**Interview #7 Transcript: Second Year Female English Student (18.04.18) (University A)**

Interviewer (I): So, why have you chosen to do an English degree at this particular university?

Participant (P): Well, I actually did a year at another university. I did English and Philosophy at [pre-92 Red Brick University]. Choosing English was always – that was the subject I was always good at in school, and then Philosophy was – my great uncle is actually a philosopher so [laughing] like, academically, not just in his own life, but – so I chose that, and then didn’t really get on with the course, but still liked English, and really liked [University A] as a university, it’s close to my home, so yeah, I ended up here.

I: Okay, cool. Are you the first in your family to go to university?

P: Yes, yeah.

I: Okay. What does value for money mean for you? And is it important that you get it from your university?

P: I think, *yeah,* I think – I come from a lower income family, so I think the – accepting the *amount* of student loan also comes with the titbit of having to pay it back so – especially with the increase to £9,250. I think because of *that*, I would appreciate getting the upmost out of that, so I think in terms of, not just the standard of teaching, but, sort of, the equipment available to you being up to standard and all that, sort of, stuff, which I think it is here, really.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you agree with paying fees?

P: Yes *and* no. I agree to pay fees, I don’t think it should be nearly as much as it is. But I understand – I mean I don’t understand the total of it, but isn’t it originally, it was meant that universities like Cambridge and that would offer higher fees? But obviously then everyone wanted the same. So, I think the problem is, it’s all gotten a bit tangled in politics, but no I don’t think it should be anywhere near what it is. But I understand the need for a fee to keep things going, and, like, keep libraries resourced, and equipment in the university, so…

I: Okay. What does being a university student mean to you?

P: See, this is interesting. For me, I *personally* wanted to go to university because my favourite thing to do is study exactly. I like books, I like reading books and I like learning. I didn’t actually go because I wanted a career out of it. So, for me, it’s *that* part, it’s being a student and learning something new. But then I know plenty of people that do it because it’s a means to an end so…

I: Okay. What do you think being a university student means to people outside of the university, or who have never been to university?

P: I think we get a bad reputation [laughing]. I think, having spoken with some of my friends who didn’t *go* the university route, kind of, went straight into employment, they almost see it, instead of being, like, a means to an end, they see it more as, almost, like, a *stasis* period, where you can, kind of, still pretend to be a bit of a kid, for the set amount of years, you’re still a student, you’re still – there’s an invisible hand holding onto you until you’re in the *real* world, and I think that’s how a lot of the outside world views it, instead of being, like, they’re studying for academic purposes or anything like that.

I: Yeah, okay. What meaning does the word engagement have for you?

P: I think, for me, it’s a two-way process, so it’s – if I’m interested in a thing, but also if someone’s *encouraging* the interest. I don’t think it works if it’s just the individual happens to be interested because I think you could be *obsessed* with a subject, but if you’re talking about it for a long amount of time, you’ll get very bored, so…

I: Okay. So, using what you’ve just said, in what ways do academics attempt to engage you as a student?

P: It’s interesting *here*, when I was – I’ll talk comparatively, but when I was at [pre-92 Red Brick University], it was a very, sort of, what I expected stereotypical, so, sort of, a lecture, tutor-student scenario where you were, kind of, talked *at* as opposed to engaged *with*. Whereas here, I’ve actually – it’s been interesting, my course, kind of, we do anything from Drama to, like, PowerPoint presentations with the class, sort of thing, which I quite like, I’m a visual learner so I appreciate that it takes a step beyond just being *talked* at. So, yeah, so this uni’s definitely really good for – especially my tutors, at least, have been really good for making sure that you’re not just sat down in a lecture hall the entire time, because I think that gets a bit monotonous.

I: Yeah. Okay, what are your thoughts on the concept of student as consumer in higher education, have you heard of this?

P: No, I haven’t.

I: So, this is, like, a concept that came about when fees started. It basically suggests that students are being positioned as consumers by their universities, rather than students. So, they’re concerned about treating them like customers because of the amount that they’re paying. So, have you noticed, like, have you noticed that from the university at all?

P: I would say, in the sense of – I think, until I actually went to university, I didn’t realise what a big business university is towards the students, in that, when you’re a student, ironically, it’s not, for me at least, your education is the last thing that’s *advertised* to you, if you will. It’s, like, the whole package of, “At our university, we have these club events, we have, like, these food sources and all of this that you can get on campus”, and I think, *sometimes* it feels less, yeah, more like a – I don’t want to say money-grabbing scheme, but in a little way, yeah, there’s a lot of stuff like, “Oh, you can pay for this and then you get this” rather than it just being, like, “Okay, well you’re a student, you need these books, so there you go, off you go”. I think it’s a bigger business than that.

