

Students demonstrate over ties with arms companies



By [Hoagy Davis-Digges](#), Managing Director (2011/12)
Friday 20 May 2011



Image credit: Philippa Grafton

Students protested against the University's choice of research funding outside Vanbrugh College today and urged it to introduce new ethical funding legislation.

This follows the recent investigation by *Nouse* which revealed that [the University has accepted over £4 million in research grants from arms companies such as BAE Systems](#).

Alexandra Peck, one of the campaign coordinators and a third-year politics and philosophy student, commented: "We're hoping that this will be the beginning of an ongoing campaign to get the University to be more transparent."

"[The University should] take ethics into consideration when they are looking at the research they're conducting rather than just using money which is always readily available from arms manufacturers."

The demonstration itself featured a talk from the MP for York Central, Hugh Bayley, as well as a performance from a local protest poet. Many of the demonstrators carried drums on a protest march which led them around the University lake.



Protesters were joined by MP Hugh Bayley. Image credit: Philippa Grafton

The organisers of the protest also took signatures for a petition for the University to introduce a policy on ethical research funding.

Cat Wayland, YUSU co-Women's Officer, stated that: "We have an ethical investment policy now, but it doesn't go far enough."

She added that "We don't really think that it's appropriate that arms companies should be presenting the University with research funding in order that they carry out research that essentially leads to the loss of many civilian lives."

Chair of York Amnesty International, Mariel Stringer-Fehlow, said that if the University stops accepting research money from arms companies, "of course there will be a replacement source of funding, the problem is that it's harder to find.

"It is possible to find but the onus should be on them not go for the easy and the lazy option which is unfortunately unethical."



Campaign coordinator Alexandra Peck led the rally. Image credit: Philippa Grafton

Bayley addressed the demonstrators in a speech which praised student activism and detailed some of the history of the international arms trade.

Afterwards he gave a statement, saying that: "The University took an important step forward a couple of years ago when it agreed that there should be an ethical base for its investment policy and I think students are right to say that it's not just about investment; and the University should look at its pension fund and research funding [as well]."



66 comments

Anon

20 May '11 at 6:20 pm

Yawn

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CJGS

20 May '11 at 7:06 pm

What an absolute embarrassment these people were today.

Defence companies in the UK are regulated to a level in which the state acts a middle man when arms are being sold to other countries around the world. I understand that some people are pacifists but if you are unhappy about companies such as BAE funding research, then you should also be opposed to government funding, European Union funding, and funding from the vast majority of companies and entities which facilitate and accept the need for defence.

Out and about on campus we saw the same small minority of people who sympathize with Hamas, reject the need for public cuts and of course will be quite happy to accept places on the excellent management

training courses run by companies such as BAE having finished their studies. I suggest to them that they grow up, enter the real world, and accept that wars are necessary and defence companies do a public good by arming and keeping our soldiers safe out in the field.

I, like many students, have already recognised this, and am quite happy for my University to play a part in making our world safer.

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Mariefan club

20 May '11 at 8:33 pm

woooo!!! onus YEAH!

[▲ Report](#)

A. Liberal

20 May '11 at 9:42 pm

The fact that these people were accepted at York in the first place is quite amazing... I guess it explains why we've been dropping in the rankings. Who would want to hire persons who think it's their place to choose where the university gets its funds from?

Reasons these people should just pipe down:

- They have not even done proper research. The research university students do does not have anything to do with weaponry.
- The university needs as much funding as it can get.
- These companies hire our graduates, who are very willing to work for them. If someone wants to work for BAE, who are these students to hinder his chances?
- As CJGS says, if we reject funding from BAE, we should also reject funding from the Government, and indeed most other sources.
- The vast majority of the student population just does not care.
- They are just annoying, self-righteous, self-important, loud-mouthed idiots who just create a raucous to get their 15 minutes of fame. OK guys, you met your MP, well done, now just hush.

A.L.

[▲ Report](#)

Sam Burgum

20 May '11 at 10:31 pm

'CJGS' = "wars are necessary and defence companies do a public good by arming and keeping our soldiers safe out in the field." I wish you had tried to back up this comment. What exactly are wars necessary for?

'A Liberal' (i.e. Aris) = i dont understand your position. first you condemn me for not acting on my beliefs on my article on the Royal Wedding, then you are telling these guys to pipe down. what your standpoint? or are you being just as self-righteous as the people you condemn?

"the fact that these people were accepted at York in the first place is quite amazing" - Im just glad that at least there are people at this uni who still use their freedom of speech to voice their opinion (even with people such as yourself rattling off offensive criticism in their face)

[▲ Report](#)

d

20 May '11 at 10:47 pm

“Out and about on campus we saw the same small minority of people who sympathize with Hamas, reject the need for public cuts and of course will be quite happy to accept places on the excellent management training courses run by companies such as BAE having finished their studies.”

this stinging hypocrisy is what got to me the most. if you investigate the investment decisions of MOST major firms there will be information you don't agree with on a basic, moral, level. there's very little we can do to avoid this- but the thing i find funny is these students probably have phones with parts from 'conflict zones', will continue to study in buildings built with the money from BAE, and will probably work for a firm like them in the future. it just seems like the university is easy pickings for picket liners & unhappy students.

ALSO a very petty point but the girl asking for signatures in market square this week at some point was incredibly rude to a lot of people in her college last year, and threw around a lot of misogynistic slurs. nice to know she's against the slaughter of people, but not the demoralisation and humiliation of them! :)

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Wibble

20 May '11 at 10:53 pm

To be fair there weren't very many of them. They will not affect university policy one iota

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Peter Iveson

20 May '11 at 11:23 pm

What a joke, its the same group of lefty rabble rousers on every protest

University might take notice if they could enlist some new people, but they can't because the vast majority of campus have no issue whatsoever with York accepting funds from reputable companies like BAE

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Anon

20 May '11 at 11:49 pm

'Sam Burgum' in reply to your question of 'what are wars necessary for?' has there ever been an unnecessary war ? They are obviously a last resort but necessary none the less and such a statement is an insult to anybody who has ever put their lives at risk in order to serve their country or support their cause . Stop being such a hippy

[▲ Report](#)

blah

21 May '11 at 9:06 am

Anon, you ask “has there ever been an unnecessary war”? You are joking, right? Good point though, soldiers put their lives at risk just for our sakes (nothing to do with the money they're paid, or the fact that they're fully aware of the risks before they go out there) — you're right, they're really heroes!!!! What would we do without them? I don't know, but we'd probably not have lost those 55 dead in London in 2005 if we didn't get into a “necessary” war. God, I hate these pro-government pro-war sheep.

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A. Liberal

21 May '11 at 9:12 am

Sam,

I am self-righteous, but I have sound arguments to back up my position. I accused you of not acting your positions – I think it's wrong to just talk and do nothing. But then again, if your beliefs are wrong and you act on them, you are not a hypocrite but you are really annoying.

