hoisted by the masses they lose all their meaning and become empty slogans. It's no coincidence that those found towing this line tend either to be the previous sole occupiers of the high-ground, reluctant to share their patch, or else the philandering, city-driving, watt-guzzling objects of ethical scrutiny.

Nonetheless, more ethics don't necessarily mean sound ethics. John Stuart Mill sagely advised that unargued opinions breed tired dogmas. Tedious as his own tortuously argued opinions often were, it's still something worth remembering as the cake flies past your head. All the same, the more people are talking about the right thing to do, the better the chances that one fine day we might do it.

Comment & Analysis



Rich Croker
SU President

When deciding what area of life to cover in this edition's comments, I had just watched *Cloud 9* – a superb performance by some of York's Writing and Performance students. The play explores a range of issues that are still present in our society now, such as gender, sexuality and race. You could be forgiven for thinking I was going to go into a piece on gender, race or imperialism, but I'm not. For this article, what the play itself is about is irrelevant. That I went to see it instead of going to Toffs or Vanbrugh bar isn't.

The winter cold tells us that the summer and freshers' buzz is over and everyone has started to begin the weekly routine again every Monday. The end of term is approaching and money is tight; the Sunday morning after Club D is a bigger struggle than it was eight weeks ago.

So what now? Why not try to break the student stereotype and do something that won't cost you a fortune or leave you with a mouth like the badger's proverbial in the morning? Why not try something that doesn't involve spending half your student loan on a few snakebites and double vodka red bulls?

Take Drama Soc for example. With a different performance running every week of term, there is little doubt that something should catch your eye. Whether it is a mind-engaging play or some light humour, there's something to cater for all tastes. Indeed, if you fancy a couple of hours of playful banter that will leave you with tears in your eyes, the YUSU Comedy nights in Wentworth could be for you.

Or why not do what everyone always means to do, but never gets round to doing and go to see a speaker put on by a society or attend a debate. Maybe even go one step further and debate yourself. All of these opportunities are available through the huge array of societies YUSU offers.

If you fancy taking some time away from campus then why not check out the 'The Ice Factor' ice rink next to Clifford's tower. They also serve superb cookies in the rink-side cafe! What could be better? Or maybe take in some real York heritage and take a tour of the Minster, which is free with student ID. Alternatively, if you fancy meeting the bracing winter air head on, then take a walk with Outdoor Soc and enjoy a tasty pub lunch along the way (the accompanying pint of real ale is optional, of course!).

I guess what I'm trying to say is that next time you're wondering what to do on an evening when the money's tight and you don't feel like the same old, take a look around the poster boards and see what else is going on around you that you never even realised. There will always be something on – it is just up to you to find it!

Nice and sleazy does it

A joke is just a joke, but students won't take their Union seriously as long as it keeps managing to turn itself into one



Sam Thomas
Comment Editor

As any seasoned campus observer will be aware, the Students' Union can work in mysterious ways. Rarely, however, have its limbs managed to pull so violently in opposite directions. As one metaphorical hand snatches risqué magazines from the shelves of Your:Shop, another is making jokes about pulling students. Meanwhile, University bosses look on with studied indifference, siphoning cash off into a cavernous pit a few miles to the east. What is all too easily forgotten amid the light and heat so effortlessly generated by Union officers and keen-eared campus hacks is the real object of the whole enterprise: looking after the interests of students.

All those involved with the bingo hall nudge-winkery insist that despite anything that might have been said, or any scoresheets that that were drawn up, it was all nothing more than a bit of fun; a joke easily made, and even more easily forgotten. It's perfectly likely that they're telling the truth. Moreover, anyone tempted to throw down moral standards for others must first realise that they may well end up standing accused of hypocrisy. After all, there are few traits less attractive than criticising the moral pratfalls of others whilst behaving little better one's self. So, with that in mind, what right do we have to stick our necks out and cast the first stone?

There are two good reasons, and both are matters of that most unfashionable of concepts: integrity. The first and most basic problem is the responsibilities that sabbatical officers take on when they agree to accept a salaried position representing students. What they do in their time off is their own business; they have social lives outside of student politics (at least, you really have to hope that they do) and ought to be allowed to keep them separate and private. So far, so very uncontroversial. When it comes to the welfare of students during Freshers' Week, however, what they say publicly ought to be no different to what they say behind closed doors. To promise students their welfare is being taken seriously, then to fail to do so when you think that nobody's listening, is totally indefensible.

That in itself is sanction enough for a slap on the wrist. But there's another problem, one that goes deeper, and lies at the heart of the uncomfortable truth that most students at York regard their Union as a harmless but ultimately impotent talking shop: If students elect people to

fight their corner, not to mention help to pay off their loans into the bargain, they have a right to expect that they'll stick to the principles on which they were elected. Whatever you think of covering up *Nuts* to protect Jodie Marsh's modesty, and there are plenty of reasons to think it's a pretty silly idea, it is at least easy to square with the Union's objective of promoting sexual equality. The motion was proposed by the womens' officers, who are students and work for free: there's no reason not to trust that they genuinely think it's the right thing to do by the Union's policy.

Sabbatical officers are not students. They have no reason to be on campus other than doing the job they are paid for. That's not to say they can't still be involved in student life (it would be difficult for them not to be) but it does mean they should take the Union's policies seriously, in private as much as in public. If they don't feel they can do that, they can propose whatever changes to them they like. But as long as the YUSU charter contains no explicit mention of the

right of officers to the sexual favours of students, they should leave the bingo to women of a certain age: they are, after all, much more likely to win something.

