Reimagining the University – Student Feedback

SEPTEMBER 2015

A report on interviews conducted with students participating in IATL's 'Reimagining the University' module (Term 2, 2015).

Contents

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The module 'Reimagining the University' was run by module convenors Chris Maughan and Stephen Barrel as a 12 or 15 CAT IATL module in Term 2, 2015-16. It comprised ten two-hour sessions. The course was intended to introduce students to the contested notion of the public university and through examining the past, present and future of (UK) higher education systems develop students' understanding of the politics of research and tertiary education. For enrolled students the module culminated in a project aimed at planning an engagement with a university on a relevant topic of their choice.

Over the course of the module, 14 students attended the module with 3 students taking it for credit. The module also involved several guest lectures as well as two sessions in the archives at the Modern Records Centre (MRC).

FINDINGS

Learning/Academic Value of Module

The critical analysis element of the module was seen as a strength of the module and students were confident that they had been challenged to critically analyse current systems through lectures and discussion. Whereas students could have been challenged more to develop their own solutions and ideas about current systems.

Research skills were either improved or remained the same, the MRC visits were useful in developing research skills. The module helped students apply theory to current issues and understand them as part of a wider context.

Students' knowledge of higher education systems were developed throughout the course particularly in earlier sessions relating to the history of higher education.

The course could be extended to include more material, in particular to look at systems globally and study more alternative education systems.

Quality of Teaching

Students were generally very satisfied with the teaching and lecturing styles of the module convenors as well as the design and management of the course. The teaching could be improved by being more student-focused during lectures and by sessions being more structured with student-led activities incorporated.

The group discussions, which often overran, were a strength of the module and were well facilitated. This developed a sense of belonging and students felt supported and that they could all participate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Value of course materials

The module coursepage did not have a large impact on students' decisions to take the module. It could be improved to better reflect the content of the module and interest future students. The lecture notes were found to be useful and extensive, closely linked to the content of the lectures.

Participation and Enrolment

Students attended the module for a variety of reasons: seeking and understanding and understanding of the wider context of higher education, knowing the module convenors, having heard positive things from others.

There were only three students officially enrolled in the module so looking at possible reasons for low enrolment was important.

Some reasons for low-enrolment figures:

- Practicality: lack of optional CATs available, clash of timing, module decisions being made earlier in the year.
- IATL: Students not having heard of IATL or the modules or knowing that they can enrol in them.
- The course being in its infancy and needing to build a reputation.
- Potential students lacking confidence in skills and knowledge, particularly from unrelated subjects such as science and consequently being concerned about grades.

Some suggestions for improving enrolment:

- Link the interdisciplinarity of the module with relevant departments, e.g. English.
- Get students to attend first few sessions or taster session.
- IATL improving advertisement of course and becoming more well-known amongst students as viable module option.
- Support sessions from IATL to help address perceived skill gaps for students from subject such as Science, e.g. essay writing/researching:

Value of Specific Planned Elements of the Course

The visits to the MRC archives were highly valued as an aspect of the course whether students attended both sessions or, as a result, went in their own time. For some this directly related to their study outside of the module by demonstrating the resources that exist there as well as giving guidance in how to access and use it.

In general, students thought that there was a good range of guest speakers. However, the cancellation of the lecture by a pro Vice Chancellor had quite a big impact and a larger interaction with the university management would have been beneficial to students in terms of developing both sides of the debate on current higher education systems.

Introduction

MODULE DETAILS

The module 'Reimagining the University' was proposed to IATL by the module convenors Chris Maughan and Stephen Barrell in 2015. The module subsequently ran as a 12 or 15 CAT module in Term 2, 2015-16. It comprised of 10 sessions, 11:00am – 1:00pm on Thursdays. The course summary as described on the course webpage is as follows:

'The intention of this module is to introduce students to the contested notion of the public university. By examining the past, present and future of the modern university, students will come to understand the politics of research and tertiary education, and their options for realising their agency in shaping public institutions.' (IATL Modules Team, 2015)

TEACHING AND LECTURING

As well as to core seminar teaching and lectures run by Chris and Stephen there were a series of Guest Lectures (see below).

Guest Lectures:
- Professor Thomas Docherty (Week 4)
- Dr Nicholas Monk (Week 5)
- Dr Christian Smith (Week 6)
- Dr Michael Niblett (Week 8)

Most notably there was a scheduled lecture by one of the Pro Vice-Chancellors of the University of Warwick which was cancelled at short notice. This lecture was intended to offer the balance between the perspective of the university management and that of the students and literature on the wider context of higher education. Dr Nicholas Monk's lecture was intended to replace this to give an insight into the management of the university.

COURSE DESIGN

Modern Records Centre

Two of the weekly module sessions were held in the Main Archives Selection in the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick. Students were shown how to use the archives to find relevant information and documents relating the course were extracted.

Module Project

Students enrolled in the course for credit were required to complete a project accounting for 50% or 60% for the 12 or 15 CAT module respectively. The aim of this was for students to demonstrate their grasp of some of the core issues of the course by coherently planning an engagement with the/a university on a relevant topic of their choice, taking account of the modes of engagement discussed in lectures.

INTRODUCTION

PARTICIPATION AND ENROLLMENT

Over the course of the 10-week module, 14 students attended sessions. Three of these students were enrolled in the course while others chose to audit the course. The course participants came from varied backgrounds with a mixture of undergraduates, postgraduates and university staff from a range of disciplines.

Methodology

Interview Participation

Of the 14 students (3 enrolled) who attended sessions of the module, 7 responded (3 males incl. 1 enrolled, 4 females incl. 1 enrolled) to an email calling for student feedback and were subsequently interviewed. Of the 7 students who were interviewed, all had attended over 40% of the module sessions with most attending over 60%.

Interview Design

The module conveners were consulted on the purpose and design of the interview to ensure it served the purpose of informing them in improving student experience of the module and gave them useful feedback on the teaching and design of the module. From this discussion, five main areas of enquiry were identified:

- **Learning / academic value of module -** research skills, critical thinking skills, value of course content within a wider context.
- **Quality of teaching -** teaching style and design and execution of the module by module conveners.
- **Value of course materials -** the website and the lecture notes.
- **Participation and enrolment –** current student's attendance/enrolment, reasons for low enrolment/inconsistent attendance, suggestions for improving participation/retention.
- **Value of specific planned elements of the course:** visit to the modern record centre (2 sessions) and guest lecturers.

General question formats were agreed upon (see Appendix 1 – Interview Design) and the interviews then comprised of these questions combined with others in response to student's statements.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were carried out by phone or in-person and recorded for transcription. In the case of one of the participants, due to technical issues, notes were made immediately following the interview as a full verbatim transcription was not possible.

Qualitative data collected in the form of interview transcripts from the questionnaires and interview was analysed using an orthodox grounded theory approach (Urquhart, 2013). This approach was selected as it has propensity to give greater sensitivity to divergent views and enables a more explorative and holistic approach to data inspection (Schwandt, 2007). In order to ensure more accurate coding and analysis the computer program NVivo 10© was used to assist coding of the transcripts for analysis.

Data reporting

In reporting on the data, participants have each been given an alias to provide relative anonymity. However, the issue of deductive disclosure has not been addressed as details in the transcripts which could lead to participants being identified have not been edited (Kaiser, 2009). Participant aliases have preserved gender as this is relevant to participant responses and data analysis.

Results

The coding of transcripts resulted in the development of categories and subcategories which emerged from the data via a grounded theory approach. The results will thus be given in these categories to highlight the categories and subcategories which emerged and how they relate to each other.

ACADEMIC VALUE

This category encompasses participant's comments in response to a variety of questions. They were asked specifically to comment on whether the module had developed their research skills and supported them in critically analysing current systems and developing their own conclusions. The *critical analysis* element of the module was seen to be a strong aspect of the course with participants confidently asserting that they had been challenged to critically analyse current systems and some responding that this had helped them to view things in the wider context and connect it to other areas. While one participant remarked that this critique had helped them in *developing own conclusions* others were less sure of whether they had developed their own conclusions with some seeing this as an aspect of the course to be improved upon.

> I would definitely say I was challenged to think critically of current systems [...] it's really made me think now when I read the newspapers about universities, I can definitely see how everything links together more. - Nia

Participants saw the development of research skills in different lights dependent on their backgrounds. The undergraduates all commented on how their research skills had been improved with particular reference to the sessions at the Modern Records Centre and noted that the research experience they had gained differed to their other study at the university. One undergraduate said that 'it was good to do something at all like research while at uni' (Jack). Postgraduates saw this as a less relevant category to them noting that they already had research experience.
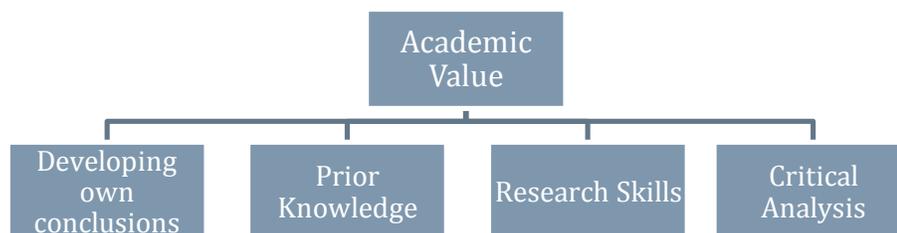

Figure 1 - Hierarchy of the category 'Academic Value'

RESULTS

Another category which emerged from the data without prompting through interview questions was *Prior Knowledge* (see Figure 1 - Hierarchy of the category 'Academic Value'). Three of the participants shared their feelings about their lack of prior knowledge in relation to the higher education and how this had been developed throughout the course. In particular two participants suggested lack of confidence in prior knowledge as a possible reason for students not enrolling in the course. For instance, Jack expressed that if he 'had a better stock of knowledge beforehand it would have been even more useful.'

