**Interview #3 Transcript: Senior Lecturer (26.06.17) (University B)**

Interviewer (I): Okay, so as a senior lecturer, what would you consider to be your main responsibilities?

Participant (P): Oh okay, my main responsibilities are planning, teaching, marking and administration for my modules. I’m responsible for four modules so, that’s definitely one. Another responsibility is within the team, I have an administrative role, I – well I have a number of them, but from next year, I’ll be programme director for the MA programme, so I have the oversight of that, I will have the oversight of that, in the past I’ve had different sorts of roles. I also have to publish, I have to research and publish and there is also a responsibility for pastoral care of students, which is not *technically* in my job description I don’t think, but it is one of the responsibilities of the job, just in running modules and dealing with young people, it is a part of the role. [pause] Yeah, I think those are the main – the main areas.

I: Okay. How many undergraduates do you teach in a term, roughly?

P: Ooh. [pause] Including lectures as well as seminars, or…?

I: Yeah.

P: Altogether? Okay. So, let me just count [pause]. Probably about 150?

I: Okay, do you think that’s a manageable number?

P: Good question. Well that’s quite a higher number because I do give a lot of lectures, I’m – as many of my colleagues are, I’m involved in some team-taught modules which, for example, our introductory module for first years, [module name removed], I lecture for 2 weeks on that, so I see the *whole* year group of first years in those 2 weeks, but I don’t really – I don’t work with them in seminars and I’m not working on their essays so, that number sounds *large* but it *is* manageable because I’m probably only working *closely*, like in terms of seminars and tutorials and marking, with a much *smaller* number of that kind of 150.

I: Okay. What meaning does the word engagement have for you?

P: For me, as a lecturer, or for my students?

I: Both?

P: In terms of students, engagement involves attendance to class, preparation for class, motivation for their studies, work and participation kind of both inside the classroom and then also in their own time and, contact with their peers but also with us, as staff, so for example, getting in touch if they don’t understand something or if they’re unhappy with a mark or if they want to know how to improve. It’s – yeah it involves lots of different aspects I would say. [pause] And I think it can – engagement *can* happen without attendance, I mean I do think that’s important, but I do have a few students who, for various reasons, *can’t* come or you know, have had issues, but they still remain engaged in the sense that they’re motivated, they’re doing the work, they’re doing their reading, they’re interested, they’re in touch. So, I guess you could have various combinations of those factors.

I: Yeah, okay. And what about for you as a lecturer?

P: Good question. I guess it means also motivation and interest in what I’m doing and a desire to improve and develop in what I do. So not letting myself *stagnate*, you know, just rehashing the same lectures year after year, trying to introduce new material, trying to keep reading, trying to think about the ways that I teach, the ways that I mark, the ways that I set assessments. So actually, it’s kind of a mirror image of what I expect of the students in a sense.

I: Yeah, okay. So, using what you’ve just said, how do you personally attempt to engage your undergraduates in your teaching?

P: I try to make my lectures *interesting* and *accessible*. I did a qualification a couple of years ago when I started working here, I did a [removed for confidentiality] and one of the things – we had to do quite a lot of reading – and one of the things I read about was, motivation is related to students perceiving that the material is *useful* and perceiving that the material is *doable*, accessible, not too hard, not too easy and then, also perceiving that it’s interesting. Sometimes I can’t really affect that but, I do try to make my classes interesting, I try to make my classes varied, so that we do different *types* of activities. What was the question?

I: How do you personally attempt to engage –

P: Engage students, yeah. So, yeah, I put quite a lot of thought into the structure and content of my sessions and I also try to design assignments that are – that connect with the material and the learning outcomes, obviously, but that also are creative in a way, so that it’s not – I’m not just asking them to regurgitate what we’ve discussed in class but asking them to kind of use that as a basis to do something else with. So yeah through teaching, through assessment and I mean there’s a *human* element as well I think, I try to get to know my students, obviously I maintain boundaries, but I invite them to office hours and I try to make myself approachable so that students will feel that they can come speak to me and when we have designated tutorials, they feel that they can talk about the issues that they’re having, but also just what they like, what they don’t like, how things are going. I find that that sort of connection with students helps with engagement with, on the academic side as well.

