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2016

# Community Learning Course

A SIX SESSION TASTER COURSE OPEN TO PEOPLE CONSIDERING  
UNIVERSITY STUDY OR WITH AN INTEREST IN KNOWING MORE  
ABOUT LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY  
COAN, SUSAN; MOUNTAIN, CAROLINE; HANNA, ESMÉE.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY STUDIES | LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

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## Background

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The CommUNITY team work with a wide variety of community partners across Leeds and also with research/teaching teams across the University, but particularly within the schools which form the faculty of Health and Social Sciences (HSS).

CommUNITY's aim is to promote links between Leeds Beckett University and the surrounding community in a variety of ways, mainly connected to research, student placements, dissertations, volunteering, and knowledge exchange. Most of the work involves staff and students going into the community, but not community groups coming onto campus. Opening up the physical space of the university is a key factor in breaking down barriers, addressing misconceptions about, and promoting the idea of, higher education (Bruning, June 2006). The CommUNITY team are well placed to champion widening participation across diverse groups in Leeds.

CommUNITY have linked up with the central Widening Participation team to organise visits and tours of the Headingley campus to a Young Dads' group, which were a great success in challenging views of not belonging in this environment and led to some of the young men considering the options of further study available to them. These visits helped them to learn more about university and the wide variety of courses on offer. Even if higher education is not right for these fathers at this time, the visits still help to raise aspirations in their families and peers.

Following a meeting to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding between Leeds Beckett and Health for All (a community health development organisation in south Leeds), it was felt that the University could go one step further than the visits and actually give people a taste of the student experience.

This led to the development of a short course of introductory sessions to Health and Social Sciences which was designed and run in joint collaboration between CommUNITY (Susan Coan), Men's Health (Esmée Hanna) and Youth and Community (Caroline Mountain).

Men's Health (Esmée Hanna) work closely with a Young Dads group at Health for All. Susan and Esmée have previously run a summer fun day with the Young Dads group, as well as having some of the young men visit Leeds Beckett. We knew from our relationships with the Young Dads group and from Esmée's previous work with young fathers at the University of Leeds that inspiring and educating young dads about university could be beneficial both for the young men and for their children. (Johnson, July 2015)

The Youth and Community team (Caroline Mountain) have a strong relationship with Getaway Girls, as well as many other community groups. Yvette Smalle and Caroline Mountain from the Youth and Community team worked with Getaway Girls to develop 'She Matters', a conference for International Women's Day 2016 aimed at young women. One of the aims of the conference was to inspire young women to consider university. Several young women expressed interest and contacted Yvette or Caroline in the weeks following the conference. The Community Learning Course provided an opportunity for those interested young women to further understand what university entails and what it is necessary to do to get there.

The main objectives of the course were to break down barriers to members of the local community coming onto campus, and to create a supportive, inclusive environment in which to inform and motivate.

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## What we did

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Working with the momentum from the initial discussion, it was decided to organise a pilot course as soon as possible, to evaluate it and refine it accordingly (day, time, length of course, type of sessions).

A general email was sent to the HSS group email list inviting staff to deliver a session in their specialist area. Staff were asked to adapt an existing session from their courses in order to give participants a real student experience, but also so as not to burden staff with extra work. There was a good response from HSS staff and sessions were confirmed from five different courses: Youth Work & Community Development; Psychology; Sociology; Playwork; Politics.

Taking into consideration staff and potential participants' commitments, it was decided to run the course on Wednesdays from 4 to 6 pm, from 29<sup>th</sup> June to 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016. The first five sessions were given by different HSS tutors and the final one covered the practicalities of applying for courses and becoming a student, which therefore included input from the Admissions team, Students' Union Advice, and Students' Union Money Advice to really equip the participants with the information required when considering higher education study.

The course was promoted over Twitter and through our community networks. As the start date was imminent, two partner organisations were approached in particular: a Young Dads groups from Health for All and Getaway Girls, groups with a focus on supporting young men and young women respectively. Four participants came from each group and the remaining four people came through general promotion of the course.

The intention was to offer the 6 sessions at City Campus, but due to timetabling conflicts, it was necessary to have 2 sessions at the Headingley Campus.