MODULE CONTENT

When asked about the module content participants were overwhelmingly positive about both the content and the structure of the content. From the participants perspectives the content was structured in two halves: firstly, the history of UK higher education and grounding in a wider context and secondly, relating theory to activism, developing solutions and looking at the future of higher education. One subcategory emerged, the History of Higher Education (see Figure 2 - Tree graph of 'Course Content' Category). Five of the participants commented on the significance of this aspect of the course and the importance of studying the history of the higher education system in giving context to developments today. One participant who enjoyed this aspect of the course also noted that the second half of the course was less relevant to them due to their own reasons for attending the module.

> I probably have never thought of universities in the way we did, for example like, looking historically at the way that universities, the structure of universities. I never realized the impact that it has today. - Nia

Module Content	History of Higher Education
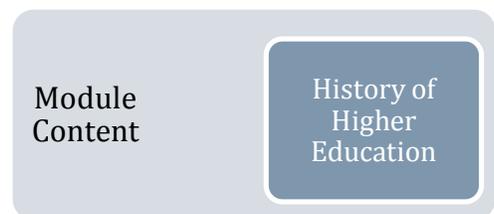
Figure 2 - Tree graph of 'Course Content' Category

MODULE RESOURCES

There were two themes of inquiry which fell under this category. The course convenors wished to ascertain the value of the printed lecture notes disseminated in each session as well as the module webpage.

All responses regarding lecture notes were positive with participants describing the lectures notes as extensive and closely linked to lecture content. Lecture notes were said to be useful particular with regards to information on the history of higher education:

> It was very useful because there was a very large amount of dates [...] it was very hard to keep track of it and I couldn't possibly have tried to note everything down so having quite detailed handouts ... was really, really useful - Teresa

When asked about the module webpage participant responses were more uncertain and overall more mixed. Six of the seven participants had viewed the course webpage though most only had a vague memory of it. In relation to the syllabus described on the webpage comments were positive and the module was seen to be well structured. However, one participant found that the information on the webpage did not give them a clear idea of what the course was about while another commented that the content looked "drier" than it was in practice:

> I remember it being alright, it looks a bit drier than the content actually is. So, the 'History of the NUS' as a subject heading sounds a little bit dry but is pretty interesting in practice. - Jack

LECTURING AND TEACHING

Chris and Stephen

Feedback on the teaching and lecturing styles of Chris and Stephen was overwhelmingly positive with particular mention of the way that their teaching styles complimented each other and created a good dynamic. Chris was praised for being a good facilitator whilst Stephen, conducting the lecture portions of the sessions, was praised for his wealth of knowledge and insight.

> They have a pretty good Penn and Teller routine going, I think [chuckles] Chris is more the Teller, you know, quite quiet and Stephen is quite, he's verbose. So he's the Penn of the two and I think that dynamic works out really well. You know, they're both pretty sharp so it works well. - Carl

Comments which were coded as *criticism* were all in relation to the lack of student-led or interactive elements in the course. Two participants noted that Stephen's lecturing style could be improved by engaging with students more during lectures. One of these participants also went on to describe this as part of a wider issue in terms of the structure of the sessions needing to be developed to include more student-involvement.

> [Stephen] does engage but his lecturing style - he does a bit walking and talking [...] but, you need to engage with the student and you need to look at the student a bit more. – Mark

Module Management

This category encapsulates feedback related to how the course was managed by Chris and Stephen. The strongest subcategory of this was *Seminar Discussions.* Six of the seven participants commented specifically on the group discussions that occurred during the sessions and all of their feedback was incredibly positive.

This also relates to the subcategory *belonging and support* as the group discussions were seen as having a key role in students feeling supported both in the facilitation of the discussion by the convenors and by the

other students in the sessions. Three participants mentioned the discussions overrunning the end of the sessions and this being a positive aspect. Other participants commented on the discussions as producing a sense of belonging as they felt they could relate to the other students who took part. One participant noted that the environment created meant that all students contributed openly to discussions whilst another noted the awareness of gender roles in whole group discussions:

> Having a group that was so aware about gender roles and speaking up and whenever there was a man who just dominated the situation you could feel everyone noticing it. And that was cool. … the awareness of it among to teachers and the other students made it good. – Sophia

There were two *Specific Activities* mentioned. Two participants found the activity involving the design of student president campaign manifestos enjoyable. One participant mentioned that the activity aimed at finding solutions to university funding could have been more guided and given more time.

> I quite enjoyed the last bit of the course they did where people were meant to break off and come up with a manifesto, like a campaign manifesto. But I think it went a little further than that even, I think people started coming up with creative ways to engage students – Carl

Guest Lectures

The guest lectures described in the Introduction were also a major theme of interview discussions. Largely this involved discussion of the involvement of university management in the course. Other guest lecturers were only mentioned on two occasions with little content. Therefore three interconnected subcategories emerged, *IATL Director, Module vs. Management and Cancelled Lecture* (see Introduction - Guest Lectures). Four of the participants thought that there was a good range of speakers, two said that it could have been better by representing both sides more as well as inviting 'more incendiary' speakers. Also two participants positively commented about the fact that some students who were on the course did small talks on something of interest to themselves.

Two participants explicitly expressed disappointment about the cancelled lecture from the pro-VC with both expressing a sense of tension between university management and the module itself, one going into a lot of detail regarding this.

> I did think that was a missed opportunity on the universities side [...] this was a bit of an organic organisation of several students, more than a dozen students who were participating in this so it would have been a pretty good exchange of ideas and discussion which didn't really take place. - Carl

Comments pertaining to the guest lecture by Nicholas Monk were mixed. Only three participants explicitly mentioned the session with one saying that the activity to find links between pictures was a highlight, another saying it was fun but confusing while a third found it to be 'a waste of time'. Participants also mentioned this in relation to the cancelled lecture.
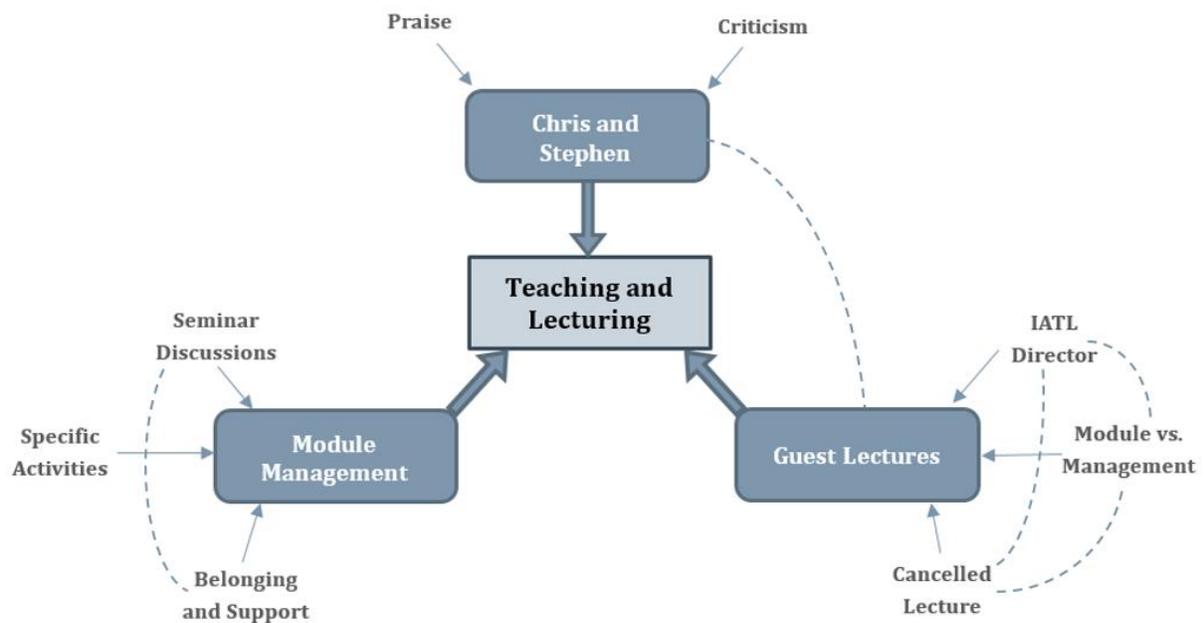
MODERN RECORDS CENTRE (MRC) ARCHIVES

The sessions held at the MRC arose a lot in discussions with participants both prompted and unprompted by questioning with all feedback about the value of the sessions being positive.

MRC Attendance

Of the seven participants, two had attended both sessions, three had attended one session and two had attended neither session. Four of the participants, including one who had missed the sessions, then subsequently went to the archives independent of the class and a further one participant said that they would return.