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

P: I have a real problem with that. [removed for confidentiality] I went to university, at least for a few years, in [removed for confidentiality] where we’ve been paying fees for years and years and, we *don’t* have this rhetoric as student as consumer, which is interesting to me because we have a shift here moving into fees in very recent times, and that shift has brought this idea of the student as consumer. People take those things as kind of necessarily linked and I don’t think they need to be. In [removed for confidentiality], you pay a *lot* for university, you know, I had loans, you go into quite a lot of debt but, there’s no sense that you’re the consumer, it’s much more that you have the opportunity to learn and I think that the student as consumer is a problem because there are conflicting *goals*. If a student is a consumer, then we are a business and we are trying to maximise our profits, if the student is a learner, then there is a different set of priorities that we have and that we might act on in the ways that we interact with them, in the standards we set for them, in the ways that we mark them. I mean there’s a real conflict between students as consumers, wanting to get the highest mark they can and us as providers and arbiters of learning and achievement and wanting to keep up our integrity as, you know, institutions that provide *learning*. So yeah, I have a *real* problem with that rhetoric, which is not to say that I don’t think they should get, you know, a lot of content and a lot of attention, *for* the money that they’re paying, but I just think that that rhetoric, it can undermine and conflict with some of the educational ideals that we have.

I: Yeah okay. Do you consider students to be customers in any sense?

P: [pause] I mean they are in the sense that they’re paying money I suppose but, I really don’t think of them that way when I teach. I try not to, even though there’s lots of pressure to, to keep that insight. I do very much value the experience they have, I very much prioritise their educational *journey*, what they’re getting out of it, what kind of support they’re getting from me and other, you know, departments in the university, wellbeing for example, but I can’t say that I really do think of them that way.

I: Okay. In your opinion, how prevalent, if at all, is the concept of the student as consumer in the university’s attempts to engage its undergraduates?

P: I’m not really sure about that. There are – I have seen things in the past couple of years sort of saying like you – I can’t remember what the phrase is, but it’s something like, [removed for confidentiality], so there’s a sense of, you know, the university responding to student feedback and not necessarily about education but, you know, the café and the library and facilities and you know, existing buildings, that kind of thing. So, there is a sense that the university is trying to let the student body know that they value their input and are trying to give them customer satisfaction in a sense. So, I definitely can see that, I’m not sure in terms of other ways that that might play out, it probably does.

I: Yeah, okay. In your opinion, are there elements of the student consumer concept apparent in your interactions with undergraduate students? So, are you ever aware of them considering themselves as customers?

P: I sometimes have heard some of our mature students mentioning the fact that they have made sacrifices to be here, to afford to be here, both in terms of time and money, and that they want to get the most they can out of it for what they’ve, you know, had to put, or had to give up to put in and, I can think of two conversations I’ve had but they’re both with mature students, not – and when I say mature students, we do have quite a few mature students, but they are mature students in the sense that they’re maybe in their late 20s or, they don’t tend to be sort of, you know, over 50 kind of mature students. But they are – they do have a different perspective than our undergraduates who are like 18 to 21. I’m trying to think of if I’ve heard – I think I have heard the odd comment, but probably not loads.

I: Okay. In your opinion, do you think the introduction of fees has given them a greater sense of entitlement to higher grades?

P: I think there is a sense of that, creeping in. [pause] It’s not as noticeable here as in previous places that I’ve worked.

I: Okay, in the UK, or…?

P: Mmmhmm. But yes, I do perceive a bit of that.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you ever – do you get students complaining about their grades in ways that they think they should get a higher one?