The best of both worlds would be for these people to grow up and out of these beliefs, and thus to stop acting on them. Don't they realise they are an embarrassment to the rest of us?

A.

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A. Liberal

21 May '11 at 9:52 am

A couple of other points:

– These protests undermine demonstrations over serious issues. If students start protesting about every little cause (and especially when they are in the wrong, as they are in this case), the university will stop paying attention all together. The student population of York is on its way to turning to a new Greece – and no one would like that.

– A couple of years ago, there was a debate at the Union, on whether York should stop investing in BAE, RR and others. In the preliminary vote, 70 out of 80 voted in favour of disinvesting. I pointed out that the reason the university invests in these companies is stability and other such benefits. I also pointed out that the same went for students: they all had their money in banks like HSBC, NatWest and Barclays, which invest billions in BAE. I asked why they chose to bring their business to these banks instead of Coop.

Out of these 70 people, only one changed banks. What do you make of this? What I see is that these people like to shout and protest, but do not actually want to help – they only do it for the show. Before asking the university to seriously deplete its resources, maybe you should start thinking of how you could change your personal lives?

A.

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Sam Burgum

21 May '11 at 10:34 am

'Anon' = stop being such a right wing, nationalist fascist! an insult to anybody who put their lives at risk? or a comment on how the armed forces target working class people who need employment? and what the fuck is wrong with being a hippy? thats not an insult! if it means being pro-love and pro-peace then why should I stop being like that?

“they are obviously a last resort” – you are so naive

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Ben Katten

21 May '11 at 11:49 am

High Bayley touting for a handful of votes.

Pitiful.

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Starred First.

21 May '11 at 12:16 pm

@A.Liberal

"The fact that these people were accepted at York in the first place is quite amazing... I guess it explains why we've been dropping in the rankings."

I was on the march.

My average undergraduate grade was over 81%.

Now see if you can tell us YOUR average grade without lying.

[▲ Report](#)

Anon

21 May '11 at 12:17 pm

So, during a time when the government is making some severe cuts to university education, and and despite the hypocrisy surrounding and impracticality of this as quite clearly put by A. Liberal, these idiots suggest that the university gives up millions of pounds worth of research grants as part of some "ethical" investment policy. Sorry, but A. Liberal is right - these protesters need to grow up.

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Wibble

21 May '11 at 12:48 pm

Just out of curiosity, would these pupils be first to protest if BAE stopped investing, with the inevitable consequences of reduced contact hours, poorer graduate prospects and a general falling down the league tables that no investment would inevitably create?

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Sofa

21 May '11 at 1:18 pm

Whilst I was not there myself, I wholly support the protest.

Being frank, I'm somewhat appalled by the poor arguments being presented by both sides - however, I'm acquiring a particular distaste for the language and arguments presented by those championing BAE.

BAE, are by any measure, not a reputable company at all. If we are to measure the term reputable by their revenues, then I can see how some would come to that conclusion. Or we if we are to measure it by their corruption scandals, sales of weapons to brutal regimes around the world or their infiltration of this country's long-term strategic economic growth, then they are by no means reputable. It's rather infuriating to see people clearly so passionate about defending a company that is directly complicit in injustices around the world.

If I were to tell you about brutal Saudi Arabian laws where homosexuals are executed and the regime actively advocates brutal crackdowns on any dissent all over the Middle East you'd all agree with me on the appalling nature of their actions. You'd also be thankful that you live in a democratic state like Britain, where you enjoy substantially more freedom than those who live under those regimes. BAE systems supplies a great deal of arms to those states, in fact, it bribed plenty of influential Saudis to get favourable contracts with the atrocious regime. This cutting edge technology you all speak of, is peddled to the same people who would put you in prison for drinking the alcohol you so cherish.

Now, I'm sure someone will tell me that it's important for our economy and this and that. However, without wanting to sound too self-righteous, I sincerely hope you realise that by basically saying that it's

OK for British companies to be so directly complicit in practises which you don't agree with yourself is incredibly depressing. You've made a judgement that it's OK for those thousands of miles away to face harsh injustice, so long as our economy is OK.

The fundamental issue is that we *shouldn't* have to rely on arms companies for our economic growth. It's rather absurd that we do. It's a manufacturing niche that we've got that is simply there to maintain a military might that doesn't exist anymore. Our economic growth should be focused on the long term and the strategic. If Britain is to position itself strongly in the global economy our economy should be diversified. The mere fact that the PM had to stop an anti-corruption investigation because the arms industry is so vital to our economy is a worrying sign.

If you all recall, we had similar cries about the banks. The idea that they're simply too big for us to allow significant damage to them, appeared to infuriate people. What you're not realising is that this isn't something entirely moral, but rather we should view it from a simple economic lens. No strong state, especially Britain's, should be fearful of a sector of it's economy. It does not bode well for our ability to plan our economic growth and continued support of this system will continue this state's steady stagnation.

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Baetrice

21 May '11 at 2:31 pm

Some great points made by A. Liberal. The sooner some of these people graduate the better.

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Anon

21 May '11 at 2:41 pm

'starred first' I wonder if any of your 81% average was due to the facilities and teaching paid for with this so called 'blood money' get over yourself

[▲ Report](#)

davy

21 May '11 at 2:55 pm

"Out of these 70 people, only one changed banks. What do you make of this?" As you say this was a couple of years ago, many of them may have since changed banks; they wouldn't necessarily have felt the need to inform you about this. Also, as it was a couple of years ago, it's of limited relevance, as many of them have probably graduated and left York and so were unlikely to have been on the march. When you say "these people like to shout and protest, etc.", there is actually no one group of people you are talking about, this would assume that everyone who disagrees with you on this issue must behave in just the same way.

And nobody is suggesting that the university seriously deplete its funding, they're saying that it should seek alternative funding, as the original article states quite explicitly. Surely this is quite a tame requirement, who would disagree that we might as well explore the possibilities of non-military funding? And I accept that there are some shades of grey, helping to research and produce technology that is harmless and intended for civilian use, even at the behest of companies that also produce military hardware, is certainly not as bad as researching missiles or other technology that is intrinsically harmful.

Your point that people should also examine the ethics of their personal lives is very fair and well-made though, I hope that everyone will consider this.

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A. Liberal

21 May '11 at 3:01 pm

Well done Starred First. The fact that you go around touting this shows how pathetic you are. I am not even going to bother comparing my CV to yours.

Intelligence is not about getting good grades. Universities like York should aim to attract well rounded individuals, not just people who might be gifted in one subject. In the end, James Watson is a brilliant scientist, but a constant source of embarrassment for the institutions with which he is affiliated.