> I went back and had a look just on my own to look through stuff and that I LOVED actually […] the graphics in particular, old boar articles and stuff like that. - Jack

RESULTS

Enthusiasm for MRC

All participants who visited the archives both as part of and/or outside of the sessions were incredibly positive about the value of this element of the module and said that it was interesting. Participants remarked that seeing how the material had been accessed for the module sessions had guided them in their own use of the archives with many saying that they would not have otherwise accessed the archives or known what was there. Some participants included this as a part of the course which had improved their research skills and several participants commented that the archives gave real-life context to the theory of the module:

> I really like the work they did [at the MRC] because in many ways it took the theory that was being discussed and made it real with evidence. - Mark

PARTICIPATION AND ENROLMENT

Reasons for attendance

Participants were asked why they attended the course. They gave the following reasons (frequency):

- Relevant to current events in higher education, in particular at Warwick (4)
- Relevant to participant - fixed term contract, student loans, higher fees (3)
- Involvement/interest in higher education activism on campus (3)
- Seeking wider context - nationally, internationally, historically (2)
- Positive comments from others attending the module (3)
- Knew module convenors (3)
- Wanted to learn something completely new (1)
- Module is unique in that it covers higher education (2)
- Already taking another IATL module (1)

Reasons for low enrollment

Participants were asked to suggest reasons for why the course had a low number of enrolled students (3 students). The three participants who were members of staff all said that they did not know enough about the undergraduate system. Of the other four participants these reasons were given:

- Lack of confidence of prior knowledge and skills (particularly amongst science students)
- Concern that grades on assessments (particularly in comparison to other module choices)
- Not having heard of IATL or not knowing whether they can take IATL modules
- Clash of timing with other modules
- Difficulty in ascertaining what the module is about
- Early decisions being made on module enrollment (the module is second term)
- Taking a course with limited CATs to use on optional modules with large compulsory modules
- Module needs to build up reputation year on year.

Here is one example of a participant speaking about lack of confidence:

> You might think, "I'm not that confident I'll do a really good job" or if you're doing well in other modules. So in a weird way you can kind of be penalised for trying things which is obviously not good in education. - Teresa

Audit vs. Enrolment

As only two of the seven participants were enrolled on the course while the others were auditing it, there was some discussion of the differences between these two approaches in attending the module.

Although participants tended to be unsure of whether enrolment improved commitment and attendance or not many cited auditing as a positive approach. Several participants remarked that their enjoyment of the course was increased by the fact that they were auditing and their commitment to the course came through internal motivation rather than a focus on grades. One participant expressed that they may not have taken it if they had had to enroll due to lack of confidence in skills required. For the three staff members and the postgraduate student it was not in fact possible to enroll.

However, two participants felt that the lack of enrolled participants changed the end of the course and meant there was less focus on the project than there would have been. One participant felt that the low number of enrolled students meant that some activities lacked seriousness.

Both auditing and enrolled participants expressed that they would like more consistency and commitment from others participating in the course and that this at times made teaching and seminar discussions more difficult.

SELF-IDENTIFYING

Participants often spoke of their own experiences in general as well specifically in relation to the course. These fell under the four subcategories below which are all interconnected.

Activism

Of the participants, four mentioned that they were either involved or interested in activism related to higher education. Several participants mentioned how the module had help give them context to current issues in higher education and in particular at Warwick, with one explicitly mentioning the 'Free Education' movement. However another participant said that they were not as interested in this aspect of the course: 'it's interesting but... not why I came to the course.' (Sofia)

Understanding of Wider Context

Most of the participants mentioned seeking an understanding of the wider context as a reason for attending and that the module had helped with this. Three participants remarked on how it had helped frame the decisions they had made in their involvement in higher education within a wider context. Many of the participants commented on how they had improved their understanding of the UK system as a whole which

helped to understand their position in it. In particular, the importance of looking at the history of higher education in helping participants to understand their current positions and put current issues in context. Teresa framed this particularly well:

> Good education should make you realise the context you're in and make things visible that weren't visible before [...] it's really interesting to take a step back from it and actually think about education. - Teresa

Experience of the Higher Education System

Undergraduates mentioned their experiences of student fees and loans and how the historical context of the course had helped them to understand their own experiences. One participant said that it helped to explain their own reasons for being at university and commented on how they had previously felt alienated in the Warwick University environment. Staff members related the course to their own experience as staff, for instance, fixed term contracts and research in higher education being 'apolitical'. While another participant positively commented on how, coming from a science background, they had not learnt in this way before.

Study outside of the module

One participant mentioned reading about alternative education and critiques of higher education outside of the course. Another participant remarked that the course helped to frame their own research in teaching and learning practices in terms of history and politics to gain a better understanding. Two participants explicitly mentioned that the module had helped them to provoke discussions with others outside of the course. Four participants mentioned using the archives for their own research and interests. A few participants related what was learnt in the module to their own academic interests including two who mentioned their dissertations:

> I remember I told Stephen that I was interested in race and straight away he was telling me about all these things, things that other tutors would never take the time to sit down and talk to me [about] - Nia

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE MODULE

Improving Participation and Enrollment

Here are the suggestions that participants came up with for improving participation and enrolment in the module:

- Link the interdisciplinarity of the module with relevant departments, e.g. English.
- Get students to attend first few sessions or taster session.
- IATL improving advertisement of course and becoming more well-known amongst students as viable module option.
- Including more student-led activities.
- Clearer information on the website such as a video (the website currently includes a video of the taster session)

- Support sessions from IATL to help address perceived skill gaps for students from subject such as Science, e.g. essay writing/researching:

  Maybe there's a way that we could offer something within the wider IATL thing [...] like, "Doing an IATL module? Here's a bit of extra support and there's someone there who can help you if it's a new way of thinking for you" - Teresa

General Suggestions

There were also general suggestion about the course given by participants.

- Include more about alternative systems for higher education.
- Invite Dr Paul Smith from the Art History department as a guest lecturer to discuss his experience at Warwick when it was a newer university.
- Include more about global higher education systems.
- Extend the course/sessions to include more content, perhaps over two terms.
- Include more student-led activities such as the presentations done by students.

Discussion

LEARNING / ACADEMIC VALUE OF MODULE - RESEARCH SKILLS, CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS, VALUE OF COURSE CONTENT WITHIN A WIDER CONTEXT.

The critical analysis element of the module was very strong and students were confident that they had been challenged to critically analyse current systems through lectures and discussion. The latter part of the course partly aimed at encouraging students to develop their own solutions to higher education was seen to be lacking and could be improved, possibly through more students taking the module for credit so that more students completed the project.

For undergraduates, research skills were generally developed throughout the course particularly with regards to the work done at the archives of the MRC. Students were supported in doing their own research, both for the module project and for related studies outside of the module. This was done via discussion as well as the visit to the MRC which guided students in how to access resources themselves.

The academic value of the course differed for each student dependent on the background of the students and their reason for attending. Reasons for attending varied from specific relation to the students own study/research to interest in the topic relating to the students experiences within higher education.

Group discussions were another strong element of the course cited by many participants, these were beneficial in developing ideas and creating a sense of belonging.

Students generally came to the course with little prior knowledge and although for some this initially created a lack of confidence, their knowledge of higher education systems were developed throughout the course particularly in earlier sessions relating to the history of higher education.

The use of the MRC archives, early sessions on the history of higher education as well as later sessions on applying the theory to current issues helped students in understanding current systems as part of a wider context.

Some students wished that the course were extended to include more material, in particular to look at systems globally and study more alternative education systems.

QUALITY OF TEACHING - TEACHING STYLE AND DESIGN AND EXECUTION OF THE MODULE BY MODULE CONVENERS.

Students were generally very satisfied with the teaching and lecturing styles of the module convenors as well as the design and management of the course. Chris and Stephen had a good dynamic together though one area to be improved is in involving students more, particularly in lectures delivered by Stephen. Both offered support to students in facilitating discussions and assisting with research and development of ideas.

Although the course was generally seen to be well structured there were some comments that the sessions themselves lacked structure and could be improved with more student involvement. The group discussions

in the sessions often ran over time due to student interest and were highly valued by students and well facilitated so that all were seen to participate. This led to a sense of belonging amongst students both from their peers and from the support of Chris and Stephen. The student-led presentations and the session involving student president campaign manifestos were also enjoyed by students.

VALUE OF COURSE MATERIALS - THE WEBSITE AND THE LECTURE NOTES.

The module coursepage did not have a large impact on students' decisions to take the module. Some thought it was clearly structured and informative while others thought it could be improved to more effectively reflect the content of the module and interest future participants.

The lecture notes were found to be useful and extensive, closely linked to the content of the lectures.

PARTICIPATION AND ENROLMENT – CURRENT STUDENT'S ATTENDANCE/ENROLMENT, REASONS FOR LOW ENROLMENT/INCONSISTENT ATTENDANCE, SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PARTICIPATION/RETENTION.

Students attended the module for a variety of reasons. Many cited an interest in seeking a wider context for current issues within higher education as well as their own experiences. Several students either knew the module convenors or had heard positive things about the module before deciding to attend. The module is useful to some in that it is unique in addressing higher education and does so both historically and politically.

There were only three students officially enrolled in the module so looking at possible reasons for low enrolment was important. There were several reason given:

- Practicality: lack of optional CATs available, clash of timing, module decisions being made earlier in the year.
- IATL: Students not having heard of IATL or the modules or knowing that they can enrol in them.
- The course being in its infancy and needing to build a reputation.
- Potential students lacking confidence in skills and knowledge, particularly from unrelated subjects such as science and consequently being concerned about grades.

Some students preferred auditing the course and valuing it as a learning experience which did not directly relate to grades and their degree. There was a concern that the course would have been taken more seriously and resulted in more in depth discussions and sharing of ideas towards the end had there been more enrolled students.

Here are suggestion made to increase student participation and enrolment in the course:

- Link the interdisciplinarity of the module with relevant departments, e.g. English.
- Get students to attend first few sessions or taster session.
- IATL improving advertisement of course and becoming more well-known amongst students as viable module option.