I: Okay. Do you consider yourself to be a customer in any sense?

P: I suppose a *little* bit because there is that element of, you’re paying *for* your study, and then there’s the fact as well that, you know, I’ll speak honestly, your loan doesn’t just pay for, like, the basic living things, it pays for, you know, your experience at the uni [sic], so whether that be club events or anything like that, so in that sense I do feel a little bit like a customer because it’s – I’m being sold something and I’m accepting it *and* paying for it, so…

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think paying fees gives you more entitlement as a student?

P: I wouldn’t say it gives you more *entitlement*. I think you probably – I think people probably feel like it, not – I don’t think entitlement’s the right word. I think people think it means *more* because they’ve *paid* for it, but for me personally, I’d consider more the fact, say I got into a career in the English world, I would be more proud of the years of work, as opposed to the amount it cost. If anything, I think I’d be quite unhappy about thinking about how much it all cost, but yeah, I think the years of study and the work you put into it actually means a little bit more, to me at least.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think paying fees gives you any entitlement as, like, a customer? In the sense of complaining, or…?

P: Yeah, I think in that sense it does. I think, again, speaking broadly, this isn’t for me, but I know my – one of my friends is at [pre-92 University] that was hit by the lecturer strikes, and a lot of the students there ended up – they were the group if the ones that were complaining, wanting refunds, because they were still paying the same amount of tuition fee, but arguably, missing a lot of that tuition. So, I think, in that sense, yeah, because you’re paying for a service which is, if it’s not up to scratch, or if you’re missing portions of it, it – you know, if you’re at a restaurant and you ordered a three-course meal and you weren’t – you didn’t get the dinner part, then it would just be weird [laughing]. So, I think, yeah, so I think in that sense, it offers you a little bit of entitlement to, kind of, put your foot down. I think you should put your foot down if you’re unhappy anyway, but I think it gives you that *extra* edge to say that you’re not satisfied.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, how engaging and/or useful for learning, do you find lectures, if at all?

P: I am not the *biggest* fan of lectures. I think that they are – they *can* be good, I’ve definitely had lectures before which have been engaging and the – I couldn’t really tell you the reason, maybe it’s just the person was more approachable, for me, I don’t really know. But, in general, I think – I think, especially with the dynamic we have here, where it’s, you have a lecture and then you have a seminar on that lecture, and I find that, quite often, the seminar is *just* expanding on the, kind of, cliff notes you’ve just been given in the lecture and I think you could, kind of, cut out the middle man a bit there, and – I think the reason that so many students might – I know a lot of students that are less interested in going to lectures, but care about going to their seminars, because I think lectures, kind of, just gives you an extra, an extra hand if you *haven’t* done the reading, or if you *haven’t* prepped for it. But I don’t think they necessarily *add* anything to the *course*, per se, I think you get that from your seminars.

I: Okay. So, okay, how engaging and/or useful for learning do you find seminars?

P: Yeah, seminars I think are good. I think when you – I think for one thing that, when you’re in a smaller group, it’s much easier to get a conversation going with other students *and* with your tutor. I think when people are in a lecture, particularly me, I’m quite a shy person so, if I’m not following something in a lecture, I’m not going to want to go up in front of everyone, or ask a question in front of everyone, or even turn to a stranger next to me. Whereas, when you’re in a seminar, you, kind of, get to know the group and you feel less embarrassed about – you’ll feel less embarrassed in front of 15 people to say, “I don’t understand” than in front of, like, 50. So, I think, for *that* reason, it’s *better* because it encourages people to actually ask themselves whether or not they’re getting it, and then ask what they need.

I: Yeah, okay. Where do you choose to sit in seminars and lectures, like, do you – like, back, front, middle, or do you not really care?

P: I tend to go middle, for the reason that, in a very, sort of, mean girls scenario, I think that there’s – there is actually a bit of a divide, especially with the English group, I think you’ve, kind of, got – people, kind of, go into their groups and then, I’m a bit of an inbetweener, we’re *literally* in the middle [laughing]. So, I think for that reason, yeah, just, kind of, in the middle. I think at the front, you’re a bit *too* into it, and if you’re at the back, you could be napping. So, middle’s a nice space, in the middle.

I: Okay. Okay, how engaging and/or useful for learning do you find one-on-one sessions with tutors?