P: It’s more subtle than that, I mean yes, I do get students who are unhappy with marks and come to see me, but I’ve not had a student say, “I paid £9000 to be here and I want to get a 2:1” I haven’t heard anything so direct as that. I have heard students say, you know, “I’m unhappy with this mark and I worked really hard and I don’t really understand”, *usually* at the end of that conversation, I’m able to explain why they got the mark and also to give them some pointers for next time and that usually resolves it, but I *do* sense that there are students who come in and don’t feel that they need to, I mean you used the word engagement in quite a few of your questions, don’t feel that they need to engage to get their degree, that they’ve kind of paid to be here and they can do it *their* way. So, I suppose that’s kind of connected, but not quite as direct as I think what you’re asking about. I have had that experience in previous institutions, where students have said, quite directly, you know, “My parents have spent a lot of money to get me here, you know, I expect to pass” that kind of thing. But often that was students who were from different cultures, international students, and they had a different sense of how this kind of system works.

I: Oh okay. Okay. So, moving onto learning then. In your opinion, are lectures useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: Yes, I think they are, yes. I – we moved this year to a structure where we have a lecture workshop, which is a 2-hour slot. We used to have one-hour lecture and then one-hour seminar and now we have a lecture workshop and then we have a seminar, a one-hour seminar, on a different day, and the way – I mean I vary – but a lot of times, what I do is I lecture for the first hour, or maybe 45 minutes or so, and then in the second – we have a break – and then in the second we do something that’s a bit more interactive. Sometimes I flip that and we do something a bit more interactive and then I lecture. *Because* there’s the interactive element that’s either going to precede or follow, I find that the – my students *can* and *do* focus for the lecture and find it useful. In fact, actually, one of the things I was really surprised about when I started teaching here was, how much students *expected* me to lecture. I had to really revise my kind of expectations because *I* thought, “Oh students want things that are more interactive” and I came to find that yes, they do want that and they really benefit from that, but they – there’s a certain part of their higher education that they believe should be me telling them about things. I am an expert, they perceive me as an expert, whether that’s true or not I don’t know [laughing], but they perceive that I know a lot more about the topic than they do and they want me to *tell them* about it and they want to take notes. So, it’s interesting, they do find that really useful and if they *don’t* get enough of that, they complain. On the other hand, I make sure that there’s always lots of interactive bits so it’s never that they’re *just* listening to me and have *no* chance to give their own ideas or take what I’m saying further or challenge what I’m saying.

I: Okay, in the same vein, are seminars useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: Yeah definitely. Yeah, I think it’s invaluable for students to have the chance to discuss and the best seminars are the ones where I don’t have to talk much and I just get to kind of facilitate and I think those are tremendously useful for students. They need it also to build up their confidence.

I: Are one-to-one sessions useful for engaging undergraduates?

P: They can be. I find that with one-to-one sessions, a lot of it depends on how much they’ve done before hand. So, I do structure – I schedule tutorials into the timetable for *all* my modules, but I have very specific requirements of what I want my students to have done before they come to the tutorial. And that’s because in my first year or two, I was finding that students were coming in and they’d be here for maybe 15 minutes or 20 then, and it isn’t useful at all, because they are just asking me, “Oh what should I do for my essay?” And really it’s much better if, you know for example, in my second year module, I make them identify their question, find three sources and write out an essay plan, and they bring *that* to the tutorial and then that’s a really useful way of engaging because a) they’ve already done some footwork and b) I can actually give them – I can *respond* to their ideas in a one-to-one fashion, that’s the idea of a tutorial and I think that’s *really*, it’s really *useful* for them and it’s really motivating because they get a lot of individualised, you know, attention. But they have to do the footwork first, otherwise it can often feel like either just a chat, or just a bit of wasted time, theirs and mine.

I: Yeah, okay. Which of the above teaching methods do you think undergraduates find the most engaging?

P: I mean if you look at their module feedback, that we get, it’s probably split 50-50 between lectures and seminars, in terms of what they write on there, but my sense is that seminars probably tip the balance. I just think that that interactive element of them talking to each other and hearing from each other, is – I just can’t help but think that is probably slightly more important.