- Including more student-led activities.
- Clearer information on the website such as a video (the website currently includes a video of the taster session)
- Support sessions from IATL to help address perceived skill gaps for students from subject such as Science, e.g. essay writing/researching:

VALUE OF SPECIFIC PLANNED ELEMENTS OF THE COURSE: VISIT TO THE MODERN RECORD CENTRE (2 SESSIONS) AND GUEST LECTURERS.

The visits to the MRC archives were highly valued as an aspect of the course whether students attended both sessions or, as a result, went in their own time. Students found the MRC sessions interesting and also thought that 'they brought the theory to life'. For some this directly related to their study outside of the module by demonstrating the resources that exist there as well as giving guidance in how to access and use it.

In general, students thought that there was a good range of guest speakers. However, the cancellation of the lecture by a pro Vice Chancellor had quite a big impact and a larger interaction with the university management would have been beneficial to students in terms of developing both sides of the debate on current higher education systems. Some students valued the guest lecture from the IATL director in terms of the activities being interesting though it was also found to be lacking in terms of offering information about management of the university. A sense of tension between the module and university management was picked up on and given as a possible reason for the cancelled lecture and the lack of more 'incendiary' speakers.

References

IATL Modules Team, 2015. *Reimagining the University Module Page.* [Online]
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[Accessed 10 August 2016].

Appendices

APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW DESIGN

<u>Interview Themes</u>

- ➢ **Learning / academic value of module -** research skills, critical thinking skills, value of course content within a wider context.
- ➢ **Quality of teaching -** teaching style and design and execution of the module by module conveners.
- ➢ **Value of course materials -** the website and the lecture notes.
- ➢ **Participation and retention –** current student's attendance/enrolment, reasons for low enrolment/inconsistent attendance, suggestions for improving participation/retention.
- ➢ **Value of specific planned elements of the course:** visit to the modern record centre (2 sessions) and guest lecturers.

<u>Possible Interview Questions</u>

<u>Why do students choose the course? Is it well advertised?</u>

1) Why did you decide to attend the module?

2) Why did you (not) take the module for credit?

3) Have you seen the course webpage?

[If "yes"] What do you think of it?

<u>What was done well? What needs to be improved?</u>

4) What do you think you gained most from this course?

5) Which part of the course did you find most enjoyable?

6) What do you think could be improved about the structure and content of the module?

7) What do you think could be improved about the teaching of the module?

8) Do you feel that there were a good range of speakers across the module?

<u>Has the course achieved its goals and been academically beneficial for participants?</u>

9) There were two sessions held in the archives at the Modern Records Centre. Did you attend either or both of these sessions?

[If "yes"] Were the sessions helpful and would you feel capable of accessing the archives independently now?

10) Did you find the lecture notes and handouts useful?

11) Has the course improved your research skills?

12) Do you think you were challenged to critically analyse current systems and to create your own solutions for public universities?

Increasing Participation and Retention

13) What do you think could be done to improve participation and retention for this course?

APPENDIX 2 - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS AND NOTES

Interview 1 - Transcription - Mark

I: With the 'Reimagining the University' Module, why did you decide to attend the sessions in the first place?

Mark: It was a very relevant topic to what's going on in the university right now and what I'm experiencing at the university because I'm a tutor in the English department on a fixed term contract. And so what they were talking about helped explain to me, basically, my careers choices [laughs], you know and what limits those career choices. So it was very relevant to me as staff at Warwick.

I: Did you see the, err, the course webpage, before you decided to go to any of the sessions?

Mark: I talked to the tutor before I decided to go so I knew what was going to be in the course, I think before the course webpage had been made. I think I did see the course webpage at some point.

I: Ok. What do you think is the most important thing that you've gained from going to the sessions, for you personally?

Mark: I really liked the work that they did with the, what is it called – the modern documents archives?

I: The Modern Records Centre.

Mark: Yeah that one, the modern records archives. I really liked the work they did there because in many ways that took the theory that was being discussed and made it real with evidence. So that was a very useful session for me.

I: Did you go to both of the sessions or just one of them?

Mark: No, just one of them.

I: Ok. Had you been to the Modern Records Centre before to access the archives?

Mark: I had only gone once but I didn't go to access archives, I went to do some research on my own dissertation a few years ago.

I: Do you think you would be more likely to go now after having that session?

Mark: Yeah, absolutely! I know what they have there now and if I were to go and work on a topic I would know where to find the archival information.

I: Ok. Are there any particular sessions, apart from going to the archives, which stand out as something that was really enjoyable or interesting? Or any part of the sessions?

Mark: Well, first I'm going to say that I didn't go to all of them: I didn't have time, I wasn't registered on the course - I was auditing and I didn't have time to go to all of them. Of the ones that I went to, there were – I don't remember which one it was – there was a session where Steven Barrell was breaking down the history of the university and especially of the political economy of the university and that was very interesting to me.

I: Ok, cool. So how many sessions do you think you went to?

Mark: I think I went to four.

I: Ok. From those sessions, is there anything which you think could be changed about the structure of those sessions or the content, from what you saw of the module?

Mark: Content? – No, I thought the content was great. He looked at it from two points of view: he came at it from the university administration point of view in the first half and then in the second half he looked at it from the student, and I guess really the stakeholders in the university, looked at it from that point of view - So that was really good. In terms of the… what was the first thing you asked about?

I: So the structure, of the module in general but in in particular session that you went to.

Mark: Mhmm. So he would usually - so Steven and Chris would usually start with a bit of lecture and then there would be a bit of discussion and then in the second half there would be mostly discussion. I see that as *correct* [laughs], I don't have any critique of that. I think it would have been better if there were more students in there but that' not something they could have controlled. Because more students would have generated more conversation so maybe in the future – I don't know how you get more students into a class that IATL puts on…more advertisement? I don't know – I think more student would have…

I: That's actually something I wanted to ask you: if you had any suggestions for things that might attract more students or reasons why people aren't attending the module.

Mark: If there's a way of linking the interdisciplinarity of the module to other departments, like for instance, English Lit. I think that might work.

I: Ok, cool. Did you see any of the guest speakers, the guest lecturers?

Mark: Erm, I didn't. I was one of the guest speakers for –

I: Oh, ok.

Mark: - for half of, actually about 20 minutes. I saw myself. I didn't get a chance to see the other ones. I would have loved to have gone to see Thomas Doherty.

I: Yeah.

Mark: Because he was my doctoral supervisor.

I: Oh ok.

Mark: And is my colleague now.

I: He is very good at speaking. With Chris and Steven, do you think there is anything that could be improved with their lecturing or teaching... at all?

Mark: I think I with Steven.... umm.... he engages, he does engage. What I want to say is: engage with the students a little bit more. He does engage but his lecturing style - he does a bit walking and talking and it was a big room so he could easily do that, right. An d that's fine for that kind of, I don't know, you know? I mean, yeah, it's fine for an intellectual – and he is an intellectual – but, you need to engage with the student and you need to look at the student a bit more. And actually that is something I've told him so, you know. Chris, I had no critique of Chris. Steven did more of the lecturing, he had more of the theory going on but the bit that Chris did I thought was fine.

I: Did you make use of the lecture notes at all, the handouts that they gave out?

Mark: Well, I would have probably made use of them had I enrolled in the class and done the assignments but I didn't so there was no need on that level to make use of them. But what they gave us is something I have and I've kept and if I come around to write about that at some point – which I'm sure I will – then I'll make use of it.

Interview 2 - Transcription - Jack

I: So, why did you decide to attend the module?

Jack: It's because I'd done some... I'd been involved in the free education stuff in the previous term and I wanted some broader information about where we stand and what sort of trends that was part of. So I thought, I'd quite like an academic perspective to the history of higher education and understanding why I was there and yeah, to see what, the things that were happening, were they specific instances of, if you know what I mean, yeah, something like that.

I: Why didn't you take the module for credit?

Jack: Because it was only in second term and I only have four modules which are each a year long so importantly, I couldn't and also I did really want to do the other ones for credit so yeah, that's why, because I couldn't.

I: And you do English and Film.

Jack: Yeah, yeah, I do English and Film.

I: Have you seen the course webpage?

Jack: Yeah... erm...

I: What did you think of it?

Jack: I... remember it being alright... it looks a bit drier than the content actually is. So, the 'History of the NUS' as a subject heading sounds a little bit dry but is pretty interesting in practice. It looked pretty well structured. And also the conversations that we actually had sprawled out in really good ways, beyond the stuff that was officially for that week, which I think was another virtue of it, yeah.

I: So what do you think you gained most from the course?

Jack: I think understanding my, well, in a way, I guess my personal position, as in the things that have been on my mind about being a uni generally, sort of giving more context to them. And yeah, more context to the stuff that was going on at university at that point, so yeah that's sort of what I found most valuable from it.

I: And which part of the course did you find the most enjoyable?

Jack: As in..? Seminar?

I: Yeah a session or an activity or something like that.

Jack: There are a couple of seminars, I can't remember which weeks they were in particular. But there was one where we went 45minutes to half an hour over the end of the time and that discussion was really good. Yeah, quite a few times the seminars went over the time and we covered loads of topics in relation to what we were talking about. That's the thing I found the best. There were quite a few fun weeks. In terms of which topics as well?

I: No, just more in terms of the teaching and the activities.

Jack: Yeah, a few of the activities were pretty fun, there was one where we had to run for president the same week that the actual [Student Union] presidential campaign was happening and that was pretty fun. But actually the open seminars were my favourite parts.

I: What do you think could be improved about the structure and the content of the module? So, what's in it and how it's set out?