Similarly, though you might be good in one subject, you clearly do not understand the first thing about how the world works. So hush down and go do something good with your life (maybe you should consider sticking to academia – clearly the real world is not for you).

A.

 Report

A. Liberal

21 May '11 at 3:02 pm

By the way, Starred First, why not tell us which bank you use? Or where you work, as you are now a graduate?

It will be insightful to see how well you live up to your rhetoric.

A.

 Report

Technology anybody?

21 May '11 at 3:06 pm

Do any of the protesters use the internet? Do any of them have smartphones with GPS?

The internet was initially funded and started by DARPA (a sort of badass american version of DSTL) which led to the creation of the Lincoln Lab at MIT, a government funded research station the scale of which would make the protestors weep. Then again MIT is the best university in the world for science and technology fields.

OK, OK everyone uses the internet, I can accept that, it's mainstream and you probably can use it while protesting against arms investment without being a hypocrite.

So what about GPS? The US military runs the thing. If you have a smartphone then you are giving the US military money to pay for the system that spies on people for the Americans to then drop bombs on. I'm comfortable with this, I don't think that they're all evil people trying to kill everyone, I think that this military investment is helping the world. As someone else pointed out, the use of banks that invest in arms companies – one would think that sitting on your high horses would give you a better vantage point to see all of this.

Maybe you do. Maybe you're kicking up a fuss to make yourself feel better while ignoring the whole issue because actually it's pretty damn easy to tell yourself that you're making a difference by annoying other students for half a day instead of really trying to change things.

 Report

Matt Sharp

21 May '11 at 4:52 pm

“CJGS: Defence companies in the UK are regulated to a level in which the state acts a middle man when arms are being sold to other countries around the world.”

The state acts as a middle man, but not a very good one. After all, the last Labour government granted licenses to export arms to Libya and most other governments in the middle east, Uganda, and others:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/mar/01/eu-arms-exports-libya>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/mar/01/uganda.armstrade>

And the previous Conservative government allowed BAE to sell its Hawk aircraft to (what was at the time) an authoritarian regime in Indonesia, which then reportedly used the planes to bomb rebels in East Timor, as well as selling arms to other countries with dodgy governments.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jtHwfc6Z3N4TAmbjtdMoG-r2smQw?docId=CNG.0c88465f3b8d86ddafe09537f1f1aae2.151>

Now, what this suggests is that we should be campaigning for the UK government to significantly raise its standards over which countries are granted export licenses. This is true, of course.

But the UK government is always going to be lobbied by groups campaigning for them to grant as many licenses as possible. So we should pressure the companies to adopt much higher standards themselves, and one way to do this is by encouraging (e.g.) the University not to engage with them unless they are willing to commit to high standards.

“A.Liberal: – They have not even done proper research. The research university students do does not have anything to do with weaponry.”

I don't know exactly what current *students* are investigating, but the Dependable Computing Systems Centre has been involved in the development of aspects of the Hawk and Eurofighter aircraft:

<http://www.cs.york.ac.uk/research/research-success/dcsc/>

 Report

A. Liberal

21 May '11 at 5:10 pm

@ Sofa: BAE does indeed supply weapons to oppressive countries – I never said they are a reputable or ethical company. I personally would not work for them, neither would I invest my own money in their shares. However, it is not my place to say whether the University's pension fund should invest in it.

In addition, what I and others here have been saying is that it is no more unethical to accept funding from BAE than from a government that legitimises these regimes. No-one has responded to this argument.

Finally, the analogy to banks is irrelevant. Most liberals, like myself, believe they should have been left to fail. The reason is that we think that it would have been fair (they should go down, as they screwed up) and because saving them has set a bad example for the future.

@ davy: so do you honestly believe that the majority of these students use ethical banks instead of the mainstream ones? That would be interesting – I'd like to know myself.

I do believe these people can be classified as a group – at least a large part of them. Maybe I'm wrong here, and I cannot prove my case, but you could: go talk to them, see on how many topics they have similar attitudes.

This is not a case of BAE sponsorship VS alternative funding. It's a case of BAE sponsorship PLUS other funding. York's endowment is 7 million. Cambridge's is more than 6 Billion. We are simply too small to make such decisions. We need all the funding we can get.

This last sentence needs a qualifier: I would oppose funding from clearly unethical sources – e.g. Gaddafi or other tyrants. But BAE does not fit in this category. BAE is a legitimate company, doing business with regimes approved by the UK government. They have paid for their corruption scandals, and if not, they should be charged for them. But it is not for us to say they are guilty – that's for a court to decide.

Finally: how easy do you think it would be for a large company like BAE to refuse to do business with a country that is acknowledged by the UK government? Such a reaction could cause a diplomatic incident. Hardly advisable.

A.

 Report

Matt Sharp

21 May '11 at 5:24 pm

“Ben Katten: High [sic] Bayley touting for a handful of votes.

Pitiful.”

Firstly, the reason I invited Hugh Bayley along to speak is that he is a member of the international development committee in parliament, and has previously spoken about the fraud/corruption charges that surrounded BAE:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/bae-faces-fine-over-tanzanian-radar-contract-2165651.html>

And the international development committee is part of the Quadripartite Committee on Arms Export Controls:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmquad/686/68601.htm>

Thus, he was invited to share his knowledge and expertise in this area.

Secondly, if you were there you would have realised that he did not simply turn up and say he completely agreed with everything that the absolute pacifists amongst the protestors believe.

He made the point that arms can be used e.g. by UN peacekeepers, and as such arms research is not fundamentally unethical. Some of the protestors share his view (e.g. myself), whilst some believe there should be no association with arms companies and education whatsoever. But the point remains that we should demand higher standards, both in terms of UK government policy, corporate responsibility, and university investment and funding.

 Report

hi

21 May '11 at 5:27 pm

Pharmaceutical companies also profit from the suffering of others, should the Biology department stop accepting funding for immunology research?

 Report

Starred First.

22 May '11 at 1:15 pm

@anon

I've brought in far more money (via research) than I've taken out.

@ A. Liberal.

I have better things to do than walk you through relativism.

And don't sling mud based on supposed academic performance:

“The fact that these people were accepted at York in the first place is quite amazing... I guess it explains why we've been dropping in the rankings.”

And that was your big opener, too. Shame.

[▲ Report](#)

A. Liberal

22 May '11 at 7:54 pm

Starred First, I am glad you are in academia, because people like you are dangerous outside this field. Stay clear of politics or any sort of policy making - it would be for the best.

If you want to contribute to this debate, try answering to the arguments others and I have brought forward instead of bragging about your grades. The former might promote healthy dialogue; the latter makes you look like an insecure geek.

A.

[▲ Report](#)

anon2

22 May '11 at 9:28 pm

The fact is that the funding from BAE is being used to research technologies and scientific discoveries that may one day aid millions across the world. To criticize the University for accepting these funds is to deprive those millions of this.

