

A Hitch too far? YUSU and the agents of Health and Safety

By [Alex Russell](#)

Sunday 3 February 2008

***Alex Russell* is unimpressed by the confusing nature of YUSU bureaucracy.**

Right, so here's the situation: a load of students hitch-hike from York to Morocco during the Easter break to raise money for charity. 'What a great idea!' I hear you cry, 'A fantastic opportunity to experience the wonders of world culture while raising money for a worthy cause.' That's exactly what I thought, anyway. Especially when I heard that over the years over two hundred thousand pounds has poured in for Link Community Development's (LCD) education projects in Africa.

But wait for it, here's the hitch to the hitch-hike. Good old YUSU have refused to ratify the society. Initially, I thought that maybe they had reasonable grounds to say no due to safety reasons and the dangers associated with hitch-hiking. But after some research I found out that, actually, LCD puts really sensible safety precautions on all of their hitch-hikes. For starters, they have a telephone hotline that all members of "hitch groups" must call every evening to make sure everyone's still safe and on track.

By now I was starting to get quite annoyed and my grandparents' voice came into my head; "it wasn't like this in the old days". Even if these safety precautions weren't in place, maybe we ought to have a bit of risk-taking in our lives. The world's become so obsessed with health and safety that it's increasingly difficult to do anything any more without considering all the worst case scenarios. I really do think that we're in danger of missing out on all the world has to offer because some organisation or other says it's too dangerous.

When I applied to come to university and did the usual open days, people kept banging on about how coming to university was a time for you to experience new things. You would be allowed your first flourish of adult freedom; set free from the bounds of teachers and parents telling what you can and can't do. For YUSU to then refuse to ratify the hitch to Morocco therefore completely contradicts my whole point of coming to York! The very people who are meant to make university a truly life-changing experience outside of your academic work are now trying to rein us in. It's not as if the hitch is going to massively impact on students' studies as it's during the Easter holidays, and besides we're all adults now so shouldn't we be allowed to decide what's best for us in our lives?

Upon speaking to Hitch to Morocco Soc, it seems that YUSU are allowing the hitch to go ahead anyway, even though they haven't ratified it. What a ridiculous situation! YUSU ratifying an event means that they agree with it taking place. If they have refused to ratify it, this should consequently mean that the hitch isn't allowed to happen. But it is, and they've said that's fine. So why not ratify it in the first place? It would have been much easier, rather than allowing it to go on regardless. All I can say is that I'm glad the hitch to Morocco is still happening because it's a great idea. Everyone will have a fantastic experience that they will never forget, and hopefully looking forward to it will make the stress and strain of work this term more bearable. Will someone please save this university from the swamp of bureaucracy before we can't do anything at all?



7 comments

Daniel Ball

3 Feb '08 at 3:42 pm

I was one of the 3 students who last year managed to hitch-hike from London to Prague, Prague to Slovenia and from there onto Morocco, we spent a month hitch-hiking in countries not covered by Link (the charity organisers) and can't begin to understand what YUSU's problem is. The documentation, communication and organisation is extremely well organised, the talks, advice, rules and guidelines laid out before pretty much guarantee your safety if you adhere to them.

I wonder if any of YUSU have attempted the hitch or hitch-hiking in general. Before I did our hitch I was sceptical over safety and security, after it, I'd be happy hitch-hiking pretty much anywhere.

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Hitcher

3 Feb '08 at 9:54 pm

YUSU has declined to ratify the Morocco Hitch because, if ratified, it is YUSU that gets sued if something goes wrong.

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Sam Bayley

4 Feb '08 at 1:54 pm

To clarify, YUSU can't stop things happening. By not ratifying the Hitch, we've basically said we won't insure it or back it up if things go wrong. Personally, I hope it all goes well.

If things go wrong hitching to Morocco, they could go BADLY wrong - and our expert staff decided that the risk was too much for the Union to handle.

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Daniel Ball

5 Feb '08 at 1:25 am

The risk of 16 years incident free? I understand that yes if it goes wrong it GOES WRONG but there are more ratified societies and events with a far worse track record than Hitch-soc.

Re: being sued, seems a bit far-fetched. Should anything go wrong it would be because the hitcher didn't follow guidelines or it would be due to something completely out of YUSU's control. I.e. not their fault or liability.

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Sam Bayley

5 Feb '08 at 2:26 pm

Daniel, I suggest you put that one to our insurers. There's not much that YUSU won't ratify on grounds of risk, but we have a duty of care and we would be liable if anything goes wrong, so we have to be careful.

I know people who twenty years ago used to drink 10 pints at the pub then drive home with one eye closed to focus on the road. Luckily, they never crashed. Doesn't make it risk free though!!

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Daniel Ball

5 Feb '08 at 3:29 pm

But that's my point, with all the we had to go through before the hitch, daily and before getting into any car, anything that could go wrong would not be the fault of YUSU or the hitch organisational body.

I don't understand what on earth your point is by citing people who drink ten pints and drive, if they do crash, it's obviously their fault and no insurer would pay out or take liability for that. Similarly, I don't see how YUSU is worried about things (from a liability viewpoint) that would be completely out their control if something went wrong.

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Sam Bayley

6 Feb '08 at 11:42 am

No, that's simply not true. YUSU would be held responsible if anything went wrong, that is the advice we received from our insurers and legal people...

Daniel, I appreciate you're disappointed about the hitch not being YUSU ratified but it's going to be at your own risk (or the charity's) I'm afraid.

If you've got any other points please contact me rather than adding comments here which may mislead people who don't know the full story.

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