Jack: Erm... I think the content was pretty good...there was one thing I read a bit about afterwards which I would have, as in, what is the most alternative idea of what education should be for. As in, what is the most idealistic view of education? So I guess it was good in that it was grounded in the actual British university system but erm, yeah, I would have liked some really far out concepts of what would have been eful. I read a bit of a book about this Paris commune. There was a section in that about their education system and I think that kind of thing was really interesting, yeah, just to see exactly how...

I: like what would be the other end of the spectrum?

Jack: Yeah, yeah, like what would be the perfect way to integrate education with life. So I would have liked some more stuff about that I think.

I: And, what do you think could be improved about the teaching?

Jack: I thought the teaching was really good, the lectures were all really good and the seminars worked really well. I think I probably enjoyed the regular lectures and seminars more than the guest ones but then again it was interesting having them in relation to each other. To be taught by one of the management people, it was really interesting actually. Erm, but that felt more like an exercise than being taught in a way because we had our perspective on the management's approach. Yeah, I thought the teaching was really strong. Maybe....[pause]..more....reading, a longer time beforehand. Maybe if I'd read a couple of other books on higher education before - Not just as in weekly reading because I wouldn't have had time for it at all - but if I had a better stock of knowledge beforehand it would have

been even more useful. So yeah, pretty much all I'd read beforehand was Warwick University ltd. and a bunch of articles, I guess. I hadn't read any yeah I hadn't read any books on British higher education.

I: So, did you feel like there were a good range of speakers across the module?

Jack: Yeah! Erm, I missed one, I can't remember who that was and there was that week when somebody didn't come, that was going to be good but erm…. I'm trying to remember who we had. We had a management person one time, which was quite interesting. He was like a little bit - because I mean he seemed pretty cool actually, he seemed smart, sympathetic and also sympathetic to the management side of stuff. Which I guess the course is slightly angled against. Yeah, so I enjoyed that. The week where we had to lay out the pictures, I quite liked, but I found that a little bit erm…kind of confusing [laughs]. I'm trying to remember who the other speakers were….[pause]….I spoke to a Dr. Paul Smith who's in the Art History department and he said that he was there in, maybe 1970 or something like that. I think he would have been really useful, I think he would have been interesting.

I: Yeah, there's also someone in Maths, in Statistics, who is a really cool guy. He spoke at one of the first occupations and he was in the old, old occupations.

Jack: Yeah, I would have really like to see that.

I: Yeah, that's an interesting idea. So, there were – I'm told there were two sessions held at the modern records centre, in the archives. Did you attend either of those?

Jack: I actually missed both of them but I went that week to look at the stuff they got out because I had some…I can't remember what it was but I couldn't make them. But I went and had a look just on my own to look through the stuff and that I LOVED actually. Yeah, there was so much stuff, I didn't really know what to look at but the graphics in particular I thought were really fun, old boar articles, stuff like that – seeing cartoons that they did ages ago.

I: So do you think you would have done that if you hadn't been on the course? Have you accessed the modern records centre another time?

Jack: I… I did one other time but that was after going to it because of the course so I wouldn't have done it otherwise. That was actually because, that guy Paul Smith, I saw there and he said he'd just put a box in of s stock that he had when he was a student so I went to try to find that. Yeah and also if they hadn't got out those materials I would have just been too bewildered to know what to ask for I think. Yeah, so that was useful actually.

I: Were the lectures notes useful, the handouts?

Jack: Yeah, yeah the lecture notes and lectures were pretty similar I think. As in, a lot of the content from the lectures were in the lecture notes. But I still think I probably would remember it a lot better because of the lectures, I don't really remember stuff. Yeah the lecture notes were pretty full actually, four or five pages long, yeah, they had a lot of information in.

I: Ok, cool. Do you think that doing the module has improved your research skills at all?

Jack: I never wanted to look at archives and stuff like that before I – I literally had zero interest in that – but I found it really fun. I didn't realise how it – what do I want to say – it brings it to life but yeah, kind of. I wasn't doing it for any end though, I wasn't researching for a specific thing so… the thing is, in my course we don't really do research like that, it's mostly just watching and reading critiques and whatever. So, it was good to do something at all like research while at uni. Yeah, it could be useful, I'll guess we'll see.

I: Do you think you were challenged to critically analyse current systems and come up with your own solutions for public universities?

Jack: Yeaaah. As in, the critical analysis was really strong, I don't think I reached any personal conclusions as to what to do and how to have an impact. It's also like, towards the end of my third year so, I wish I'd had that perspective from the beginning. Like, I tried to tell my brother some of this stuff, erm, because he's just joining – well he's going to Glasgow now –

I: Oh really?

Jack: Yeah, I think it is useful to position yourself throughout. So, by the time I knew all that stuff I was having exams and that kind of thing. Yeah, I don't know what…[pause]… as in, did it make me know what I wanted to do in relation to it?

I: Well, just about… if you are challenging ideas of the current system, did you come up with any of your own conclusions about… do you think they pushed you to come up with your own conclusions about what could be done to change things? What are alternatives?

Jack: Yeah, I think so. But now I'm trying to think, what actual conclusions did it lead me to make in terms of what should happen…[pause]… I think, on a very personal level, it was useful tonot feel like an idiot for not being careerist at Warwick because I think otherwise that is so pervasive that you feel like, what's wrong with me? I'm not working for KPMG [laughs]. So it's useful to have perspective from people who aren't doing that or maybe not wanting to. Yeah, I think it didn't, as in, I don't think it force fed me conclusions but also, I don't know if I could say I've got an absolutely solid, a complete understanding of the British university system.

I: Ok, final question. What do you think could be done to improve participation and retention in the course?

Jack: As in… participation of people auditing it and people taking it…?

I: Yeah, as in, both things, so people auditing it and people taking it for credit as well.

Jack: I think if any people are vaguely interested and come to the first few, it will get them to come to the rest of them. So maybe, if I hadn't gone to the earlier ones and I'd only gone to the last few then I wouldn't have been as into it. So… I think there are plenty of people who are interested in the higher education stuff and I think making it their go to thing for a broader context would be really useful. But I don't know how to go about that. And then… I don't know if people are more or less likely to go to it if they don't audit it, erm, sorry, if they do it for marks or not. I really enjoyed the fact that I didn't do it for marks because it just, I don't know, it felt a little more comfortable. But I guess they do need people to do it for marks don't they?

I: Yeah, you need a minimum number of people and sometimes when people audit things they don't have the same motivation to go and when other work gets on top of them they stop going.

Jack: Yeah, but I think I did the reading almost every week and I found it almost something more to look forward to than a module you have a duty to go to. So, personally I think that worked for me, to not do it for marks. I don't know, I don't know how you get better retention. [pause] Yeah, I don't know how it works normally, modules build up a reputation and get more people year on year, erm, because I think only two or three people did it for marks – so I don't know why they did it for marks, that's perhaps…..yeah, I'm not sure I can help with that one.

Interview 3 - Transcription - Sophia

I: So, why did you decide to attend the sessions of the module?

Sophia: Oh, erm [pause] I guess because I do research in higher education but the approach at my research centre is relatively apolitical and that's always bothered me and I always thought, "how can I know such minutia about higher education but not know the biggest things going on" and so when I heard about the course I thought that would be a really perfect way to fill in the other side. Because, you know, I look at teaching and learning practices in the classroom and you feel the effects of the kinds of things we talked about in the course but we kind of studiously avoid looking too closely at them, so that was nice.

I: Ok, cool. How many of the sessions did you attend?

Sophia: All but one.

I: But you didn't take it for credit did you because you're –

Sophia: No I didn't take it for credit.

I: - like, a staff member.

Sophia: Yeah.

I: Did you – before you decided to go to the sessions – did you see the website?

Sophia: Yeah I did, yeah.

I: What did you think of the course webpage?

Sophia: Do you mean the page that had the syllabus and quizzes on it?

I: Yeah, well originally the set out of the module, like what was included in the module and then all the other things.

Sophia: Yeah…I thought it was informative. It's like part of the Warwick infrastructure right, it has the Warwick branding at the top. That's it right?

I: Yeah.

Sophia: Yeah, I thought the syllabus…..[pause]… - the course plan, whatever it was – useful actually, I used it to propose to my boss that I could take the module during work time. I used it in that way as well [laughs].

I: And that worked? So you said you attended most of the module, what do you think you got the most out of it?

Sophia: Erm, I felt like the beginning was more useful for me than the end but that's because of what – not that it was better, it was just more what I'd come looking for – which was kind of an overview of the bigger currents going on and the history of the public university, all that kind of stuff. In terms of the activism stuff, it's interesting but ….not the reason I wanted to come to the class. I thought it was really cool they were doing that with the class and I enjoyed it but yeah, I'd say the first half. Especially the first session was really, really perfect for me.

I: So the second half, has that changed your opinions, your approach to it?

Sophia: Err…

I: So originally you didn't think you were going for that, did you change your mind at all?

Sophia: Well, I mean, I agree with it, I'm on board, it's just not…..erm…..sort of, for the things I was trying to fill in it's not where I had the big questions if you know what I mean.

I: Yeah. What do you think was the most enjoyable part of the course, either a particular session or activity?

Sophia: I mean I came back voluntarily the whole time so I enjoyed the whole thing. I guess I probably liked the lecture parts the best because not being a student I never get the lectures. I'm involved in discussions all the time as a researcher and involved in erm – but I rarely listen to lectures so probably the lectures.

I: Do you think there were a good range of guest speakers? Like, do you include that in what you mean by lectures?