None of this is to say that sabbs aren't capable of taking their jobs seriously. That would be unfair: anyone unfortunate enough to have experienced a campus election season will know that those who reach the top of the greasy pole are immensely, perhaps even irrationally proud of their positions. It would also be dishonest to ignore the good work that the Union does: for all its shortcomings, its officers do more than anyone else to help the student body limp slowly and reluctantly towards being a vibrant community. But here's the rub: without the full and active support and, crucially, the respect of every student, the Union has no hope of ever making a lasting difference, especially with University bosses standing in the way. It hasn't even come close to securing this support, and nothing could do less to stop the rot than the fraternity-style antics of people who really ought to have grown out of it by now.



"You're sure this is how everyone gets in with the Students' Union?"

Cartoon by Chris Turner

Punching above our weight

There are lies, damned lies and teaching statistics: still, University bosses should tread carefully over Heslington East



Francis Boorman
Contributing Writer

The age-old dilemma of quality or quantity has presented itself to University of York administrators in recent times. The University is going to get significantly bigger if the planned Heslington East expansion gets the final go-ahead. But can it keep improving at the same time?

Not if some recent league table results are anything to go by. A reassessment of teaching quality figures has seen York plummet from 1st place to 57th. At the same time, York has moved from 8th to 15th place in the Times league table.

Officially, the University isn't too worried, particularly by the reassessment. And yes, it is just a rehashing of old figures; but with worried staff voicing concerns in *Nouse*, perhaps it shouldn't be dismissed out of hand.

It's worth noting that dissenters from within the University have chosen to remain anonymous. If this is a non-issue, then what are they worried about?

Shooting themselves in the foot

FreeSoc's brand of anarchism might make a lot of racket, but it won't change the world, or our insatiable appetite for killing



Ben Martin
Contributing Writer

FreeSoc break into Heslington Hall during a recruitment presentation hosted by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, a Government agency responsible for military technology. They make a racket and throw cake around: an unmitigated triumph for ethical and human-rights conscious students.

A self-styled "anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, activist society", FreeSoc, stand, in my view, as the quintessence of everything wrong with student politicisation. Their hackneyed anti-Bush-Blair-Oil-Iraq-Conspiracyism has become such common pub-chat currency that it has lost all political resonance. Their garbled anti-everything stance means that the act of protest itself has become more important to them than the cause being

With all the debt involved in doing a degree, value for money is an increasingly important consideration for your average student, and some students don't feel they're getting the service they paid for.

I don't agree with this highly marketed view of education, and I don't think the quality of a degree course can be measured by the number of teaching hours. However, if standards at York don't keep pace with other universities then resource allocation has to be questioned, and the Heslington East development can't escape that questioning.

Perhaps, with more money coming in from top-up fees, it is time to consider whether teaching standards are slipping and, if so, shouldn't the problems with existing departments be corrected before any more are built?

A couple of reservations must be noted. First, teaching quality is a pretty ephemeral subject to be captured in league tables. The lower positions York now occupies are, in one instance, thanks to the re-interpretation of statistical data and, in the other, only apply to one league table amongst many. Many would question the value of league tables to begin with.

Second, it's not quite as simple an issue as taking money from construction projects and spending it on teaching. A

balance must be struck. In the past, York has figured in the top ten of most newspaper league tables and continues to do extremely well. That should make everyone here proud, but at the same time the University must be vigilant. It has never fared particularly well in comparisons of staff-to-student ratios and per-student spending on facilities and equipment.

This would suggest that York punches above its financial weight, which means it should be even more careful about where money is spent. This is a teaching institution, and the students need to take precedence over business developments and conference facilities. There are complaints that Heslington East is working to a different agenda. If York is to continue being a top university these complaints must be answered.

There's no point in building Heslington East to secure the future of the University if the present isn't being properly looked after. Maintaining excellent academic standards is the only way to persuade the brightest and the best students to continue coming here.

So, is the University aiming for size or stature? It looks like the decision to grow outwards has already been made. Let's hope the University can remain committed to growing upwards at the same time.

protested. The Heslington Hall demonstration is a perfect example: what was it about? One would be tempted to suggest that they object to the University Careers Service's association with DTSL. The literature they handed out at the protest focuses on Britain's arms export policy, the Iraq war, and even the training of Osama bin Laden by the CIA, all testament to the woolliness promoted by their brand of anarchism.

One gets the feeling that FreeSoc may in part have been protesting against the mere existence of 'war' and 'weapons', debates that are both incredibly anachronistic (it's not the 60s any more) and ultimately pointless. Even the most beautifully baked chocolate cake will fail to satisfy man's insatiable appetite for conflict and killing. FreeSoc, either unclear about its position, or else simply unable to express it, refused an offer from Career Services to present its case to the assembly. Clearly, the great coup, provoking a visit from the police, was enough to render the protest a success, despite leaving students none the wiser about the debate.

I see a subtle yet important differ-

ence between Careers Services' association with DTSL and the issue that arose last year surrounding the University's investment in BAE systems. The latter was an issue that concerned all students and forced them to decide, as members of the University of York, whether they wanted to be associated with an ethically dubious company. DTSL's presence in Heslington Hall was not such an issue.

The Careers Service has a duty to provide as much help as possible in finding jobs for graduates. Students must have the power to challenge the ethical policy of the University, but equally the University must refrain from asserting any type of moral agenda onto its students.

The presence of arms manufacturers on campus is a highly charged issue. Clearly most of us would like as little association as possible with such companies, but the debate is complex and multi-faceted. Groups such as FreeSoc simply hijack such issues to feed their narcissistic desire for publicity, and have succeeded in obscuring the debate behind improvised balaclavas and badly drawn banners.