As for the point of alternative funding, BAE is a huge company and thus financially able to give £1.24 million towards research at this University. To try and find other companies who are not only 'morally correct' but are financially able to give as much is a waste of time and money. I'm sure that the lego company, whom I assume do not supply arms to the Middle East, will not be able to give as much.

Even though BAE may be morally corrupt, isn't the fact that £1.24 million is being taken away from the research and production of weapons to fund this University worth it?

[▲ Report](#)

Cough

23 May '11 at 1:03 am

Ahhh yet more people loving the sound of their own repetitive voices. There are many arguments against protesting for complete disarmament however any logic in the above comments has overlooked the fact that what the protesters were asking for is well within the University's power and simply requires a little extra searching.

P.S. - Mariel Fan Club- I do hope that isn't a pun on a less than flattering body part...how crass.

[▲ Report](#)

Matt Sharp

23 May '11 at 1:28 am

"hi: Pharmaceutical companies also profit from the suffering of others, should the Biology department stop accepting funding for immunology research?"

I don't understand this analogy. Pharmaceutical companies presumably don't deliberately go out and encourage activity that leads to immunological diseases. Their products presumably can't be used by undemocratic and brutal states to repress their citizens. Or if they could be (biological warfare, perhaps?) one hopes they don't sell them to such states.

"anon2: The fact is that the funding from BAE is being used to research technologies and scientific discoveries that may one day aid millions across the world. To criticize the University for accepting these

funds is to deprive those millions of this.”

But equally, those technologies and scientific discoveries may one day be used by BAE to develop further weapons which they then happily sell on to whoever they feel like*, causing deprivation to millions caught up in avoidable warfare. It’s not the technology or scientific research per se that I have a problem with: it’s how it’s used.

*Yes, I realise they have to gain clearance from the UK government. See my previous post as to why we should not have much confidence in this process.

[▲ Report](#)

Politics Student

23 May '11 at 10:57 am

Why does it always seem to be politics or philosophy students who demonstrate?

Let the electronics students decide their department’s research, if they were all against BAE then they could probably stop this, but they’re not. It seems only my fellow arts students are unable to comprehend the realities of modern university funding.

[▲ Report](#)

Prince Philip of Greece

23 May '11 at 12:37 pm

@Politics Student “Why does it always seem to be politics or philosophy students who demonstrate?”

Perhaps they understand the issues?

[▲ Report](#)

J

23 May '11 at 2:19 pm

I have to agree with @Politics Student previously.

It should be left up to the students in the relevant departments to decide about their own research. It does appear that a lot of those protesting *generally* come from Politics, Philosophy etc. How would they like it if electronics or computer students told them what they can and can not research?

I’m sure those in electronics and computer science have enough intelligence to come to their own decisions about their own research, and don’t need students from other departments telling them what to do.

[▲ Report](#)

Sofa

23 May '11 at 5:04 pm

@A Liberal

I think that it is our position. We’re part of this university. They represent us and our tuition fees, accommodation fees (which they profit from) and by various other means, we contribute to that pension fund. Thus, yes, I do think we should have some sort of a say in where that money is invested.

Also, I’m not insisting on us being directly consulted. Rather, these students should be *allowed* to protest and have their opinions heard, precisely because we contribute toward it!

[▲ Report](#)

Another year the same story

23 May '11 at 8:48 pm

It appears Nouse have started repeating its news items, obviously it was a slow week.

What about the likes of KPMG and Deloitte supporting the sports teams and other departments. Surely the question should be raised about the unethical behavior of these companies.....errrr.....no I don't think so.

Stop being so naive. The companies in the report and many others benefit this university a huge amount and in a time when investment is drying up we should be grateful that they still consider us a top research university (no matter what the guardian says).

[▲ Report](#)

A. Liberal

23 May '11 at 9:23 pm

@ Sofa,

God, you people are impossible – you really do not understand how the world around you works, do you?

Look, when I go to Tesco's and I buy my groceries, it is not my job to tell the management where to build their new stores or whether they should change their logistics company, or whether they should hire more York graduates, just because I paid them money. This money is theirs now – I exchanged it for a service, they are out of my pocket and thus out of my control.

Similarly, you and the University have a contract of sorts: you pay tuition fees, they educate you. That's the deal. This does not make you a shareholder, nor a manager. It is not your money any more – it's the university's, to manage as they please. If you do not like this arrangement, you should not have applied to York, simple as that.

The same applies to accommodation fees. I am renting an apartment now; is it my job to tell my landowner how to spend my rent? Am I legitimate to do that? Of course not. Once the money is out of my bank account and into his, he can do whatever he wants with it (within the boundaries of law of course).

I am getting repetitive here with examples, but that's only because I hope I can drive this point home. I honestly cannot understand where you get this sense of entitlement.

To go back to an earlier point: the money which is actually and truly yours is the money you keep in the bank. Which bank do you use? I'd hope not one like Barclays or HSBC... that would seem terribly hypocritical.

A.

[▲ Report](#)

Sofa

24 May '11 at 11:52 am

@A Liberal

Firstly, I appreciate your frustration but for the sake of maintaining an argument, maintain etiquette. Nobody cares if you're getting tired or repetitive (which you're not).

Your central assumption, and your arguments are all using examples of the private sector. That's assuming that this university is a member of that private sector, and thus, should have the same freedoms that say a landowner or a private company such as Tesco should have. It's laughable that you're getting annoyed with what you say are repetitive examples, when in fact, you're somewhat incapable of differentiating between the freedom which the private sector should be afforded and the accountability which a university should face.

I did not sign any contract that said 'you pay, we educate' – that's an artificial social contract which you've constructed to suit your own viewpoint on this issue. I see it a different way. I'm here for 3 years and for the rest of my life, I will be a direct representative of York in some way and vice versa. Although my reputation will not be wholly determined by them, they will certainly be a factor. Therefore the basis of my own contract with them is far broader than 'you pay, we educate'. Also, I can leave stop shopping at Tesco with ease, I'm ar more entrenched here and have come very much a part of this institution.

Furthermore, you're whole implication rests of the fact that I believe I should have a right to dictate the university's investment policy. You're right, and that principle has in fact been maintained. The university is no obliged to listen to students, these protests and the campaign in general is not to directly involve students in the decision making process behind investment. Rather, it's a means of exerting pressure on the university management when deciding their investment policy. Management still has complete policy autonomy and are no in way bound by student opinions. Your whole argument rests on the fact that we shouldn't have the RIGHT to tell them how to spend it, well we don't!

This is the nature of most bodies and I think it is you who should recognise this, and join the real world.

[▲ Report](#)

A liberal

24 May '11 at 4:02 pm

@ Sofa

It does not make a difference that the university is not a private institution. It functions in a free market economy, and is subject to the same rules.