Sophia: No, I mostly mean Stephen and Chris's. The guest lectures were, they were fine but yeah, Stephen and Chris.

I: Do you think there is anything they could perhaps improve, Stephen and Chris, in their teaching or their lecturing?

Sophia: Erm…..well I'll actually start on something I think they did well and [laughs]. I thought it was interesting with the…well I've never, I don't think I ever can remember, back when I was a student, having a group that was so aware about gender roles and speaking up and whenever there was a man who just dominated the situation you could feel everyone noticing it. And that was cool. It was sort of really tangible in a way, like, the kind of, I mean you still did have a lot more men speaking a lot but it was like the awareness of it among to teachers and the other students made it, like, [laughs] made it good. That was cool. Erm… and, yeah, I mean the only thing that could have improved the class really was a bit more stability in the participants so you could know what had been discussed a bit more, the kind of in and out. Like the first four weeks of it there was like 60% of the people in the class were different each time and so erm…yeah, maybe a bit more commitment from the other people attending.

I: Do you have any ideas of why that might be? I think only three people took it for credit and as you said there were lots of people going in and out, not really staying as consistently as you did. Do you have any insight into why that might be or suggestions in how to improve the course participation?

Sophia: Yeah, I mean, I think with, I think it must be an issue with getting actually more enrolled students, because they should be the ones who – [chuckles] actually I think it is was the auditors who were more consistently attending than the enrolled students. Erm… I have no idea why it is not more popular for enrollment but I also don't feel I can answer that because not being a student at Warwick I don't know how it fits into people's needs for their degree, in terms of what types of classes they need to attend. But, if I were Steven and Chris I would be asking the exact same question. I don't know the answer.

I: Ok, fair enough. You said that you preferred the first half to the second half in terms of the content. What would you like to see improve or changed in terms of the structure and content of the module?

Sophia: Ok, well I think that, I imagine that their vision for the second half was shaped by the fact that they had so few, had to be adjusted to the fact that they had so few enrolled students. That like, so few of the people there were actually doing the final project that maybe they just had to talk about it less. But I can see that like in the vision you would have the building up of this cool project and that instead they had all these auditors that weren't actually doing the project. I wouldn't change it. I mean, I don't know, I thought the structure was great, I don't know.

I: Did you go to both of the modern record centre sessions?

Sophia: Only the second one.

I: Ok, only the second one. Did you find it helpful going to the archives?

Sophia: Yeah, that was really, that was great. That was definitely a good idea.

I: Have you done it before?

Sophia: Not there.

I: Ok. Do you think, now that you've been with the group, you'd be more likely to access the archives yourself?

Sophia: I did actually and I brought my partner there to so I had three more visits.

I: Ok, that's great. So, I know you didn't do the project near the end but through the discussions and the different activities – and I know there was some group work as well – do you think *you* were challenged to critically analyse current systems and come up with your own solutions?

Sophia: Erm….[pause]…I think… we definitely were challenged to analyse the systems, the current systems, but I don't know if we all took it seriously enough: to come up with solutions. I think an in

class activity, an ungraded in class activity can easily become fun, more fun than serious. And I think that that activity – I think it was the last day – took a kind of humorous turn and I think we did reflect on some things but not – I wouldn't say we were challenged to come up with new systems in that day. They tried but [laughs] herding cats.

I: Yeah, I've heard some of the suggestions.

Sophia: I think people could have engaged a bit more, Stephen and Chris…[laughs]

I: Stephen and Chris?

Sophia: Stephen and Chris did great, it was more like, any places where the course fell down a little bit was where they had to respond to there not being that real of a body there interacting with them. You know, they had this fluctuating, "How many people are going to show up today?" kind of thing and I thought that sort of made it a real challenge for them.

I: Yeah, that's the problem with participation. I guess it would be different, like you said, if there were a decent and consistent group there.

Sophia: Yeah and it's not nice to think that things need to be marked for people to take things seriously but if there had been at least a few more students that were there for credit it might have put a bit more serious element to some activities. The discussions I think people took more seriously, absolutely.

I: Yeah, because they ran over a little bit?

Sophia: Yeah, the discussion were absolutely, probably improved by not being marked but just some of those activities… [laughs].

Interview 4 - Transcription - Carl

I: So the first question is: Why did you decide to take the module in the first place?

Carl: Well, I'm quite interested in that kind of stuff – so I'm actually not a student at the moment, I'm not an undergraduate or a postgraduate, I'm a postdoctoral researcher – but, I knew Chris from before and I had met Steven a couple of times before and I heard they were doing this class and it sounded like an interesting set of discussions. So that's why I went.

I: Did you go to all of the sessions?

Carl: No, well I travel quite a lot so I would probably say I missed three or four weeks out of the… I guess there were only ten or eleven. So I did miss quite a few at the middle end of the course.

I: When you decided to – you said it was because you knew Chris and you knew Steven – did you have a look at the course webpage as well?

Carl: I did, yeah. I think they sent around a copy of the syllabus or some bits of reading material beforehand, so I was quite into what they were talking about.

I: Do you have any memory of the course webpage at all or any comments about it?

Carl: No, I don't have any memory of it, sorry.

I: That's ok. So overall what do you think you gained most from going to the sessions?

Carl: Err, so I'm most familiar with the way that the higher education system in the US is set up so I certainly learned a lot about how it is set up here in the UK. Well, more than I probably would have otherwise. You know, just in terms of how things are administered, how things are organised, that sort of thing. I'd say that's probably the biggest, you know, tangible thing that I got out of it. But, err, having conversations about how to affect change within that framework…erm… you know, these aren't conversations that you normally have so it's nice to have – I found that pretty rewarding and interesting.

I: Yeah, a few people have already spoken a bit about that, like the conversations running over after classes. Erm, you were talking about coming up with solutions and ways to affect change, do you think you were challenged to come up with your own solutions for the system?

Carl: Yeah, yeah definitely. I quite enjoyed the last bit of the course they did where people were meant to break off and come up with a manifesto, like a campaign manifesto. But I think it went a little further than that even, I think people started coming up with creative ways to engage student, I think – so I quite enjoyed that.

I: Can you think of anything else which you would say was your most enjoyable part of the course, either a session or a particular part of the sessions.

Carl: Erm…[pause]. I'm trying to think of what sticks out in my mind. I have to say, I thought everyone was really engaged, I think it was a really good opportunity – I don't typically take courses like that, I do stuff in the sciences, so I don't know how common that is. But I enjoyed the fact that out of the 10…15or 20 people who were there, most people participated in the conversation. There weren't a lot of people who just kind of sat there silent and everyone had some piece of perspective or at least idea

to contribute, almost every week. So I really quite enjoyed that about it was sort of – the atmosphere was quite liberated in the sense that people felt very comfortable with, sort of, saying wither what they felt or what they were struggling with thinking about.

I: Mmm. Yeah, the participants it seems were really engaged and a lot of them turned up to many or all of the sessions but overall there was quite a lot of erm – there wasn't much consistency with the people who attended the course and not many people took it for credit. I know you're a postdoc student but could you…offer any insight into why you think that is?

Carl: Why I think that…?

I: That people aren't attending consistently as well as the fact that not many attend it for credit.

Carl: Yeah, I mean I don't – I really can't speak to how courses like that typically go. Erm, I sort of quite like the informal nature of it, the fact that, you know, there wasn't a… there wasn't like this commodified sense of… you know, you come to this class and then you participate and that directly maps into some… some, you know, grade or some credit. It was more plutonic, it was more, let's have a… let's just hash it out. But, I literally never took courses like that as an undergrad so I really can't speak to it with much…knowledge.

I: Ok, that's fine. Is there anything that you would have liked to see changed or included in terms of the structure or content of the module?

Carl: Yeah I would have liked to see somebody from the university participate other than the IATL director. I mean, he was meant to represent, sort of, the current administration and talk about that. And that – I was there that day – I found it almost a waste of time. A lot of that session was: we were given a bunch of pictures and we were meant to draw some narrative around that. So we split off in two groups and did that. And it was just really abstract and vague and, you know, it was kind of like, whatever you wanted to get out of it, you got out of it. It was like a Rorschach test and err, that was, it would have been a nice environment for somebody from the university to say: this is why we do certain things, this is why…and I think, because - certainly Chris and Steven to a lesser extent – because they are involved in activism on campus, that it is seen as sort of contrary to the administration. I think they felt a big level of fear that they would just come in and get, not physically attacked but you know, given a really hard time. And I really, I think that was almost the opposite attitude to what everyone else in the class had. I don't think anybody there really agrees with the way that the university is currently run, do you know what I mean? I think there was a certain level of interest in the course just because a lot of people feel disaffected by the way that the university is governed. But I thought it was a really good opportunity to say – for someone from the university, whether it was the registrar or

someone even higher – to come in and say, look these are the realities under which we operate and…. yeah, I think this narrative got developed about halfway through the course that a lot of the people could do better but really they are forced into the way they operate because really that's just how neoliberalism operates and the university is part of the neoliberal structure. And that narrative really took hold. And I think in some sense a lot of the people on the course may have softened the way they feel about people personally in the university. Erm, and so, yeah, I was really quite disappointed, personally, that the only time the university – And it was kind of sold as, originally, one of the pro-VCs was going to take part in one of the classes and sort of backed out at the last minute. Erm and I thought that was really disappointing, that would have really been a good opportunity to – forgive me, I think you work in IATL so I think you know who the director is, what's his name?

I: I don't work in IATL, I'm just employed for and I do know his name is just doesn't come to mind right now.