I: Yeah okay. Is there anything you think is particularly good about the style of learning that takes places at university as opposed to compulsory education?

P: Particularly good? When you say the style of learning, what do you mean?

I: So, the ways in which students approach their learning at university compared to the ways in which they’re like, they’re – oh what’s the word I’m thinking of? They’re sort of sculpted to do it at school, or how they’re trained to do it at school?

P: I mean there’s a lot more freedom at university, a lot less structure and that can be very, very good for some students – for a *lo*t of students. It allows them the time to do, you know, for us to do reading at length that they, you know, they don’t have time for when they’ve got loads and loads of lessons and smaller bits to be doing all the time. And I think the level of questions and topics that we’re talking about has the potential to be really *satisfying* for them because we delve quite deeply into the material. On the other hand, you know, some of our students, you know, they’re – they struggle with independent, you know, structuring their time, all the freedom, all the spare time they have, it can be a challenge for them to stay on task and to use the time for, you know, kind of what it’s meant for, so I do think that it’s – yeah it has the potential to be the *best* kind of education because it’s at such a high level and it’s so self-directed, but it doesn’t have quite the same safety net that they get at A-Levels, and that’s difficult for some of our students I think.

I: Yeah, okay. From your own experience of teaching, is there anything you would change to improve student learning, in terms of either your own teaching, resources you have access to, curriculum and assessment or anything else?

P: Yeah, a *few* things. The first thing that comes into my mind if, you know, if I could just magic wand and have my own policies instated in the university, I would love to be able to have attendance as part of their mark. We, I told you already, I came from [removed for confidentiality] system and you know, you are marked on attendance, you get – it’s something like 10% of your mark, is just coming. And I’ll tell you what, students in the [removed for confidentiality], they turn up to class and, actually, it’s not attendance that’s marked, it’s *participation*. So, 10% of your mark in the [removed for confidentiality] is not only attending, but when you come, you know, partaking in the seminar and, yeah, students in the [removed for confidentiality], they come to class and they speak in class. And I know that not everyone learns in the same way, there are people who are very engaged, but don’t need to be speaking the whole time, they’d rather be quiet in the classroom and I recognise that, but I do think being present in the classroom – I mean the correlation between attendance and achievement is *staggering* and yet we don’t mark on it, we have no way of forcing it. I mean it sounds ridiculous that we should have to when we have adults, 18 and over adults, *but* I do think that it would benefit the education, I think it would benefit the quality of the education and I think that some of our students who *aren’t* as good on *paper*, would be able to recoup some marks from being engaged in the classroom and being present, so I think it would actually be really motivating for them as well, to be able to have that aspect of their studies acknowledged. So, I would love to be able to force that, and by that, I mean kind of, incentivise it, I guess.

I: Okay, anything else or is that it?

P: What were the, what were the things…?

I: Your own teaching, resources you have access to, curriculum and assessment or anything else.

P: [pause] Yeah, I mean I have lots of other smaller things. It takes a *long* time here to change, we – there’s a lot of paperwork that you have to put through if you want to change, for example, your assessment pattern in your module, I wish that kind of thing were a lot more flexible. So I’ve just taught a new module this Spring and I would like to change the assessment pattern for that module for next year but, it’s too late, but I hadn’t – the deadline was like Christmas, but I hadn’t taught the module yet, then, so it’s like I have to not only – I was waiting to see how the module went before I made that decision, well now I’ve seen but I have to wait a whole other year to do that, it just seems – that kind of inflexibility is just frustrating, I wish I could change things, you know, more quickly.

I: Okay. Okay so moving onto policy, I sent you the document that refers to the university’s teaching and learning strategy. How does this strategy impact, if at all, on your interactions with students?