### **Funding**

The course required very little funding. Tutors volunteered their time, so the only outgoings were for refreshments and travel expenses. Participants were refunded up to £4 for travel (the cost of a day ticket on the bus). The pilot was funded using the remains of an Early Careers Research budget for a project on young dads and from the School of Health and Community Studies' budget, with the permission of Dean of School, Sue Sherwin. Total cost of this course = **£696.25** (Travel: £392.30; Refreshments: £303.95).

For a 6 session course of 12 participants with refreshments (tea, coffee, juice) and travel expenses, taking into account the learning from this course, we estimate that subsequent courses would cost:

Refreshments: Sessions 1-5:	<b>£26.50 x 5</b>	(tea/coffee/juice x 10)	<b>= £132.50</b>
Session 6:	<b>£125.25</b>	(working lunch + juice x 15)	<b>= £125.25</b>
Travel:	<b>£4 x 12</b>	(participants) x 6 (sessions)	<b>= £288</b>
		<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>= £545.75</u></b>

In future courses, Leeds Beckett merchandise e.g. notepads, bags, pens would no doubt be appreciated by the participants and also promote the university.

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## The Programme

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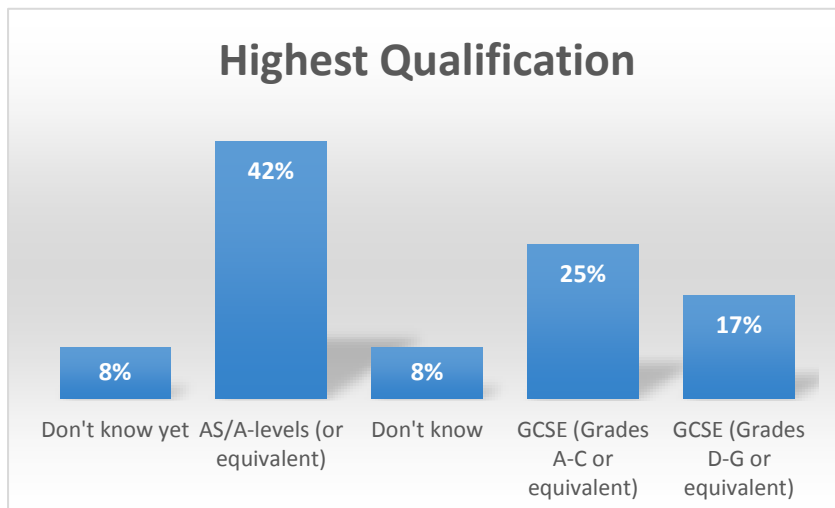
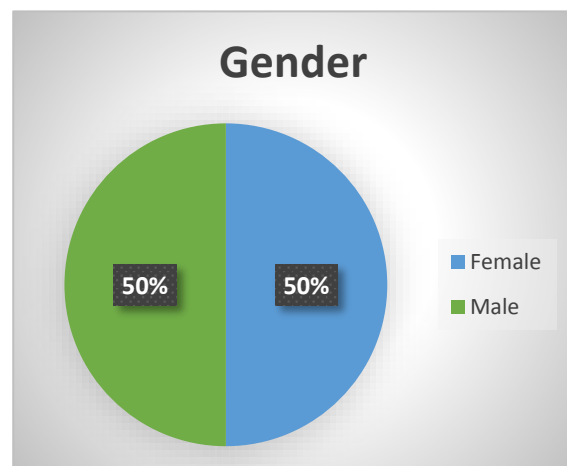
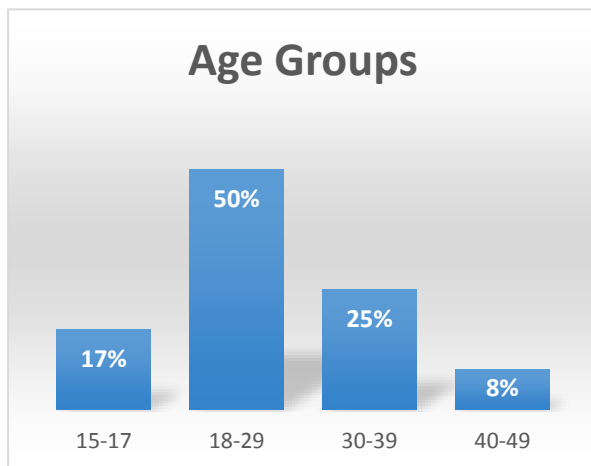
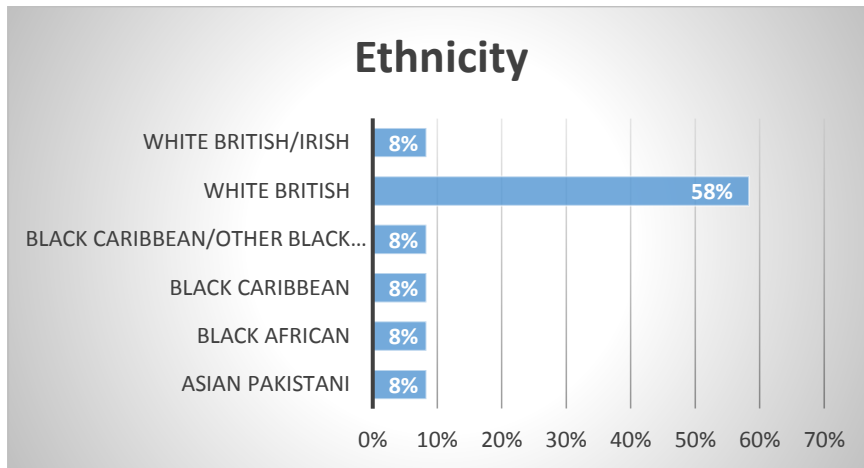
Session	Content
<b>Wed 29<sup>th</sup> June 4-6pm</b>	<b>Introduction to course</b> <b>Youth and Community (Caroline Mountain)</b> This session will share some of the content covered in the Health and Wellbeing module of the Youth Work and Community Development Course. You will also get the chance to play some of the games developed by students for the module assignment.
<b>Wed 6<sup>th</sup> July 4-6pm</b>	<b>Psychology (Therese Shepherd and Ellie Willard)</b> We will introduce you to the different approaches Psychologists take in their quest to understand the human mind and behaviour and give you the chance to work with state of the art equipment used by Bio-psychologists to measure physiological responses (e.g. heart rate). We'll show you how to set up a lie detector (polygraph) and help you run a mini-experiment to investigate whether or not we can really tell if people are lying using this approach