Carl: So anyway -

I: I mean, I was told that there was someone else, someone who came to speak to the group and do a session from the university in terms of….

Carl: So that was scheduled but it then it never took place as far as I understand it. He was sort of the ambassador for that. I mean, he was a really nice guy and he was quite friendly but you know what, he sort of did all these things and it felt like a bit of a waste of time and then finally we got to ask him about how the university runs because you know he is quite involved in a lot of the administrative side of things. And err, he sort of had this attitude that everybody was going to be sort of hostile to him and that was sort of the very opposite of what happened so erm, yeah, yeah anyway, I did think that was a kind of missed opportunity from the universities side. I mean, granted all of these people are busy and I'm sure they don't want to take too much time to do it but it did – this was a bit of an organic organisation of several students, more than a dozen students who were participating in this so it would have been a pretty good exchange of ideas and discussion that didn't really take place.

I: So do you think that there could have been a better range of speakers that was more representative of both sides?

Carl: Erm, yeah but I don't really put that at the fault of the organisers of the class. I think there wasn't any participation from the university's side of things if you see what I'm saying?

I: Yeah. In terms of Chris and Stephen's teaching in general, is there anything you think could be improved about that?

Carl: No, they have a pretty good, they have a pretty good Penn and Teller routine going, I think [chuckles] Chris is more the Teller, you know, quite quiet and Stephen is quite, he's verbose. So he's the Penn of the two and I think that dynamic works out really well. You know, they're both pretty sharp so it works well.

I: Ok, just one last thing, you said you missed a few sessions, did you attend the modern records centre sessions?

Carl: No, I was out of town for that, I think they did two?

I: Yeah, they did two.

Carl: I certainly know I was out of town for one and I might have been out of town for both, I don't recall.

I: Ok and did you make use of any of the lectures notes, the handouts that were given out?

Carl: Yeah, definitely! I think the one that was quite useful was one about the history of different governance structures in the UK for higher education. I do remember that one being very useful. I mean, it's very dry and generally quite boring but as I said I didn't know how any of this stuff was or is organised so I found that really interesting.

Interview 5 - Nia

I: So I've heard from others that you attended most or all of the sessions. Can you remember, did you attend all of them?

Nia: Erm, I attended all but one.

I: Ok. And why did you decide to attend the sessions in the first place?

Nia: It's probably because I've never seen any module about, focused specifically on, universities. Because I study Sociology anyway and so we study things like education but never specifically universities. I felt like it was a really interesting time to take the module, erm, like I pay nine grand fees and I come from a family who didn't have to pay fees and I was the first one so I thought it would be interesting to take

I: Ok. And did you take it for credit?

Nia: Yeah I did.

I: Ok. Before you decided to take the module did you see the course webpage?

Nia: Yeah I did.

I: And what did you think about it?

Nia: Yeah, I thought it was good, I feel like there was a video of like, I mean I know there was a taster thing which I missed because I didn't know it was on. Yeah, the website was really good, it's good that they had like what each week was going to be about and stuff erm, yeah it was pretty good.

I: Ok, cool. So what do you think overall you gained personally most from the course?

Nia: Erm, mmm [pause] I probably have never thought of universities in the way we did, for example like, looking historically at the way that universities, the structure of universities. I never realized the impact that it has today, so the way that students engage with, for example, vice chancellors, that has completely shifted my view. Also I had no idea about the way that the student loan system actually worked, erm, and like the huge black hole of the student loan system and the way that it keeps being – I know that David Cameron tried to sell it off recently – yeah, I didn't really know much about that. The impact it's had on me is to just think more in a lot more connected way. For example, because I study Sociology, I find race really interesting and that's what I kind of want to do my dissertation on next year and I didn't realise the way that I could put my own ideas for things like race for example within universities. To see how they all contextually link up is really interesting.

I: So do you think the sessions helped you do that? Make that link between race, historically, and universities?

Nia: Yeah, definitely because I feel like Chris and Stephen were really, really good at like whenever I said – I remember I told Stephen I was interested in race and like straight away he was telling me about all these things, things that my other tutors would never take the time to really sit and talk to me. And I always felt like the sessions that I went to, they would always overrun because people were just so interested in it. Which has never happened in any other classes that I took.

I: Mmm, yeah I've heard that from a few people. Could you pick out one part of the structure of the sessions or one particular session or activity that you thought was most enjoyable?

Nia: We had one session where – I don't know if he was from management, I think he was – someone from management came to teach us and he just gave us loads of cards with images on and he was just like, "Find the link between them", and it was just really interesting working in that way. I also liked that we were able to do presentations on what we found interesting like, I know I did one on the Prevent legislation which was coming through to curb extremism in the UK but it also had a big influence on

universities. Erm, and I know that Charles Macdonald did one on student activism and the imagery that they use so it was really interesting kind of hearing about other people's interests because I could never think about the way that student activism is portrayed in the images that they use. So yeah, that was really good.

I: Do you think it was an issue that only a few people ended up doing the project and presenting it to others? I think only three people took it for credit, perhaps.

Nia: Yeah, I wish everyone else had done it so I could talk to more people because I only really got to speak to Chris and Steven about the project because it would have been really good to speak to other people who were doing it. Because there was so much scope that you could do your project on that it would have been really interesting to hear what other people got out of the course.

I: Yeah, do you think, do you have any suggestions for ways they could improve participation in the course?

Nia: Do you mean in the like actual sessions or…

I: So both, people attending sessions more consistently but also more people taking the module for credit.

Nia: Oh ok. I feel like if you're taking it for credit people like – because I told people on my course that I was taking it for credit and they were like "Oh my god, what if you don't know anything?" – I think they need to market it that you don't need to know much about universities to go and do the course. Because when I told people about the course I think they thought I already knew something about it and that's why I'd taken it. In terms of participation, I think having more student led stuff would be really good like, for example, when we did presentations I found that really interesting to see what other people were reflecting on differently to me on the course. Because some of the sessions – as great as Stephen is - were just Stephen talking [laughs] and as interesting as he is and intelligent as he is, it would have been good to have a bit more structure. Just sometimes I would listen to him for ages and just write nothing and then at the end of the sessions I'd be like "oh shit, what have I actually taken from this apart from listening to his really interesting thoughts?" Yeah I think a bit more structure would be really good.

I: Yeah, that's really interesting. Is there anything else you can think of in the structure or perhaps the content of the module that you think could be improved? So you've already picked up on perhaps more student-led activities.

Nia: I think more of like the global - I mean the thing is it's so limited by ten weeks, it's so annoying - but a more global view of universities would be really interesting. I sent a pdf to Steven and Chris about academic freedom for a lot of academics in the US and how that interacts with race, I thought that would have been really interesting. I also think, a lot of it was, there was a lot of theory that I didn't quite know much about…. so yeah, it would have been good in the first few sessions to say to people, "You don't need to know loads, you'll pick it up."

I: Yeah. Did you find the lecture notes useful in that?

Nia: Yeah, the lectures notes were really, really good, they were excellent.

I: Cool. So the teaching…you've already said some good things and perhaps some things that could be improved, perhaps from Stephen. Can you think of any other aspects of the teaching from Chris and Steven that could be improved?

Nia: Erm, I just think structure is really needed because everything that was said was so interesting but sometimes I didn't quite see how it related to the course in general. I really feel like if it was just a tiny bit more structured it would have been excellent. Erm… let me think… I'm glad that we didn't have lecture slides. Yeah, if they were going to do it next year I wouldn't like want to see lecture slides, personally. But no, I think it was done really well, especially for its first year.

I: Ok. So, one of the sessions that you missed, that wasn't at the modern records centre, was it?

Nia: No, no, no, I went to the modern records centre.

I: Ok, so you went to both of the modern records centre sessions?

Nia: Yeah.

I: Ok. Do you think they were helpful, the sessions?

Nia: Yeah, they were really good. It's really like – It was nice to just actually see the student activism actually physically, because talking about it is one thing but to actually see it was really interesting. And it was also really useful for when I did my project because then I had the skills to go and actually know what I was looking for again.

I: So did you go back to the modern records centre afterwards?

Nia: Yeah, I went back like three times [laughs] and I know that other people on the course did as well. I went back to help my research about boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel and how universities

can interact with that. And the NUS had already done work on Palestine and South Africa prior to that so I kind of went through NUS records at the modern records centre.

I: Ok, cool. Do you think doing that project improved your research skills?

Nia: Yeah, massively, massively. Because they gave us so much control over what we wanted to do, I had never been given a piece of work that was so independent before and so it was really good because it gave me that incentive to work on my research skills and something like, whilst I kind of know a bit about Palestine-Israel, I don't know a huge amount so it was a really good way for me to improve my research skills.

I: Ok, one last question: Do you think you were challenged to critically analyse current systems and to create your own solutions for public universities?

Nia: I would definitely say I was challenged to think critically of current systems. Like I said earlier, I didn't know much about student loan systems despite taking out maximum loan myself and it's really made me think know when I read the newspapers about universities, I can definitely see how everything links together more. And that's one of the best things about the course, it's really changed the way I think about universities and students and how they interact and I can see it all the time now. But I wouldn't really say, like alternatives, I wouldn't really look at that to come up with my own. I remember in one of the sessions we were given this page that was like, funding the universities and you had to come up with your own solution. But it was just kind of given to us and we didn't discuss it but I think that was just an issue of time. Erm, but it would have been good to think more about alternative systems and whatever.

I: So is that something you would like to see more built into the course?

Nia: Yeah, that would be really interesting.