P: I find one-on-one really, *really* good. I think, I’ve got – well, I actually have BP2, which is bipolar disorder 2, which has a *lot* in common with ADHD, so I find I get distracted *very* easily, so to actually sit down with one person is good for me because I can, kind of, get *my* point across and not be too distracted by other people’s points or anything, so for me especially, it gives me an opportunity to say stuff I might not necessarily say in a classroom.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you ever find them intimidating?

P: Sometimes, *definitely*. I think that’s just a *person* thing. I think some people just are – especially in the academic world, I think you’ll get people that have gone into it for a real love of the subject and then you’ll get other people who probably have, kind of, a power problem [laughing] and yeah, they’ll be a lot harder to approach, and quite *stern*, and – I mean I know for myself, not so much at [University A], but I’ve found before, having mental health issues, sometimes they *will* be an excuse for why I couldn’t perform a certain way or I couldn’t show up or something like this, and some people still have very archaic views about stuff like that. So, they probably won’t be *as* kind, or understanding as someone else who might be, so I think – but, I think that’s more of a people problem, unfortunately.

I: Okay. Is there anything you particularly like about the learning style of universities, compared to compulsory education?

P: I like the fact that – I’ve found that I *am* treated as a mature student, I’m treated as an adult, as opposed to a child. I found when I was in school that, even if you excelled in a subject and they commended you for excelling in it, they would still look at you and treat you as a child, which makes sense, you are a child. But then I think, having people trust you to be independent with your study, is actually a really *good* thing because it, kind of, it separates people that are *actually* interested in it to those that aren’t actually that interested, and I think it’s a good thing for them to realise that and it’s a good thing to *know* that you can work off your own back. So, I think yeah, it’s nice to be considered capable of being independent I think.

I: Okay, do you always understand what your teachers – tutors are explaining to you, or the material you’re set to read?

P: Not always. I think that’s – I think it’s, kind of, a, “You won’t understand everything”, I mean no one’s, you know, academically strong in all areas, so there’s definitely some stuff that I would have had to take a bit longer on, even if it’s explained once, I might need it explained again in a different way. I know, like, with me, my area’s, kind of, medieval studies, that’s what I’m really interested in and as much as I appreciate, sort of, I don’t know, we did, sort of, modernist, I *appreciate* it, but because I just didn’t really enjoy it as a genre, it’s really difficult to engage with it and actually understand what was being said, and I know, like, doing philosophy, I know people who had a very *rational* mind took to that very stressed, because – and English is very similar to philosophy, that you get constantly asked, “Why?” and there’s always a point where you want to say, “No, that’s just the point now” [laughing]. So, I think sometimes that can be difficult.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think the lack of understanding is more to do with content, or language used to explain it?

P: I think a bit of both, depending on the situation. I think, probably, content would be the *bigger* one, but I think anything *can* be explained to you if you have the right person and the right language, so I think yeah, if you have someone who – I mean, you’ll sometimes get them, you’ll get lecturers that use, like, all this technical jargon and assume that – my personal pet peeve is where people go, “And obviously” and then they say a word that no one understands [laughing] then that can be a bit of a problem, because they’re *expecting* something that you can’t offer. Whereas, when you get people that – I think that if people, kind of, take it as a baseline and then they’ll make it more complicated if they think that they can, moving on, then that tends to work out a bit better than when people go into it with technical jargon and you’re thrown.

I: [laughing] Okay. From your own experience, is there anything you would change to improve your own leaning? So, in terms of either teaching, resources you have access to, curriculum and assessment, or anything else?

P: I think at this university, a slightly, I don’t know if I want to say bigger, but a more resource-filled library would be great. I’ve had it before when they’ve only got, say, three texts for something that an entire group of, say, 120 are going to be studying and that can be really frustrating. So, I think if *that* could be changed a little bit, and then I think, I think sometimes there was – in first year, there was too much emphasis on, not attendance because that is important, but more emphasis on attending without actually looking into if people were engaging with it, so I think people were more concerned with if you’d *been* there than if you’d got it. So, I think if there was any way that people could look more into if people actually understood, than just to care about the attendance part, then I think that would be good.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, so I sent you the document that refers to the Student Collaboration Policy [policy name changed]. Have you ever heard of this policy before?

P: No, I hadn’t.