<b>Wed 13<sup>th</sup> July 4-6pm</b>	<b>Sociology Does the Apprentice - Learning Sociology through games and gaming (Natalia Gerodetti and Darren Nixon)</b> In this session sociology staff and students might surprise you by showing you some of the creative ways in which we teach our students to think about social issues and help our students to do their own research. We will talk to you about how we have used the TV programme "The Apprentice" to teach students and introduce you to some of the interesting project questions our past students have come up with (ever wondered how Facebook has affected young people's lives, how porn has impacted on young people's relationships, or how the lives of young men and women have changed from their grandparents' generation?).
<b>Wed 20<sup>th</sup> July 4-6pm</b>	<b>The Importance of Play (Ali Long and Mike Wragg)</b> An introduction to the importance and value of children's play. The session will involve interactive activities and some theory we use to think about how play affects children's development. It will provide a little overview of the breadth of content covered on the course – including some developmental theory, the sociology of childhood.
<b>Wed 27<sup>th</sup> July 4-6pm</b>	<b>Politics (Paul Wetherly)</b> This session will introduce you to the nature of politics and what's involved in studying politics at university. We will see how politics can be a stimulating subject to study, how it can develop your skills and employability, and why politics matters for our communities and society.
<b>Wed 3<sup>rd</sup> August 4-6pm</b>	<b>Practical Advice for Prospective Students</b> In this session, participants can speak to the Students' Union Money Advice and general Advice team. There will also be information from the admissions team about how to get onto courses. You can ask any questions you have about studying at Leeds Beckett! Celebration of completion of the course – all participants will receive a certificate.

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## Demographics

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The final group consisted of 12 participants, 8 of whom were from two community groups with strong links to HSS. The group was 50% male and 50% female, two thirds were white British/Irish. There was a wide range of ages represented, from teenagers to a person in their 40s, but half of the group were aged 18 to 29. Five participants had qualifications equivalent to GCSEs and 5 had A-level/AS or equivalent.