Interview 6 - Transcription - Teresa

I: Ok, so in the first place, why did you decide to go to some of the sessions for this module.

Teresa: Well, I felt really unclear what it would be about in a way, which, to me, was a bonus because it meant that I might be able to learn some things that were really new to me. Erm, because I find that if you go to a course where you don't even fully understand what they're saying in the description that can actually be really good because it means that you're going to learn totally new frameworks or

paradigms. So that's why I thought it sounded good and other people who were studying it told me it had been really interesting, so it was kind of positive comments as well.

I: Was this the description on the webpage?

Teresa: I think it was, I think it was the one on the IATL, yeah, description.

I: What did you think about that in general, the course webpage?

Teresa: I don't think I felt really all that clear what it was about but the fact that other people gave me good comments about it and I knew a bit about the people teaching it and I thought they had an interesting approach so I thought that anything they did, I would probably find interesting.

I: Ok. How many sessions, roughly, did you attend?

Teresa: I think I went to six. I'm not sure if they were all exactly in a row but once I started going I tried to go to it regularly because I was getting a lot out of it.

I: Ok, cool. So, you said you were getting a lot out of it, what would you say would be the thing that you gained most from the course?

Teresa: Yeah, it's a bit vague really but I'd say, just realising the context we live in because I think that we just tend to treat the world as being natural and in quite a natural state and I think that, you know, good education should make you realise the context you're in and make things visible that weren't visible to you before. So, I think one thing it showed me was the way that, erm – sort of what the dominate culture is in education, what it has been and the ways people think about it. Which I had always seen as sort of a given or a natural because growing up, if you were lucky enough to go to university you will have lived through years at least of education or so and so it just feels so natural and I think you take in all the norms and cultural ideas that are fed to you and the way you're taught as well. That is the context of how education happens. So it's really interesting to take a step back from it and actually think about education.

I: Mmm, yeah. Over the six sessions you went to, what particular part of it, or session or element of the sessions did you find most enjoyable?

Teresa: The group discussion were really good. I thought they were really well led and kind of facilitated. Some of the is to do with the group you're getting but I think there was a really good attitude, everyone seemed to have a lot of respect for each other and that was modelled by the leaders. People who came on the course, because it was interdisciplinary, came from different areas so they were kind of bringing different things to it so I think that was really, really interesting. It was also

really nice the way thy brought in outside speakers and took us to the modern records centre so it's really hard to pick one because to the modern records centre and having that on site was so interesting for people to see historically various things that happened. So it's a bit hard to pick one.

I: So do you think there was a good range of speakers overall?

Teresa: Yeah, definitely! I mean, I remember we had one guy - who I've forgotten the name of sadly – who came from the Caribbean studies area which I didn't even know there was at Warwick. And he said he was kind of in another department at Warwick. And he talked about Caribbean student movement, things that happened in Jamaica and things like that and that was just so interesting and really shed light from a new angle and yeah I thought that was really imaginative, the kind of people that they chose to invite in and also, some of the people who were on the course were invited to talk about something relevant. So I actually found that really good as well, not seeing people on the course as people to just be, you know, trained. But rather seeing them as a resource themselves and educational people if that makes sense?

I: Yeah. What about the core teaching and lecturing of the module. So Chris and Steven, do you think anything could be improved in the way they led? Their lecturing style?

Teresa: Not really, I actually really liked both of their styles, they had quite a different approach I'd say. Chris tended to do a lot more facilitating in some ways and I think Steven more tended to give us quite a lot of asides: So he would comment on something and give kind of half sentence about it and that might lead to interesting discussion further and so I think they really bounced off each other really well. I mean, if you only had one of them maybe that person would need to do both things but I think working as a team of two it actually worked really nicely and I think also having two people there and seeing them interact together initially starts provoking that discussion that then the rest of the group go into so it worked really well to have two people.

I: Ok, cool. Erm, in terms of the structure and content of the module, do you think anything could be improved or is there anything you would like to see changed or included?

Teresa: Hmm….there wasn't really anything that struck me at the time. Erm… I mean, I think it could be a longer module which if you see what I mean, it could go on for longer and be split up more and go into more depth because with everything there was always discussions going on at the end and we thought ok we've got to wrap things up and obviously those discussions continued outside the classroom but it would be quite nice to have more scope for them because it's really quite a bog area but.. it was worth doing it in that amount of time as well, it wasn't like, it wasn't worth talking about it because we couldn't cover things. But I think probably if Chris and Steven wanted to cover something

else then I think that would probably prove to be of interest because people seem to be really interested in all the things, I mean everything is very interrelated.

I: Did you make much use of the lecture notes, the handouts?

Teresa: Erm…*yes.* It was very useful because there was a very large amount of dates and especially with things when we were looking at the development of the NUS and it was very hard to keep track of it and I couldn't possibly have tried to note everything down so having quite detailed handouts in terms of things like dates and key happenings was really, really useful in order to get a quite quick overview and also discussing the module later with other people I've called on my lecture notes and been like, "Gosh, can you believe in 86 they nearly brought in student loans and then they didn't and the NUS did this campaign" or whatever, or "There was actually this woman elected in 1940 but there was a re-election so she actually didn't become president." Yeah so it has actually been really interesting.

I: Ok, so do you think it has changed your views or the way you interact with or perhaps how much you are involved in this sort of topic. Because you said you shared this information with others.

Teresa: MmmMmmMmm……..Erm, yeah, erm, well, yeah in an intellectual way yeah, I think I've tried to use it to provoke discussions with other people because I've found it interesting, I want to keep talking about it with other people, so yeah, I guess it has led me to sort of discuss it with others. Yeah, it has sort of come out of the remit of just sort of being the people I would discuss with inside of the lecture room and moved to being other people that I've tried to talk to about it. So that's why it would be nice to be something that keeps going further but yeah it has helped me with others things as well because as I said before, just understanding the context that we live in, that's helped me understand various social movements within that.

I: Ok, that's interesting. So, participation in the course is quite low, only three people took it for credit and other people same to the sessions, some more than others. What do you think could be done to improve participation and retention in the course.

Teresa: I think maybe, although I don't know, IATL might have more of a widespread problem because not everybody I met knew what IATL was or that they could take IATL modules even though quite often they were in a position where they could have done that. So I think it might be part of a wider problem. I also think that… some people might not really feel confident about the skills they have – so if they've been doing mainly, well I don't know which subjects but there are certain subjects where you've mainly done that subject – and although you might be able to take this sort of module you might feel you wouldn't have the sort of skills at a high enough level to it for anything except audit it because you might think "I'm not confident I'll do a really good job" or if you're doing well in other modules. So I

think in a weird way you can kind of be penalised for trying things which is obviously not very good in education. So maybe there's some way that we could offer something within the broader IATL thing and you could have some sessions in the library like, "doing an IATL module, here's a bit of extra support and there's someone there who can help you if it's a new way of thinking for you" because if you were doing a science course I can imagine that doing something like this would be a bit strange for you initially and you might think "well what if I don't do very well" and then you don't really want to put yourself out there so you just don't take any risks which is a pity. So, that's one thing. And I think maybe that would also help with just people who fancy the course but are worried that they might not be able to do a very good assignment because if you're not quite sure what the course is about – I mean I was confident enough to take the course even though I didn't quite understand what it was about because I thought I probably didn't need to do it for…the report fully and things but I might have then felt I couldn't do it because I might not do a very good job and that's just putting myself out a bit. Yeah, so I don't think it's so much about the material but I think it is to do with the assessment and I don't know how the time was for other people but the time for me was ok but it - obviously every year it will change – but some people might have core or interesting looking options in that slot. Probably that's the main ones – I mean I think it's a bit hard to know what the course was about and that didn't actually put me off but maybe other people would be more put off. I don't know if there's a little video on the website, I can't remember, but maybe a little video or presentation on there, you know the ones that run for about a minute, could be quite useful but I can't remember if there was or wasn't one.

Interview 7 - Notes - Ethan

1. **Why did you decide to attend the module?** – doing other IATL modules (psychotherapy one) and was looking through and had 15 CATs left. Knew of Chris and saw that he was teaching it, was excited for the course and also interested in activism.
2. **Why did you (not) take the module for credit?** Took it for credit. Didn't really look at course details much.
3. **Have you seen the course webpage?** No.

    [If "yes"] What do you think of it?

4. **What do you think you gained most from this course?** The discussions, particularly related to activism. Chris and Steven were great teachers, bounced off each other well, learnt a lot. Really well structured sessions.
5. **Which part of the course did you find most enjoyable?**

6. **What do you think could be improved about the structure and content of the module?** Nothing.

7. **What do you think could be improved about the teaching of the module?** Nothing

8. **Do you feel that there were a good range of speakers across the module?** Yes, though feel that they were restricted by university, could have had more incendiary speakers invited.

9. **There were two sessions held in the archives at the Modern Records Centre. Did you attend either or both of these sessions?** Yes, hadn't been before then decided on dissertation title and went back loads of times, Steven pointed him in the right direction and he really got a lot out of it, wealth of resources.

    [If "yes"] Were the sessions helpful and would you feel capable of accessing the archives independently now?

10. **Did you find the lecture notes and handouts useful?**

11. **Has the course improved your research skills?** Definitely, particularly modern records centre

12. **Do you think you were challenged to critically analyse current systems and to create your own solutions for public universities?** I were to sum up experience of the course it would be that, lot of critique, helped in forming own ideas.

13. **What do you think could be done to improve participation and retention for this course?** Better advertising, maybe appeals more the arts and not sciences.