I: Okay, so, just to give you a bit of background then. It’s an institution-wide policy here at [University A] and it’s completely unique. Basically, what – it was set up as a, sort of, counter to the student as consumer ethos, and what it aims to do is to, sort of, bring academics and students together in, sort of, like, an equal way in the pursuit of knowledge together. So, there’s less of a divide, it’s not just a passive consumption of knowledge from the student to the academics, and it’s more, like, them working together, collaborating to produce knowledge. So, that being said, is it evident in your day-to-day experience of being a student here?

P: I think in the sense that, I’ve definitely, yeah, I’ve definitely had tutors that are *very* keen on – you’ll even get things, like, suggestion boxes, they’re very keen on making sure that what *you* are interested in is spoken about or looked into, as opposed to it just being, “This is your set curriculum, you go from there”. I know, sort of, especially when it comes to the assessment criteria, you’ll get a whole bunch of questions, but, I mean, like, with the – I do medieval studies at the moment, and with that one, you get a, sort of, framework of what you might want to write your essay on, but otherwise you’re given free reign, as long as it’s within what you’ve studied, and then from there, you can, kind of, talk about potential resources that would be good and that sort of thing, so I think with that, it’s good. I definitely know it’s a collaborative effort, especially when it comes to assessment tasks. I think, maybe in your first year it’s lacking, but I suppose in your first year, they’re, kind of, trying to set the groundwork a bit, so you know what you’re doing and you’re being led, as opposed to them, kind of, letting you free, but I’ve definitely noticed, especially now coming to the end of second, going into third, they’re very keen to – it’s independence but they’re still there wanting to collaborate with you, so I think that’s good because then when you get to third year, where it’s a lot more independent study, you’re less terrified because you know that there’s still, like, a groundwork there.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think this is a good policy to implement?

P: Yeah. I think it’s – I think people, just in general, I think people are too quick to *generalise*, say with age, I think people are too quick to generalise that the younger you are, the – not less intelligent you are, but the less aware you’ll be of things like your study, and I think it’s important for people to recognise that, especially *now* with the cost of university, in choosing to go to university, you probably have an understanding of *why* you’re doing it and what you want to do, and I think it would be good if people engaged a bit more with that, instead of just giving you, sort of, a set guide, a bit like you have in school, like, a set timetable of what you do. Yeah, I think it’s very important.

I: Okay, brilliant. I also sent you the document that refers to the Student Charter. Have you seen this one before?

P: I hadn’t. I’ve heard of student charters, but I hadn’t actually read the [University A] one [laughing].

I: [laughing] Okay, fair enough. So, do you think this one is evident in your day-to-day experience?

P: I think *yes*, I do think it’s probably a case of – not propaganda because it is true, but it’s a case of, kind of, making things sound a lot better than they might necessarily *be*. I think the uni is really good at achieving these different things, but I think they *aren’t* quite as involved as this makes it sound they are. I think that they, especially here, they’re very good at – I think it’s good, I know some people that might disagree, but it’s – they give you the guidelines of, “There is help there if you need it”, but it’s a very much that *you* ask, and you’re given, kind of thing. So, as much as I think this is good, I think it does glorify how hands on they are, a little bit. But, I still wouldn’t – I wouldn’t necessarily critique that, I do think it’s a good thing.

I: Okay. Okay, so technically that is your contract with the university, that’s what you’re paying for, that’s what they’re promising to deliver. So, do you think it’s important to have, like, a set contract with the university?

P: Oh, *definitely*. I think – because I think then if, I mean it’s that, kind of, the fact students have a reputation for – or the age of being a student is when you start, kind of, going to protests and rebelling. I think the reason for that is because you, you know, you become aware of what you like, and you don’t like and if you’re going to fight for something that you believe in, you can’t *do* that without something to fight against or something to fight for. So, I think contracts, especially with the university, is good. Sort of, like I said earlier, like, if there’s something that you’re *not* happy with, or that you disagree with, you have something to go *against*, you can say, “Well, this actually conflicts with what you’ve told me you’ll offer”, so I think if they didn’t have a contract, they could, you know, you could show up and it’s a PowerPoint every week and there’s nothing else to give you any information. So, yeah, I think it’s important for you to have something that you can critique if you’re not happy and, kind of, agree with if you are.

I: Yeah, okay. In your opinion, should undergraduates have greater control over, or input in, the curriculum and/or assessment design of their chosen courses?