P: Yeah, I had a look at the teaching and learning strategy and actually, I’ve seen it before. It’s something that – I almost feel like it’s not that this strategy has an impact on our teaching, it’s more that this strategy seems to come out of the way that we teach. It feels like these are things that we are *already* doing – I mean I’m not saying that I’m doing all these perfectly, but in terms of, you know, educating the whole person, teaching and assessment practices, I feel that these are things that we are already doing and, it’s almost as if this is a summary of kind of the values that are already in place. So, I think that I’m – I try to be very much in line with all of these, which doesn’t mean that, you know, I’m perfect on them. I mean for example, [removed for confidentiality], it’s harder to apply that, but a lot of the other ones I feel are kind of already in line with my kind of, values and my teaching practice.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think the strategy is successful engaging undergraduates and improving their chances of success?

P: I don’t know, it’s hard to say. This is a fairly new – this descriptor is new, I forget, but I saw it when it first was written, or first was published and, I’m not sure that some of the – you know then engaging students for success, wasn’t happening before that, it’s hard to tell whether this has had an impact or not.

I: Okay, I sent you the document that refers to the Student Charter [name changed], how would you say you implement the aims of this approach, if at all, in your interactions with students?

P: [pause] Well I certainly implement it in my teaching in some of the ways I’ve already talked about. One of the other things that I’ve tried to do in the past 2 years is, probably refers to this third bit about the students, getting students to take responsibility for managing their own learning. I run a – I mean I say run, I don’t really run it, it runs in the university, but I brought it to our programme, [removed for confidentiality] it’s a way that I, and now my colleagues, are trying to get students to take responsibility for their own learning and also to kind of, *lead* each other, [removed for confidentiality] to kind of feedback to us about how – what’s working and what isn’t. Our students have also recently set up [removed for confidentiality], which is, it’s extracurricular but it’s the same kind of thing in terms of students working between different year groups [removed for confidentiality]. So that’s been one way that I’ve tried to get students to kind of *lead* more [removed for confidentiality] getting them to really be almost like, I mean the word here is [removed for confidentiality], but kind of liaisons between lecturers and students and leaders. That’s one example I suppose.

I: Okay. Do you think that strategy is successful for engaging students?

P: It has been yeah, it’s been really successful. We had great feedback from our first year students and we’ve seen – we have *fewer* students this year compared to last year, our cohort is smaller, but the students who – like I mean when you tally up the marks and things – the students who submitted *all* the assignments, so if you take that as an indicator of engagement, did *better* than last year and the overall average was better, the *highest* mark was better and actually, even the *lowest* mark was better than last year, so to me it suggests that we have a slightly more engaged first year cohort, even though it’s a smaller number of students than before. So, I mean there are probably other ways to gauge success, but I thought that was one indicator.

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: It’s a tricky one because, yeah, theoretically I think it’s great but they’re not that creative in what they come up with, you know, when you ask them, they don’t have – it’s not, I don’t get the sense that there’s loads of types of assessment that they want that they’re not getting, in fact they complain about some of the more creative ones that we have in our programme because they don’t – they feel anxiety about not knowing how to do well in them, whereas an essay, they kind of know what’s expected. Yeah in terms of curriculum, *yes,* I do think that they like having input in that, and you know, I’ve had students ask me year after year, “Can we have a module on [removed for confidentiality], please can we have a module on [removed for confidentiality]?” But, you know, one of the problems with that is, is that I – you know, it is sort in my period, but that’s not really my research focus and I don’t really want to teach something that I don’t feel I have the research backing to deliver at a high level so, yes, I think there’s a place for them to have input but it’s not always as straight forward as them having all these things that they want that we can just easily offer, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah. Okay, what are your thoughts on the idea of students as partners in the learning experience?

