

Battle of the colleges: who's got the BNOCs

In YUSU elections, some colleges are more equal than others, reveals [Michael Mokrysz](#)

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Image: DS Pugh

BACK IN 2016 I compiled information on the college and department of each candidate. I've done the same this year and the patterns are striking.

An overwhelming number of last year's YUSU candidates spent first-year living near the centre of the old Heslington West. Roughly one in 100 students from those colleges run for YUSU: near enough to one per accommodation block. These established colleges – Vanbrugh, Derwent, James and Alcuin – are conveniently located for student activities. Despite questionable building quality, they have a long tradition.

Halifax College is consistently bottom for students running for YUSU. This year only one in 300 final years ran for a post; last year one in 450. This is quite stunning: students in most other colleges are three times more likely to run for YUSU.

Wentworth was excluded from most of this analysis because it's a postgraduate college; as a general rule postgrads don't run for Students' Union positions. But even so it was nearly as well represented as Halifax last year, with one candidate for 500 postgrads vs Halifax's two candidates for 970 undergrads. So why might Halifax be poorly represented? As a former inhabitant I have a perspective here: It's effectively off-campus. The closest part of Heslington West is a deserted 10 minute walk; more central students can

walk from Alcuin to Vanbrugh to Derwent to Physics in that time. There's no bar and the bus service feels ineffective in getting around even on weekdays.

Over on Heslington East, Goodricke and Langwith are doing fairly well. Both are old colleges that moved campus to occupy new buildings. They brought a lot of tradition over with them, and they have some facilities and departments.

Heslington East may struggle with engagement. Student activities generally happen on Heslington West because there are more room choices and access is easier. Booking rooms on Heslington East commonly involves getting a key from a porter who might be away from the desk when you need it; with some exceptions, rooms on Heslington West are accessible to all 24/7.

This lack of activities on Heslington East forces a late night trip home for many students. This is common after first-year as many students live off-campus – but in the first, formative year people are less keen to wander far to campus areas they don't know. Constantine College only opened in 2014 and the first batch of graduates will be this academic year – as such the 2016 results aren't surprising. But this year it does have final-years and only one in 300 of them ran. Constantine is isolated at the far end of Heslington East, although regular 66 buses stop there in the daytime.

Two new colleges are planned to arrive on Heslington East in the coming few years. New colleges all start from scratch and, if Constantine is a trend, they may be well under engaged and underrepresented in turn.

You might wonder why these issues are important. My argument is simple: if students aren't engaged with the University community they might not become 'Big Names On Campus' or run for YUSU. If high-profile or YUSU people aren't aware of unengaged students they can't be properly in touch with the wider student community, which means the next generation of students hit the same issues we did.

We're electing representatives of 16 000 students across nine colleges, three campuses, a dozen departments and hundreds of student groups. That's a great deal of variety. If our representatives had broader experiences of York they could better appreciate our concerns and identify priorities. It's unclear whether Heslington East's lack of student activities is hurting its participation in our democratic process, but the relative remoteness of Halifax and Constantine looks to be a serious factor.



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