The contract I discuss may be artificial, but it is not inaccurate. The purpose of a university is to educate. The attachment you feel to it and the reputation that will follow you for the rest of your life are by-products of the education it provides.

You are right in saying you cannot leave York as easily as you can change your supermarket, but you should have researched such issues before you came here.

Besides, in terms of reputation, protests like this lower the prestige of York. York is considered 35th in the country in terms of graduate prospects, despite being amongst the top 10 or even 5 for teaching and research. Why do you think we are doing so badly in the employment sector? Maybe because when companies come here to advertise jobs, we stage die-ins. Maybe because employers are aware that York students seem to disapprove of capitalism and the free market.

Furthermore, you clearly do believe it is your place to dictate policy – you are asking the university to stop accepting funding from BAE. How is this not an attempt to influence funding decisions?

In the end, this is all about an extremely small minority of students making a fuss. The vast majority of students couldn't care less where the funding is coming from, and I bet that if you could get every single student to vote, you would lose by a landslide. Of course this is not possible, when most students do not even know what the YUSU is.

Finally, no-one here has answered the main argument of 'our' side: if you do not want funding from BAE, where do you want to get it?

- a) The students: higher tuition fees (I think not, given the protests against fees).
- b) The Government: not much better than BAE – they legitimise oppressive governments, thus being as much at fault as BAE.
- c) Other companies: how many companies can you find that do not offend anyone on campus?

A.

 Report

Sofa

24 May '11 at 7:42 pm

Let me answer a few of the points which you raised:

1) With regards to whether it's my place or not to DICTATE policy, you've failed to recognise the difference between dictation and pressure. There's a clear line between management and students which has been maintained. I do not wish for that line to be eradicated, but rather for students to have the right to protest and influence that. Dictation would imply that I wish to directly involve students in that decision at the least and exclusively decide the policy at the most. Students who wish to demonstrate and merely have their opinions heard with the hope of *influencing* policy does not mean that they want to have the right to decide that policy themselves.

2) We do operate in a free market economy. That's not something which, however, I think public institutions should engage with. Essentially, because you agree with the theoretical provisions of the free market, you're also inclined to agree with a university accepting financing from them. I, however, believe that university research should be aimed at providing benefits for society as a whole, not merely stimulating our economy. The research which you talk about does nothing for society. It's merely BAE capitalising on the expertise and knowledge which we have at York for their own material benefits. BAE is a private company which has little regard for this university. Rather, they've recognised that the research can be done here at a cheaper cost for them in their wider arms development. The idea that we're somehow benefiting from this, when in fact, the benefits are almost exclusively that of BAE is what gripes me.

3) York's bad performance with employers isn't down to our anti-capitalist student body. To suggest that a university like York, is somehow strongly leftist is both naive and ignorant.

The IFS society for example, will tell you that York suffers from a bad reputation for a number of other reasons. These lie principally in that we're a relatively new university, our geographical location, our careers service and so on. Various speakers from multinational corporations including Ernest&Young, Deloitte, Barclays and KPMG to name a few actively advertise themselves on campus and hold events on campus (this answers your questions with regards to how many companies that do not offend anyone on campus, namely, very few). These financial institutions are the bastions of capitalism itself and are in fact stronger proponents of the free market than say, BAE which supplies it's arms exclusively to the state sector. So the difference between the two isn't in their capitalist character but rather the nature of what they do. To label the students protesting or the university as a whole, as somehow anti-capitalist is largely inaccurate. Furthermore, BAE is clearly not dissuaded given that the arms campaign has been ongoing at this university for several years. The link you've attempted to make between this university's employment rate and the protests is thus, weak.

 Report

davy

24 May '11 at 9:46 pm

@ A. Liberal

Isn't classifying "these people" as a group a little anti-individualist for someone with that name ;-)

And much more widely than the current discussion, surely we can't define what's moral by what's legitimate or legal? The implications of such a definition are contrary not only to ethics but common sense. Moral standards could be altered by the passage of a bill. You say that you would oppose funding from clearly unethical sources. Accept then, that other people make different judgements as to what is clearly unethical, and have the right to protest.

"I bet that if you could get every single student to vote, you would lose by a landslide. Of course this is not possible, when most students do not even know what the YUSU is."

Isn't this their responsibility? We don't re-run general elections for the sake of people who forgot about them, or didn't manage to find their polling station. As long as a UGM didn't take place at midnight, in a cupboard, and the voting for the motions was open for a reasonable window, then everyone had a fair chance to debate and vote on each motion. There is a basic quorum level, and whilst it's not ideal that YUSU policy should follow motions that had a fairly low turnout; it's surely a better alternative than it following how one person speculates everyone would vote if they bothered to vote at all. And isn't the more natural representation of how people would vote if they couldn't care less, that they would abstain, not vote negatively against change, or positively in favour of the status quo, which they may know nothing about.

As for the Tesco example, yes it would not be your "job" to tell them what to do, but you could start a campaign to raise awareness of a particular issue to do with their spending or company practice (didn't Hugh Fearnly-Whittingstall start a campaign about free-range chickens, despite not being a Tesco director or employee). If, for example, a company claims to act ethically and we have good reason not to believe this, anyone has the right to draw attention to this. If people believe that our university should be acting differently, why shouldn't they be able to at least say so, regardless of whose the money is now. It's not your job to tell people on this common thread which banks they should use but I accept that you have the right to do so, and that it's not unreasonable to do so.

As for the main argument, the options would be:

- 1) At least reassess our relationship with companies like BAE, and to what extent and in which areas we are willing to collaborate with them.
- 2) Accept Gov. funding but only insofar as doing so does not actually relate to or support reprehensible actions like the legitimisation of oppressive Gov.s, and particularly if it draws money away from harmful activities (like continuing to work with BAE but aiming to do the same thing, this wouldn't please everyone but seems at a fairly sensible utilitarian goal for those who object, ultimately, to harm and violence done)
- 3) Conduct research/votes as to what companies/sectors offend the least people and build a comprehensive ethical policy that, though not perfect will be the most satisfactory overall.

[▲ Report](#)

funded by military research

25 May '11 at 11:59 am

you do realise of course the amount of good that comes from military backed and funded research?

without the first world war we wouldn't have the medical care equipment we take for granted today such as glueing cuts and antibiotics.

we need arms research as they have the money to support new groundbreaking technology. would you deny every amputee access to the new generation of prosthetics to come based on the fact that they came from military tech and money?

Yes I know I am making emotion based arguments but since the 'left' seem to do so then why shouldn't I, one who many would call 'right wing' even though the split like that is a fallacy. I identify as a classical libertarian.

as for the contract discussion, erm yes it is a real contract and yes it is a private organisation to a point as a university has control of what it teaches and who it teaches, rather than the state schools who have to take everyone, a university is a private business regulated by the state.

yes you should have the right to protest, a right incidently given not by students but by the military

fighting to protect you from those who would seek to control you.