P: I think *yes*, because I think when it comes to – well, you have – when you choose your modules, they usually have an outline of how it will be assessed and, unfortunately, sometimes the assessment won’t correlate with how much you enjoy the subject, like, I know for me personally, I really struggle, being quite an anxious person, I struggle with situations where you have to present individually or, anything like that, so I wouldn’t want to choose those subjects, *but* the subject of study might be something I’m *really* interested in, which can be a bit annoying. I think especially, like I say for myself, I’m more at uni [sic] for an enjoyment of learning and it can get a bit annoying when you’re just trying to enjoy it, but you constantly get these tests coming up and you’re being assessed at all angles. So I think, yeah, I think the subjects that, like I said before, kind of, offer where you have a bit of free reign on what you want to write about, like wordcounts are understandable, but when it’s, “Okay, well you can write about this” and then, therefore, you’re writing about what you *want* to and the stress is off and then I think, yeah, I think students would be more inclined to take an interest in it, especially the first year, second year, where people are still a bit, not kind of blagging it, they’re just, kind of, going with the flow a bit, I think then it would be good to have more of a say on what you want to be doing.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you get that at all at the moment, like you said…?

P: Not really, no it’s – they’re all set in stone. Once you – like I say, the only, kind of, choice you get is when you look at the module assessment criteria and then you can, kind of, say, “Well, okay, this is going to be assessed in this way, therefore I’ll avoid that”, but no, it’s – I think it’s only the, kind of, I think it’s only options, and then occasional options, where you get that, kind of, freedom to write what you want, especially with core subjects, you don’t get that at all, which I think – especially because we’re doing, like, this term I’m doing, sort of, postcolonialism, where people can get very passionate when it comes to the political stuff, and it can be really frustrating if you’re limited to questions which aren’t necessarily hitting the topics that you’re passionate about. So, I think that’s a *hindrance* because, you know, in education that’s when you *should* be encouraging people to care about stuff, so I think it *can* hinder people.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, so in recent government policy on higher education, students have been placed at the heart of the system, which is their wording. So, how central or important do you think undergraduate students are in this university?

P: I think at this university, undergraduates are the crux. I don’t think – I don’t think there’s that much emphasis on, sort of, postgraduate students or PhD students. They’re definitely *there*, and we’re encouraged to do, especially at this point, they’re, sort of, talking about whether or not you’d want to go further with your study, but for here, it’s all – all the focus, I think, is on undergrads, at least from my perspective as a student. I don’t know if that might change when I’m in the position of a postgraduate student, but yeah, I think here all the emphasis is on undergrads.

I: Okay. Do you think they should be the central part of the university?

P: I think *yes*, but I do think there probably should be more of a *collaborative* effort between, kind of, the representations of postgraduates and undergraduates, just because I think that, like I say, when – now you’re looking at going into postgraduate study and obviously there is the – you get the – it’s a lesser fee if you study at the same university, if you’re alumni, which is *appealing*, but then it’s, kind of like, if you’ve had very little interaction with other, say, students that took English to postgrad, I think *that* can be a problem because I think, it’s, kind of like, the nowhere zone, it can be a bit scary because you’re a bit – if you don’t interact with them, you’re not really sure if they exist. Yeah, no, but yeah I think – and I think especially for people that are looking to, either do postgraduate study for a job that they have in mind or a career that they have in mind, I think for those kind of people, it can be tough because you – like I’ve got a friend who does, sort of, media and film and he wants to do it at postgrad, but there’s that fear there of if it’s actually any good at this uni [sic] or if he should look *elsewhere* and, yeah, I think if there was more of a collab [sic] between different levels of student then that, kind of, fear would be taken away.

I: Yeah. Okay, what about – because there’s some people argue that there’s a bit of a divide between research and teaching, so students are put, like, as more of a focus than research is in some universities, what kind of – do you notice that here? What would you say is the…?

P: I mean I notice the difference in that, well, when I was at [pre-92 Red Brick University], that a lot of your seminars were led by research students, as kind of, a part of their education as well as your own, which we didn’t have a problem with and if anything, it *can* be quite good because, not necessarily on an age thing, but it’s easier to relate than to, say, like, a professor who’s 40 years older than you or whatever, but yeah, I do notice that there’s – I don’t see as many – I definitely don’t have *that* anymore, where there’s, like, a research student taking your class, or like, I couldn’t tell you any research students at the campus – at the university campus right now. So, in that sense, it’s a bit odd, like, I think for me, having seen a parallel, it’s a bit strange.

I: Yeah, okay. What meaning does the word relationship have for you, in the context of interacting with academics?