P: I mean I – again, theoretically I think it’s a positive thing. I’ve done a fair bit of reading around this and studies do suggest that students who have some input into the curriculum, and that might not be like the whole module but, certain texts for example, that that improves engagement and improves performance in assignments as well, which makes sense, students are going to perform better on things that they’re interested in. So, you know, I do think that that’s – I do think that there’s a place for it, for that kind of partnership, but you know, I think it’s very much – partnership can be a bit misleading because we’re *not equals*. We know a lot more about the subject and about the teaching and learning of it than they do, and I do think there’s a place for their input, but for example, I did give my students an opportunity at one point to – you know, we had a kind of free seminar in the timetable, and I said, you know, “What poems – this is my [removed for confidentiality] module – what poems do you know? If there are poems you guys would like to study, let me know and that will be the week that we’ll do them”, but they don’t know what they want to study because they haven’t studied it yet, so if it’s a new topic, you know it’s kind of, yeah, it’s – I do think they should have input, it’s difficult because they can’t have input on things that they don’t know about so yeah, again, difficult.

I: Okay. In recent government policy on higher education, students have been placed at the heart of the system. In your opinion, to what extent are undergraduates positioned centrally within this university?

P: I think our university is quite good in keeping the students in focus. I think some of our more prestigious kind of competitors, for example [pre-1992 university] [removed for confidentiality], but you know, other universities that have more of a research reputation, have maybe struggled to do that. But we were originally [removed for confidentiality] and I think that ethos is still here. I think there is a very big focus on students here. There’s a growing focus on research and research environment, but I think because we’ve had that strong student focus, those things have actually not been conflicting, so I do feel that we focus on students a – the university focuses on students quite strongly.

I: Do you think it’s a positive thing to put students at the centre of universities?

P: Yeah, I do, yeah. I mean I think not at the expense of research because it’s important to have a research environment, also because it’s important to have postgraduate students, there are you know, different levels of students *but,* absolutely I think it’s positive. That’s what universities are *for*, teaching students.

I: Okay, do you think positioning students centrally works to separate them at all from other members of the university, such as the academics or administrators?

P: No, I don’t think so.

I: No, okay. What meaning does the word relationship have for you in the context of interacting with undergraduates?

P: Getting to know students? Knowing their names, which not all of my colleagues are so good at, and I guess developing a kind of rapport or trust with them and that is kind of academic but there’s a personal element to that as well.

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

P: Main purpose [laughing]. I’ve never thought about it that way. I don’t know, they’re people and so, I like to develop the relationships with the people I’m with I suppose. I have never thought about it in terms of purpose. I suppose it’s good for all of us, in terms of teaching and learning. Is that…?

I: Yeah, that’s fine. To what extent is the purpose fulfilled in your experience?

P: I don’t know, it’s bizarre. I can’t imagine teaching and not having a relationship with students, so I’ve never really separated that out. Yeah it would be – it would be – I think it would be very unfulfilling if I didn’t have a relationship with my students, I like getting to know them, I love teaching. It would be – it would feel odd to be teaching people who I didn’t have a relationship with, and that’s not to say you know, I have an individual relationship with *every* single student but, I think generally I probably do, and I certainly know all of their names.

I: Yeah, okay. Do you think there’s a link between the relationships that undergraduates build with tutors and their levels of engagement?

P: Yes, definitely, yeah. I think the more engaged they are, the more likely they are to build relationships with their tutors and their peers.

I: Yeah, okay. Can you describe to me a typical face-to-face encounter with a student, so if they come and meet you to discuss an essay or something?

P: Yeah, usually I would sort of say, “Hi, how are you? How’s it going?” If I know something that’s going on, I would probably refer specifically to that, you know, so when our final year students are applying to jobs or, postgraduate places, that kind of thing. And then I would ask them, you know, “What’s going on?” or not like, “Why have you come to see me?”, but you know, “What can I help you with?” And try to work through whatever that was and then, I would usually let them know how they can contact me if they felt they needed further contact about that issue, either you know, letting them know my office hours or, you know, “You can email me”, that kind of thing.

I: Okay. Do you ever notice any implications of a hierarchy in interactions?

P: A hierarchy in terms of what?

I: In terms of, between you and the student, so sort of like a power dynamic?