 Report

Matt Sharp

25 May '11 at 1:14 pm

“you do realise of course the amount of good that comes from military backed and funded research?

without the first world war we wouldn't have the medical care equipment we take for granted today such as glueing cuts and antibiotics”

This is nonsense. Antibiotic research had been going on since the 19th century (e.g. Lister and Pasteur). In fact, Ernest Duchesne discovered penicillin in the 1890s, but his work wasn't recognised. Whilst Fleming was probably inspired by the many soldier deaths that occurred in WW1 as a result of bacterial infection, it can hardly be claimed that the discovery of penicillin, or any other antibiotics, were dependent on WW1 occurring. They certainly weren't dependent on military funding.

“we need arms research as they have the money to support new groundbreaking technology. would you deny every amputee access to the new generation of prosthetics to come based on the fact that they came from military tech and money?”

I guess you're referring to things like the “proto-2” prosthetic limb. According to wikipedia this has indeed been developed through military funding, specifically the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. But this is part of the US Department of Defence, and is funded by American tax-payers. If less money went to the military for the purpose of developing weapons, it could be reallocated to biomedical research and such prosthetic limbs could be developed anyway.

 Report

A. Liberal

25 May '11 at 6:23 pm

Sofa, pressure implies that you think it's your place to influence policy, if you do not want to accept the term 'dictate'. Regardless of which word you use, it is not your decision to make OR influence.

The university's research does influence society as a whole – in fact, this is one of the main points of 'our' side: that the benefits from research we do with the funds from companies like BAE outweigh the 'uneasy' feeling of having ties to weapons manufacturers.

There are several reasons York is not a favourite amongst employers, I grant you that. However, St Andrews or Edinburgh are even further north, but offer better graduate prospects. Other 'new' universities like Warwick also offer better prospects.

York IS left-wing, I'm not being naive; I did my masters at another university, and I can tell you, the difference in mentality was noticeable. For instance: if someone mentions Thatcher at a debate at York, they will be booed. At the other university, the mention of her names evokes an applause. Little differences like this make you realise where York lies.

Finally, I have to thank you for bring up these specific names as examples of non-offensive companies: Barclays heavily invests in BAE and the arms trade, and the accountancy firms are the ones who helped the likes of Lehman Brothers defraud the public by allowing them to mask their losses and make instruments like REPOs seem profitable.

@ davy: I did not claim that what's legal is moral, I only said that we should definitely NOT invest in companies that break the law. I did not infer that companies that are operating within the law are necessarily moral. I never even claimed BAE is the most ethical of companies – in fact, I stated that I would not invest my personal funds in them, nor would I work for them.

What I did say was that their funding is more beneficial than detrimental, and that it is not the place of students to tell the Uni's pensioners where to invest.

On quoracy, in my view the answer is to raise the level. Otherwise, the people who vote are mostly those involved in the campaign. People do not bother to run an 'in favour of BAE campaign', either because they think it's too silly, or because they don't want to face accusations from the 'against BAE' group.

From your options, I only accept the 3rd one. If the 'anti-BAE' group came forward with a set viable options for funding and investing, then I'd be more than happy to discuss these. They haven't though, as far as I'm aware.

A.

[Report](#)

blah

25 May '11 at 7:33 pm

"funded by military research" – how do you dare to call yourself a libertarian? You are a statist (if you're pro-military, you're statist) so please, don't debase the name of libertarians by calling yourself one of us.

[Report](#)

Sofa

26 May '11 at 12:35 am

I believe that by the very powers of protest that we're *all* afforded in this country, it's certainly not your place to be telling those that they don't have the right to influence policy in some way. It's part of living in a democratic society and what you're saying is contrary to the core values of that. I don't quite understand from where you've developed this idea that it's simply not our place to have our opinions heard at all. It's completely arbitrary like I've said. I think we'll leave this because we're just going round in circles, but ultimately, it's their free will to protest and attempt to influence a public institutions policy.

With regards to these non-offensive companies, by yourself highlighting their unethical nature of these states is contrary to your other argument. Notably, these companies, despite being clearly unethical *have not attracted widespread criticism*. You claim that York is a leftist university with scant evidence such as booing at the mention of Thatcher. I haven't seen/heard of this myself. Please care to mention the event/time/whatever this happened. I do however know that the Tory party is fairly active on campus and in wider relative terms, we've got fairly centrist student body. I'm not sure were else you've gone but for it to be more right wing than York would suggest that it's an elite campus university of some sorts. Otherwise, compared to most other campuses, we're a moderate university. I don't really see how you can really argue otherwise and it pains me to even have to contend something as basic as this.

Anyway, I'm done with this. We're not getting anywhere. I don't think we'll agree because we're clearly both somewhat entrenched in our core ideas. This debate isn't really constructive.

[Report](#)

anon

26 May '11 at 12:57 am

@blah

who the feck are you speaking on the behalf of libertarians. if you knew anything about libertarianism you wouldn't try to speak on behalf of it.

[Report](#)

blah

26 May '11 at 10:36 am

Libertarians = anti-state
Pro-military = not anti-state

You do the maths. (Unless you're one of THOSE "libertarians" — anti-state everything except the war, in which case, as much state as is possible!)

[Report](#)

J

26 May '11 at 11:09 am

How about we all just agree that all students have the right to protest and express their views, but it is the departments involved and their students who have the right to decide who they accept research funding from.

[Report](#)

Beef

26 May '11 at 6:09 pm

It has been suggested that students should not protest the university of york's links with arms companies because students should stay out of the universities decisions and accept that living in the real world requires accepting such practices.

I was wondering whether this was true as a general principle?

Lets take a case where 99% of people agree a practice to be unethical.

Living in the real world as a student in Nazi Germany involved accepting the sacking of jewish lecturers and researchers from their posts at universities.

If the principle of 'mind your own business' is correct german students were right to just accept this and not to question or protest what was going on at their institutions and in their country. It was none of their business to question their universities' policy? It was after all in line with the law of the land.

Any reasonable person would agree that in such a situation student protest is not just permissible but in fact required.

So there is no principle that students must never interfere with their universities legally permissible choices.

So the argument in the case of BAE must rest on the fact that BAE aren't doing anything that bad and that doing research for BAE is not really un-ethical or inappropriate after all.

This is the argument that those for and against doing research for BAE should be having. It should not be about whether students or other citizens have a right to protest the actions of institutions they belong to.

I do not think that researchers at the university should be doing work to benefit companies like BAE that have a history of selling arms to the dictators of un-democratic states (like saudi arabia) and states that use these arms and other military equipment to harm civilians and break international law (like the israel 'operation cast led' that killed civilians and destroyed infrastructure in the Gaza strip).