P: I think for me it’s that you’re, kind of, I think the, kind of, *bond* you have between them in – it does come down to confidence, I think, like, when you have a good bond with a tutor, you’re able – you’re more able to discuss things and I think you actually get a *better* education out of it because you’re not scared or intimidated of asking questions and then I think a bad bond would be the kind of tutor that’s a bit more shut off and has that, kind of, divide of tutor, student because I think – I think when you’re in school, there’s a literal divide of being a child and an adult, whereas when you go into further education, you’re all adults respectively, so I think that should be removed and it should be *easier* to have an actual conversation with people without worrying about things like age difference or professional difference, especially because you’re all in an educational environment, you’re all essentially there for the same reason, just at different levels of it, so yeah.

I: Yeah, okay. What do you consider to be the main purpose for building a relationship with academics?

P: I think for the student, I think it’s getting the *most* out of your course, so I think that it’s all well and good to listen to the lectures and go to the seminars, but if you’re just learning based, especially with English, if you’re just learning based on theorists and your own reading, that’s something – especially because you’re – it goes back to paying for the education, but with that, you could do that on your own, so I think the extra bit that makes up for what you’re paying for, is the added tutorage that, kind of, guides you to things you might not have necessarily thought about and obviously, the tutor themselves will have ideas that won’t be present in the text so, yeah, I think it almost comes back to the, if you will, like, the consumer idea. So, what if you’re going – if it’s the consumer idea and you’re paying for it, then that’s getting the most out of it.

I: Yeah, okay. So, do you find that you have this, or is that, like, the ideal of what you would want?

P: I think I have it with *some* tutors, I think it’s – from what I know of other people as well, you, sort of, end up having one or two tutors who become, kind of, the ones you go to, even if they’re not necessarily teaching the module, you might feel better talking to them about something than another tutor, which, you know, it *is* sufficient, but I think it would be better if more people felt – I don’t think you’d be able to get it across the board, but if the majority of people and the majority of tutors were open and people felt they could talk to them, I think that would be a bit better.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you consider there to be a link, then, between the relationships you build with academics and your levels of engagement as a student?

P: *Definitely*. I think, especially for me, in my first year, I was very anxious, and I struggled to sometimes come into uni [sic] because of my anxiety and it was always the tutors that I managed to build this relationship with, I was then less intimidated because I knew that if I came in and I *did* struggle, I wouldn’t need to feel embarrassed because there would be that understanding, and I wouldn’t have to explain myself. So, I think, yeah, in that sense you’re getting the most out of it and it can really improve you’re, kind of, outlook on what you’re *doing* because you’re less embarrassed to be there and you’re more focussed on what you’re doing instead of, you know, other things that may be going on.

I: Yeah. Okay. Okay, can you describe to me, like, a typical or a common face-to-face encounter with an academic? So, if you go to see them about an essay or something, what actually happens in that interaction?

P: I think usually it’ll be – so, for me, I usually email them ahead of time, but I know that you can, with here, you can turn up unannounced, but that’s just very awkward for me so, I’d rather just email and say, “I have a problem and I’d like to talk about it”, and then, yeah, it’s usually quite good. I think, one thing I really like is, for the tutors that I will go to for those sorts of things, say, like, when we were doing our diss [sic] prep, and I would go along with, sort of, a very *messy* concept but not really sure what I wanted to do, and it would be, kind of, a “Okay, well why do you want to do that? Okay you’re interested in this, so we’ll talk about this. Here are some ideas for that” and I think it’s a very, kind of, *buildable* conversation. It’s less, like, being told, “This is what you should be”, it’s, kind of, the ones I’ve spoken to have been really good at asking why – I think that’s a big one, *why* you’re interested in it and then they’ll, kind of, feed off of that, so yeah.

I: So, it’s more of, like, an open discussion than a –

P: Yeah, it’s a discussion instead of – that’s yeah, when you go to talk to them, I found it is more of a discussion than a *tutorage* in a way, so it’s a bit separate to, say, seminars or lectures because, I think, because it’s on your own time and it’s, kind of, *that’s* the opportunity to look into what *you* want to look into, so yeah, it, kind of, goes off the books a bit.

I: Okay. Are you ever aware of a hierarchy in your interactions with academics?

P: I – *slightly*, in the sense that I think the academics that are at the top of the hierarchy, so, like, the – those that may be, I don’t know, I don’t know what they call it, like, module convenors, or those in charge of the things, you rarely interact with them, or see them, and then it’s always, it’s the tutors on the *actual* subject that you’re – that you have this engagement with, like – which I think *can* be a problem, because sometimes, say if you want, I think it’s if you want an extension or something like that, on an assessment, you go to the module convenor, but by that point you may have never actually met them, or even know who they are, which can be a bit daunting and a bit odd. I mean it’s not across the board, I know that I’ve had a tutor before that was also the module convenor, but I don’t think that happens very often. So, I think in that sense, there’s a bit of a hierarchy where those that are, kind of, in charge are *in charge* and only deal with what they *absolutely* have to and then it’s your tutors are the ones you go to for everything else.