P: There is a power dynamic because I’m perceived to be in a position of power and I think that’s *unavoidable* but, I try to level that as much as I can – not as much as I can, to a *certain* extent. I think it’s healthy to have a certain kind of sense that I’m the lecturer and that I’m not their *friend* but yeah, I try to level that to a kind of human interaction, some students are visibly nervous when they come in, although I don’t find that that’s probably so much the case with me, I feel like I’m pretty approachable, but yeah, I definitely try to set them at ease.

I: Yeah, okay. Has the dynamic or the relationship between you and undergraduates changed at all throughout your career at this university?

P: Yes, definitely. I think with every year I get older [laughing] it changes just a tiny bit. I think I am probably just about still perceived as a *younger* member of the team, which probably has more to do with the fact that my colleagues are older than me, rather than the fact that I’m that close in age to my students, but I do sense that as I’m getting older, that gap is widening you know, because the students kind of stay the same age, and that does have an impact, but not necessarily a negative one. It’s just different. I think if you – if you’re perceived to be the kind of young one, they might trust you or go to you with certain things, but they also – it might take a little bit more time to build up the respect, and I think that flips the kind of, older I get. So yeah, some changes I’ve noticed.

I: Okay. Can you think of any particularly good relationships, without giving away their identity, with any undergraduates and tell me why they’re good relationships?

P: Oh yeah, I’ve had really lovely students all 4 years that I’ve been here and, I think each year I’ve had quite a few students who I developed really nice relationships with, you know, I’m thinking this year, I have a number of final year students graduating who I got to know quite well, I – some of our students who work during our Open Days, we have – usually have two students who work with us on the Saturday or Sundays when we have Open Days or Applicant Days, I’ve gotten to know some of them quite well because you, you know you’re sitting at the table with them all day on a Saturday and, that has been a really nice experience. I will – yeah and you know, inevitably those students – not inevitably but, some of those students also happen to be very good students and if I’ve had classes with them, then there’s that overlap and, yeah that’s been really nice getting to know them in that way and also, seeing – some of my students I’ve taught for 3 years, so I’ve seen them, you know, progress through. We had to do exit interviews and I saw a student who I had taught in the first year and she said – and you know, she’s come out with a Distinction and she’s just, you know, really excelled, but she said, “Oh yeah I remember you really encouraged me in first year because you told me to submit that assignment and you know, it was late” and I thought,, “Oh God”, I did remember it but I hadn’t – it wasn’t at the forefront of my mind, I had forgotten, but I remembered it when she was telling me, she said “Oh yeah thank you” and yeah, just you know, really nice [removed for confidentiality] and I just thought, “Gosh, that’s really lovely”, yeah, that’s a particularly strong example but I feel like I’ve had loads of students who you know, I’ve seen progress and yeah, it’s really nice.

I: Okay. So, if I give you this pen and paper, can I get you to draw your conception of a good relationship with a student? So, it can be anything you want.

P: I’m not a very visual person here. My conception of a good relationship with a student?

I: [said simultaneously with participant] Good relationship with a student.

P: [pause for drawing]. Sorry I’m no artist.

I: [laughing].

P: [pause for drawing] [laughing] Yeah, that’s my drawing [laughing] I’m sorry.

A close up of text on a whiteboard

Description automatically generated

I: Okay, so why have you drawn it in that way?

P: It’s a student and me and then in the middle is a book and an essay and we are discussing it. It looks like we’re thinking about it, but maybe we’re also doing that. I kind of wanted it to be that we were talking about it, but maybe it should be talking and thinking.

I: Okay. And on this piece, can you draw the opposite, so a bad relationship?

P: Yeah, that’s easier. [pause for drawing] So this is a picture of me sitting at my computer trying to email them [laughing]. Because I don’t know where they are and they’re not responding, that’s a bad relationship to me.

A picture containing whiteboard, text

Description automatically generated

I: Okay, so just no communication?

P: Yeah.

I: Okay, thank you for that. So, there’s often a lot of encouragement for students to engage with different experiences that the university offers, such as joining societies, or taking up volunteering, or getting involved with the Student’s Union. So, what are your thoughts on this?