[Report](#)

Heading for the military...

26 May '11 at 9:24 pm

I will preface what I'm about to say with the fact that I'm fully aware I'm emotionally biased. As far as I'm concerned it doesn't make my point any less valid.

As soon as I complete my degree at York I'm joining the military. I'm in the training system now, I have

been for a couple of years and as such I have many friends stationed around the world (Afghanistan, Italy – for Libya, the Falklands). These guys are risking their lives day in, day out, protecting civilians. So far of all the guys and girls I know personally, they have all made it home, but even seeing one come home without a leg is enough to shake you up just a bit.

In the past 4 months over 1500 medical evacuations have been conducted from Camp Bastion, some civilian some military. 4 of those were quadruple amputees, with the most common injury being a triple amputee. The rescue mission consists of a Chinook helicopter going in to retrieve the injured party with an Apache attack helicopter to defend it. A large transport aircraft normally a C-17 – converted into an air hospital – then flies the patient from the Afghanistan to the UK. The UK sets the gold standard in MedEvacs with the majority of patients requiring intensive care being back to an intensive care unit within 24 hours of injury.

The Chinooks are maintained by BAE systems, their missile warning systems: designed by BAE.

The Apaches: Engines are made by Rolls-Royce, flight systems designed by BAE

C-17: Flight systems that stabilise the aircraft enough to run an intensive care unit the size of that at York hospital at 30000ft: designed by BAE systems.

As far as I'm concerned BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, Lockheed Martin etc. are providing the technology which I hope in a couple of years time will be saving my life. If they want to invest their money in one of the UK's top research universities I'm all for it...

Just a thought.

 Report

An Engineer

27 May '11 at 12:07 am

@Prince Philip of Greece

Surely you are not insinuating that all Engineering and Science students don't understand ethics? I think I can say for 99% of us that we understand the issues surrounding our own work and that of the companies that fund us.

I support the right to protest as these students have done, but I don't agree with them. The University needs funding, and I don't personally view companies like BAE and Thales as unethical. Even if there was other available funding, I would still support defence companies should they wish to invest as much as I would any other.

 Report

Matt Sharp

28 May '11 at 2:28 am

“Heading for the military: As far as I'm concerned BAE Systems, Rolls Royce, Lockheed Martin etc. are providing the technology which I hope in a couple of years time will be saving my life.”

And this is great. If BAE only dealt with governments that were in the business of protecting other civilians, I can't see how anyone would object.

But wouldn't it have been oh so ironic had this deal gone ahead and it was actually BAE technology that was being used to harm the very civilians you or your friends were meant to be protecting:

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/us_arming_libya

Why have so many British weapons been sold to governments with poor human rights and civil liberties records?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/feb/22/uk-arms-sales-middle-east-north-africa>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/21/abu-dhabi-arms-fair-idex-2011>

“An engineer: Surely you are not insinuating that all Engineering and Science students don’t understand ethics?”

It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand ethics to the extent of most philosophy students. It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand the potential social and political consequences as much as a politics or history student does.

“The University needs funding, and I don’t personally view companies like BAE and Thales as unethical. ”

Whether they continue to pursue unethical policies is debatable. However, (as I have repeatedly said), they have a record of dealing with governments with poor human rights and civil liberties records. There were the Al Yamamah deals with Saudi Arabia, and allegations of corruptions with other countries which lead to them paying massive fines. They sold Hawk aircraft to Zimbabwe in the 80s, and continued to sell spare parts up until around 2000:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/the-firm-with-a-back-door-key-to-number-10-1796377.html>

They sold Hawk aircraft to Indonesia, which were reportedly used to bomb East Timor:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2012743.stm>

And as my first link above shows, they were seeking to deal with Libya just a couple of years ago.

So by all means, they should feel free to develop technologies that help democratic governments and civilians, but we should demand that they do not deal with ones that are not democratic, and are thus more likely to abuse any weapons sold to them.

Perhaps, like with the ‘Clean Cash’ campaign for universities, arms companies should only deal with governments of countries that are considered ‘free’ e.g. by Freedom House:

http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/fiw/FIW_2011_Booklet.pdf

(country list from page 12 of this pdf)

<http://cleancash.org/pledge/index.html>

 Report

A. Liberal

29 May '11 at 12:52 pm

Matt, what a ridiculous claim... “It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand ethics to the extent of most philosophy students. It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand the potential social and political consequences as much as a politics or history student does.”

That’s simply idiotic. Some of the best debaters, conversationalists and political commentators I have met are engineering students / graduates. Do keep such remarks out of the debate.

To clarify my position: I do not think protests should be banned – I believe in free speech (much more than some left-wingers who stage protests to revoke invitations to speakers from the BNP etc).

However, I also believe that humans tend to abuse any right that is given to them. As soon as we are offered a privilege, we take it for granted. I am only asking people to think a little bit before marching on the streets annoying everyone else.

A.

 Report

J

29 May '11 at 4:33 pm

@Matt Sharp

Wow, hold on there:

"It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand ethics to the extent of most philosophy students. It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand the potential social and political consequences as much as a politics or history student does."

I think that's very insulting to non philosophy students. Hey, philosophy students may know more textbook stuff, but this doesn't mean they are in any better position to make a decision about ethics, or better people to make any decision.

If you don't want these companies to sell to what you perceive to be undemocratic governments, our government is in a much more powerful position to stop specifically this problem, rather than York science departments receiving research funding from companies where it is not cut and dry that it is unethical.

If you don't want these companies to sell to undemocratic companies, focus on this issue rather than companies that produce military technology, which is a completely separate ethical issue.

[▲ Report](#)

An Engineer

29 May '11 at 11:19 pm

@Matt

I'm just confused about how you can be so naïve to believe that philosophy students have the best grasp of ethics. It just so happens that I live with two philosophy students and am best mates with a third. Throughout the years that I've now known them, I, and many of my friends encompassing a huge array of disciplines have had friendly and occasionally not so friendly ethical debates.

Now, not once has any of those philosophy students has ever demonstrated a better grasp on ethics than any of the rest of us. It may even shock you that sometimes their knowledge is worse.. That is not to say that their grasp is poor, just that we ALL understand it. Can I speak for all philosophy students? No. Can I speak for all engineers? No. But I can speak for all that I know (which is more than 3 philosophers), in saying that we are equal.

I don't know whether you're an engineer, a philosopher or somewhere in between but to make such a ludicrous statement demonstrates your clear lack of knowledge on ethics. It also demonstrates that you haven't done any research on my discipline. If you had, you would know that ethics underpins my course, because some of the work we undertake has some of the biggest ethical implications of all.

As for BAE, like you say, whether they are ethical or not is debateable. And my opinion remains that they are not unethical, and that is where I will stay, at least so long as people like you attempt to persuade me otherwise.