I: What about hierarchy between, like, just academics and student? Do you get that a lot, or…?

P: Sometimes. I think, like I say, I think sometimes people struggle to get over, whether it be the age thing – but then I know mature students that I think struggle with it as well, I think it’s on an academic level, sometimes – I can, kind of, understand it because they’ve, kind of, finished their study and in that sense, have, like, a prowess *over* you but I think sometimes people can, not shoot your ideas down *exactly*, but can be less than forgiving when you’re trying to present an idea, because especially at this stage of the course, and at this point, it can be difficult to come up with new ideas and I think some people get – some tutors can come across as a bit bored even with what you’re presenting, which I don’t think is the best thing. It’s only happened a few times in classes I’ve been in, but it can be really difficult to then want to put anything forward because it’s intimidating, because you’re fully aware that academically, they’re above you in that sense, but yeah, I think it would be nicer if some tutors might have had a bit more broader mind [sic] but I think, again, that might be a personality thing than actually reflective of them as a tutor.

I: Okay. Can you think of any particularly good relationships, without telling me who they are, with any academics, and why you’d characterise it as good?

P: Yeah, I definitely – one of my tutors is good because I – I know, for me, so I can – I’ve been able to come to them, not necessarily – but with a personal problem that might be affecting my study and I feel comfortable to explain that and how it’s affecting my study, and then also, I just feel, like, I’m hoping to go forward with them for my diss [sic] prep and it’s – I feel like I can come to them with an idea even if I think, “Actually this isn’t related but it might have something there” and, like I say, instead of shooting the idea down, it’s a, “Okay, well that’s interesting, here’s something you might want to talk about in relation to it because you can’t really expand on that” and yeah, I think it’s feeling, kind of, on the same level and not feeling necessarily, like, the *younger* student versus the *adult* professor or whatever, so I think that’s quite good.

I: Okay. So, now, can I get you to draw your conception of a good relationship with an academic? [laughing] So, it can be anything you want, it can be stick people, it can be abstract, just whatever comes to mind.

P: Okay, of a good relationship?

I: Yeah, a good relationship.

P: I’m so sorry for this [pause for drawing].

I: [laughing] Everyone always apologises.

P: It’s terrible. I actually have an A-Level in Graphic Design, I have no idea how I got it [laughing] Oh, okay [pause for drawing]. Oh, the table’s not long enough [pause for drawing]. Okay, so [laughing] they’re at the same level, and they are discussing ideas across a table and they’re both engaged because their arms are out [laughing].

A drawing of a person

Description automatically generated

I: Brilliant, excellent, thank you. So, can I get you to draw a bad one? [laughing]

P: Oh dear [pause for drawing]. Okay, so they are stood up and facing away, and then the student feels very small and far away [laughing] it’s very conceptual.

A drawing of a whiteboard

Description automatically generated

I: Okay, brilliant [laughing]. Excellent. Okay, this is the last drawing, I promise. So, can I get you to draw your conception of your relationship with the university as a whole?

P: Okay [pause for drawing]. Okay, I’m trying to think what to add to this. At the moment, it’s someone – me holding books and someone giving me *more* books, but I’m trying to make it seem friendlier, so I might add a smile [laughing].

A picture containing text, whiteboard

Description automatically generated

I: Okay, brilliant. So, the focus for you is totally on studying?

P: Yeah, yeah.

I: Okay, brilliant. Thank you very much for that.

P: That’s okay.

I: So, the last few questions then. There’s often a lot of encouragement for students to engage with different experiences that the university offers, such as joining societies, volunteering, or getting involved with the SU. So, what are your thoughts on this?