P: Oh yeah, I think it’s great, I think it’s – the more involved they are here, the better. I think that anything extracurricular, whether it’s a sport or a club or volunteer work or even paid work, I think so long as it’s not, you know, taking up all their time but, I think that yeah, that really just enhances their experience here and the more – I think the *more* that students feel that they are happy and connected with other *people*, doing things that are *interesting* to them, I think the better they’ll do academically.

I: Yeah okay. What are your thoughts on the Student’s Union in terms of engaging undergraduates?

P: I think that they probably have a pretty big role but I know very little about them, actually, it’s one of the things that has come up a few times this year in my exit interviews, complaints about the Student Union not doing enough, which is really the first time I’d thought about it. I personally don’t have much contact with them but, I suspect that they have quite a big role to play and, you know, maybe some of our students feel like they’re not really fulfilling that role as much as they could be.

I: Yeah. Do you think the undergraduates value the Student’s Union as a space dedicated to them?

P: I think they do yeah, I think they feel that they need it.

I: Yeah, okay. What are your thoughts on the university’s attempts to engage its current and prospective undergraduates?

P: They are *very rigorous*, especially in terms of prospective students. Our recruitment and marketing have just *accelerated* and that’s partly to do with anxieties about shrinking numbers of students, of people, applying to university across the sector but the university is *very anxious* about this and really has ramped up its efforts at engaging prospective students and in *retaining* its current students as well.

I: Yeah, okay. Do the university’s attempts differ at all from departmental attempts?

P: *Yes*, yes, they do yeah. They’re trying to engage students, they’re trying – the university is trying to get students *here*, to get them *applying*, to get them interested in the *whole*, kind of, university experience. Whereas we’re much more focussed on the academic side that’s in the programme.

I: Yeah okay. So, the university is obviously very successful in engaging its undergraduates but there’s probably more that could be done, perhaps ways in which it could broaden engagement across the whole student body so, I wonder whether you have any comments around this.

P: Yeah, I think there are certainly things that could be done. I [pause] I think they probably need – I mean I mentioned the attendance thing, they probably need a clearer, a clearer sense of what they want to do with attendance. They’ve spent a lot of money [removed for confidentiality]. So, it seems to me that that’s misplaced money and time. I can only imagine that that must be aimed at increasing or monitoring engagement but, it doesn’t seem like the most, the most effective use of resources.

I: Yeah. Okay. Do you think the university relies on individual departments and/or individual staff members to maintain levels of engagement once undergraduates have begun their studies?

P: Yes, yes, heavily, heavily. We – when I was co-programme director, I was in charge of our first year cohort and, one of the things I had to do was, every time students missed a certain number of classes in a row, or didn’t submit assignments, I had to get in touch with them, hence my drawing of the computer and, it is an *incredible* time burden and that was the university *policy*, so we had to do that but there was no – there’s no *consequence* so the students don’t *have* to respond to us, they don’t have to let us know why they haven’t submitted, some of them *do* but not all of them, so it’s a – yeah they really rely on us to do that but then we have no, kind of, there’s nowhere we can go with it, so it’s a kind of endless process and there – we have a lot of students, I think every university does, with mental health issues or learning, you know, learning issues, you know like dyslexia and that kind of thing, so that they need special provision and it’s all down to *us* to get them on learning plans, to make sure that they have proper care and support, that they you know, have looked into our pastoral care channels over in [removed for confidentiality] *a lot*, *a lot* of that falls on lecturers. I mean in the past year we’ve been able to hire a [removed for confidentiality], but that’s still just one person for the entire School of Humanities, so there’s still a lot that falls on lecturers and it’s important work, it’s not that I think it’s beneath me, it’s just that we don’t have time [laughing] we don’t have time to do it and the policy is a bit contradictory, so it can be frustrating.

I: Yeah okay. Is there anything you’d like to add that we haven’t discussed?

P: Oh gosh I’ve given you a lot, no I don’t have anything to add [laughing].

I: Okay, well that was the last question so thank you.

**[End of Recording]**