[▲ Report](#)

Matt Sharp

29 May '11 at 11:34 pm

I'm not exactly surprised people have criticized my previous comment, but it's hardly a contentious claim.

Ethics is a major part of philosophy, and a thorough understanding of ethics requires some knowledge of metaphysics, linguistics, perhaps formal logic, and certainly an understanding of common argumentative fallacies. Of course, science students and engineering students are perfectly capable of learning these, just as philosophy students are capable of learning about, I dunno, the immune system, or electromagnetic theory. But you would strongly suspect a random, average student from each subject to

know a lot more about their own subject than a student of another subject.

[▲ Report](#)

blah

30 May '11 at 10:34 am

A. Liberal – I would agree with you, but this is York you are talking about. Most people here are not very intelligent at all, and have no understanding of how to construct and/or defend an argument. So Matt Sharp is probably right in that people who have studied logic and fallacies would know better. (Certainly he is right when you look at the last sentence of An Engineer's post).

[▲ Report](#)

Dave Taylor

30 May '11 at 2:42 pm

I am pleased to see that some students have a sense of moral responsibility and are not just happy to take money from any direction whether it is tainted with the blood of other human beings, or from the toil of slave-labour. Good for you!

One has to wonder where is the moral compass of the University of York's Ethics Committee. Are these people asleep, incompetent, powerless, or have they too been bought-off?

[▲ Report](#)

An Engineer

30 May '11 at 8:14 pm

@Blah

I'm not entirely sure what you mean. All I've said is that in my opinion BAE are not unethical. I stand by that.

As for the rest of that sentence, what I am trying to get across is that I will not have a debate with someone who's pre-judged my discipline and myself to not understand ethics. Why would I? Clearly they've made their mind up already.

You mention those who have studied logic and fallacies, funnily enough I was taught them as well. I must have not been paying attention.

@Matt

As a general statement, I would agree. Those who are taught a discipline are much more likely to know about it than those who haven't.

I understand that ethics is deemed moral philosophy, but in that respect I have been taught moral philosophy. I have been taught formal logic. I have been taught fallacies. I even went as far as to write an essay on it.

You shouldn't assume just because a topic is a branch of one discipline that it isn't taught in others. An engineering degree isn't all equations. Like I said before, some of the biggest ethical debates are focused on science and engineering, and it will be those from all disciplines that decide where the line stands, not just philosophy and not just engineers.

[▲ Report](#)

A. Liberal

30 May '11 at 8:44 pm

As far as logic is concerned, let me assure you that engineers understand it far better than philosophers. At least we do not spend our time pondering on whether one extra grain will make a heap or anything like

that.

blah, it's unfair to say that York students are not clever – though the Engineer's point is not exactly well thought out, it does have some basis... You can see that those who oppose BAE are the kinds of persons to make outlandish claims like 'philosophy students are more ethical' or 'some students have a sense of moral responsibility' – implying that the rest of us do not.

A.

[▲ Report](#)

Jessi

31 May '11 at 11:08 am

@ Matt Sharp

I am not here to discuss my view on the debate (summary: yes there should be an ethical investment policy, but it is not for the students to dictate it, & there is a lot of naivety and hypocrisy clouding the discussion) So, sorry for keeping the conversation thread off-track, I just want to respond to this:

“It is almost certain that engineering and science students do not understand ethics to the extent of most philosophy students”

Which clearly is a somewhat contentious claim, after all.

As far as I can see, by 'a thorough understanding of ethics' you can mean one or more of three things –

- 1) ability to make ethical judgements
- 2) ability to categorize, label, analyze ethical judgements using textbook terms
- 3) ability to debate and defend said judgments

To claim that one cannot be ethical, or make ethical choices, without studying philosophy is obviously absurd, not to mention offensive to, for example, all women prior to universities being open to both sexes. To claim that one cannot use textbook terms without study is possibly fair, although many other disciplines do use them – regardless, it is the least important asset, in that it eases debate but is by no means essential, and most of these terms can, in my experience/opinion, be explained in significantly fewer words and with greater ease than philosophers like to pretend. Thirdly, to think that only philosophers learn formal logic or how assess arguments is ridiculous – Computer Science students study this to a greater level of detail than us. So, what on earth do you mean by 'knowing a lot about ethics' – what talent, exactly, do you mean to claim for students of philosophy?

On a personal note, like 'An Engineer' I have friends from both camps and have had the same experience. Aris sat in for half my philosophy lectures at York and, whilst we did and do disagree on many ethical matters, he was more able to discuss the content of the classes than many seminar members, as were many of the other CS/engineering students with whom I spent time.

Sorry for arguing off-topic,
Jessi

[▲ Report](#)

Politics Student

1 Jun '11 at 3:46 am

Surely before you can decide whether the research is ethical or not, you need to be able to understand what the research is?

Therefore the only people who can judge this are trained engineers who also understand ethics. I believe there is a committee of people just like that who have already made their decision...

[Report](#)

Matt Sharp

8 Jun '11 at 7:22 pm

Apologies for the slow response.

“An Engineer: Like I said before, some of the biggest ethical debates are focused on science and engineering, and it will be those from all disciplines that decide where the line stands, not just philosophy and not just engineers.”

Fair point. I actually studied biology as an undergrad, and although we considered a range of ethical issues (stem cells, GM crops, animal rights etc), we did not go into anywhere near the same sort of depth as I have on my philosophy masters; much of which is also taught to undergrads. I probably did underestimate the amount of ethics engineers study, and I was wrong to extrapolate the amount I did on ethics in biology at another university, to the amount science/engineers do on ethics at York.

“A. Liberal: As far as logic is concerned, let me assure you that engineers understand it far better than philosophers. At least we do not spend our time pondering on whether one extra grain will make a heap or anything like that.”

Grain/heap types of thought-experiment are actually quite relevant to ethics; e.g. when considering what level of consciousness or self-awareness something needs to be considered a person.

@Jessi: I agree with much of what you've said, especially the point about philosophers often using too many words! You're correct that computer science students will likely study logic in more depth than philosophy students; I didn't say otherwise. But logic is only one part of it.

“Politics Student: Surely before you can decide whether the research is ethical or not, you need to be able to understand what the research is?

Therefore the only people who can judge this are trained engineers who also understand ethics. I believe there is a committee of people just like that who have already made their decision...”

It's not just about the specific research that is done on campus that matters, but also the behaviour of the company that benefits from such research. And I don't think it's necessary to understand the research in depth to make an ethical judgement: I don't know anything about ballistics, but can still make the judgement that shooting someone for fun is a bad thing to do.

I'm not going to respond to this topic anymore but feel free to add me on facebook. I assume I'm the only Matt Sharp at York. (well, ok maybe I will respond if something completely ridiculous is stated)

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