

## Disabled students cut off from campus walkways by 'completely unacceptable' building works

Wheelchair users cannot freely move from Derwent to Central Hall as ramp access to main walkways has been removed

By [Chris Owen](#), Editor (2015/16)

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Images: Lam Thoy Vo

Access to some of campus' main thoroughfares has been limited to some students with disabilities, and completely cut off to those in wheelchairs, as a result of ongoing building works.

The covered walkway leading from Derwent College through to Vanburgh that makes a junction with the path to Central Hall and on to the Exhibition Centre is currently blocked off, forcing students to walk around the obstruction and rejoin the path on the other side.

However, the path beyond the obstruction is raised up an inch off the ground, meaning that wheelchair-bound students cannot easily rejoin the walkway to get to Vanburgh or Central Hall. Instead, they must make lengthy detours across two bridges and along the opposite side of the lake to reach the University's main hall.

Building works on Heslington East have also obstructed wheelchair users' access to buses. Alice Dunn, a student and wheelchair user, told Nouse that the building works on both campuses have been "a total nightmare" for her. She spoke of having to take forty minute detours to get from one side of Hes West to the other, and "being totally unable to get onto the bus on Hes East because of an inexplicably huge and un-dropped kerb."

"I've had builders parking their cars over the tarmac pathways leaving me stuck in the mud like a Range Rover at a county show," she said. "I don't think anyone at the University has thought about how wheelchair users can get around with all the work going on around campus; we're mostly just an occasional afterthought. I just want to get to my seminar on time like everyone else can, dammit."



Another student with a severe visual impairment told Nouse that the campus buildings works have been an inconvenience that resulted in him having to “take a significant detour by accident”.

“I thought that I would get to a landmark sooner or later but things got progressively worse,” said the student, who has had to commit the main network of paths around campus to memory in order to negotiate the main thoroughfares.

“I understand that things have to be done from time to time but it’s a bit strange maybe to have it during term time,” he said. “I understand that there can be bureaucratic problems with organising things for vacations... maybe someone should be on duty to assist people who rely on going by a particular path routinely.”

Information and guidance to ‘footpath’ diversions is provided alongside the walkway obstruction. No alternative routes for those in wheelchairs, or for those with other limiting physical disabilities, are provided.

The University provides a comprehensive and far-encompassing range of aides for those with disabilities, and custom makes support to student’s specific needs. The Equality and Diversity Committee promotes the cause of equality and inclusivity under the slogan ‘Dignity and Respect’.



Yet it seems as though the specific needs of students with disabilities have not been factored into the diversion routes in light of on-going building works, some of which will become long term features on campus stretching as far ahead as Autumn 2016.

Zohra Khan, YUSU’s Disabled Students Officer, has called the situation “completely and incredibly unacceptable” in light of the fact that, while students had been made aware of ongoing building works, “there was no notice of how this would affect accessibility requirements”.

“Students are being forced to take alternative routes, causing delays and frustration with the building contractors and Estates,” Khan said. “I have raised this issue with the Equality and Diversity department as well as Estates who have been investigating this issue, so potential solutions are now being formed.”

After Nouse contacted the University to raise the issue of accessibility around Central Hall, the following statement was issued on Friday by the Estates Officer who deals with disability:

“I met with the project Managers on Site this afternoon and have arranged for the fences to be moved to

enable level movement from the covered walkway to the diversionary routes. The fences will also be moved where the works may have left the footpaths with unsafe / uneven edges. This should resolve the issue of the wheelchair access in this area.”

Further significant works around the Vanburgh kitchen area and Harewood way tomorrow will result in the closing of the covered walkway in front of the lake for 5 hours. This is to make way for a wagon and crane to access the area. There will be a signed diversion around this closure, which will hopefully accommodate wheelchair access.



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