P: I think it’s a good thing. I think societies are – I think societies are important because I know, well from my own experience, I think with me, when I went – because I was at another university and I definitely found that you make your friends, especially in first year, you make friends very quickly and then you lose friends very quickly, and they, kind of, filter down into your core group, and I think societies are good because it’s, kind of, it’s a *break* from your study, but also a chance to meet people that might be a bit more likeminded than you [sic] because, at the end of the day, especially if you go in halls, you’re thrown in with complete strangers who might not be on your wavelength. So, I think yeah, encouraging sports and societies is a really *good* thing. I think – I mean I’m part of [removed for confidentiality] society and they are good at – the uni’s [sic] really good at offering us spaces for people that *want* to [removed for confidentiality], and it’s – there’s, like, it’s not really, there’s not many rules to it, its, kind of, sometimes if it’s a big event, they’ll ask for *donations* or something, so we’ll make ticket sales. But yeah, I think they’re quite good at, not only encouraging it, but helping *fund* things, so you’re not just thrown out on your own.

I: Yeah, okay. What are your thoughts on the role of the SU in terms of engaging you as an undergraduate?

P: I think the SU has gotten much *better*. I think at the start of, when I first got here last year, it was just, kind of, like, the SU was *there* and you didn’t really know much *about* it. You knew it was there, but you didn’t know what it really offered or, some people didn’t really know where the officers were, whereas I think, this time, it’s very, like, you are aware they are there, you know what they’re offering. It’s *there* covering everything from, funding sports and societies, to organising events, to the club nights, to charity events, like, it’s all very – and then I think they’re also this year, very good at tapping into social media, which they weren’t before. So, I mean, everyone’s on social media now, so you’ll get, you always know – you’re always in the loop now, they’re always tweeting or Facebooking about what’s going on and I think that’s important for this, kind of, demographic of students because if we don’t know that, I don’t think people really pay attention to anything else, so I don’t – we’re not going to pay attention to signs or anything so, yeah.

I: [laughing] Okay. How valuable do you think the SU is as, like, a space dedicated to students?

P: I think it’s important because, a bit like we were saying before, about wanting to have this, kind of, collaborative effort between student and academic, I think having an SU there always makes – it always ensures that the student has a *voice*, beyond simply, one student isn’t happy so raises a worry. I think having an SU there means that you’re always able to feel like your voice is heard, but hear other voices that may have similar opinions, and I think that’s important for – because I think anything you go into might not work perfectly and it relies on things going wrong and people voicing that to get it to a state where it works and I think an SU, when you’re in a situation with students and academics, *ensures* that because it’s always – it’s, like, a background student *net* for you, if anything goes wrong.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you consider yourself to be a part of the Student’s Union?

P: Not so much. I think I’m quite – I don’t think I really participate so much in enough things to feel like I’m part of the SU. I think that – I’m aware that, as being a student, I *am* in theory, but then I think, yeah, I think if I engaged more with the, kind of, events and things that they were wanting – I mean I have before, there’s some things that, you know, you’ll get, like, charity events or something like that, that you’ll get involved with. But, yeah, I think there are definitely people I would say are more involved with SU than I would be necessarily.

I: Yeah, okay. Okay, last question then. How much of a valued member of the university do you consider yourself to be?

P: I think a fairly valuable member. I think probably in my first year I probably wouldn’t have felt valued at all, because I think it was – as much as my participation, and I always felt *heard*, but I think when you’re first arriving at a place, there’s such a sea of people that are all trying to scramble for attention per se, that, like, it can be difficult to feel like you’re, not a worthy, like, representative, but, like, that you’re a voice within the crowd sort of thing. Whereas I think, as study goes on, and you all, kind of, you get to know your peers and you get to know your academics and then you, you can, kind of, work out what you yourself are interested in and where *your* interests lie. I think then, yeah, you start to feel more valued as a student I think as time goes on. I think that’s an individual thing though, I think all students, kind of, go through that. Because the first year is always a scary time, I mean I did it twice and it was scary both times [laughing] but so, yeah, I think it’s once you get all the, kind of, jitters and nerves out of the way then, yeah, you do feel valued.

I: Okay. Do you – would you say your value comes more from your department, or from the university as a whole, or, like, both?

P: I’d say department *more*, just because, say, I know – well because, like, I want to go further in medieval studies, so I tend to be the person that my student peers will talk to about stuff, because I’m more interested in it so I’ve done a bit more reading. So, like, I’d say in department *mainly*, but I think then, that’s when things like societies come in because then when you’re an *active* member of a society, and, like, with [removed for confidentiality] and stuff, you start to feel a bit more valued as part of the uni [sic] as well because you’re, kind of, part of the machine, you’re, kind of, operating alongside it.

I :Yeah, okay. Alright, well brilliant, thank you very much for your answers, really valuable stuff. So, is there anything you want to add that we didn’t talk about?

P: Yeah, no, I’m good [laughing].

I: Okay, brilliant.

**[End of Recording]**