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## Participant Survey Findings

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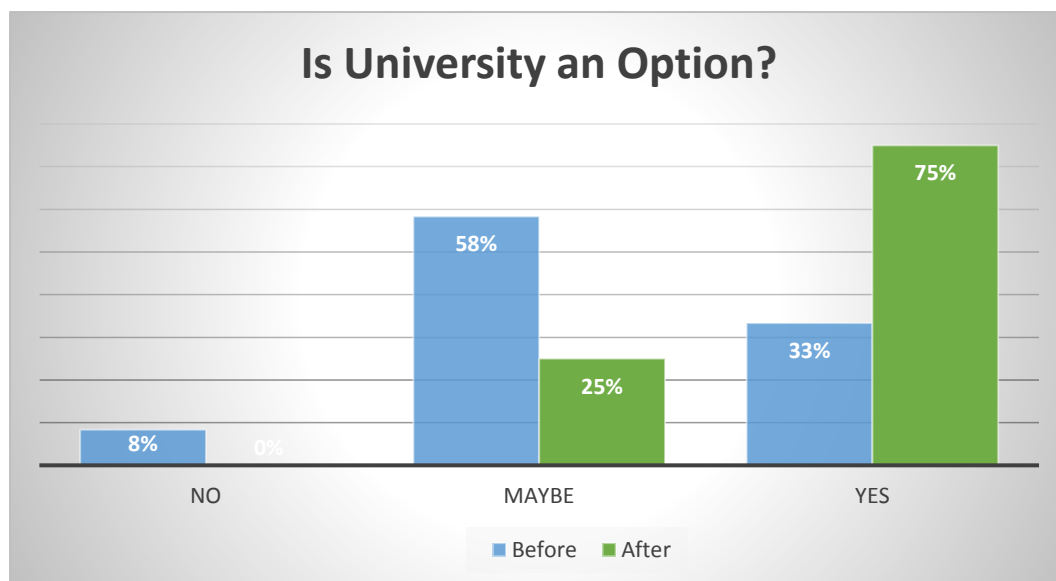
The participants were asked to complete a short survey before starting and after completing the course. The survey aimed to find out a little about their situation at the start of the course and their expectations of the sessions, and to compare that to their situation at the end of the pilot and their opinion of the course.

### Pre-Course Survey

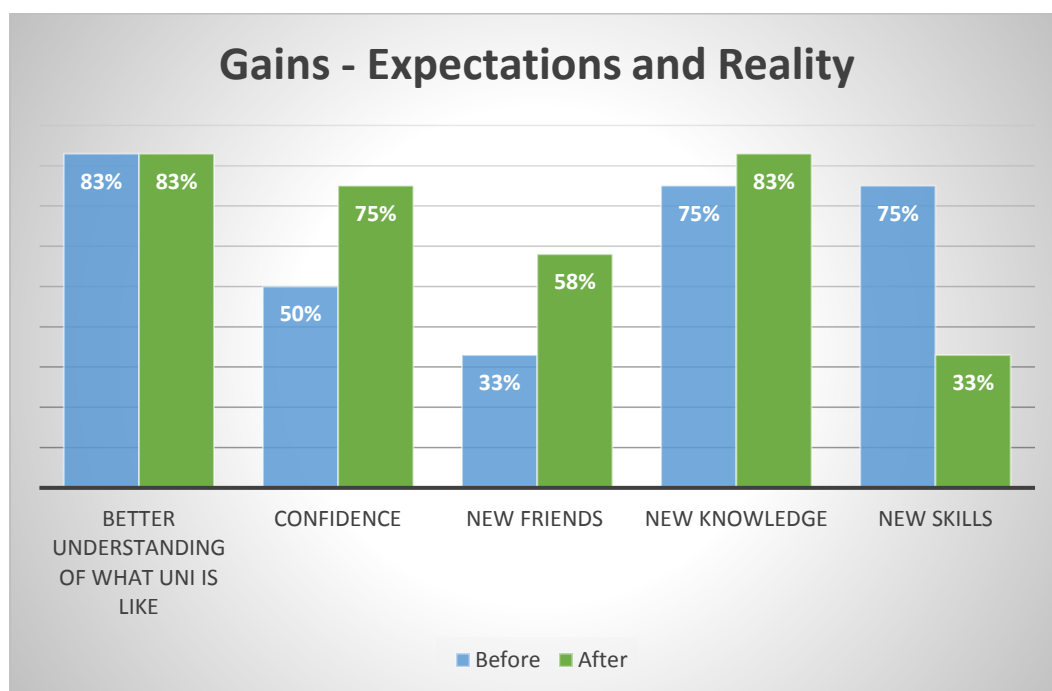
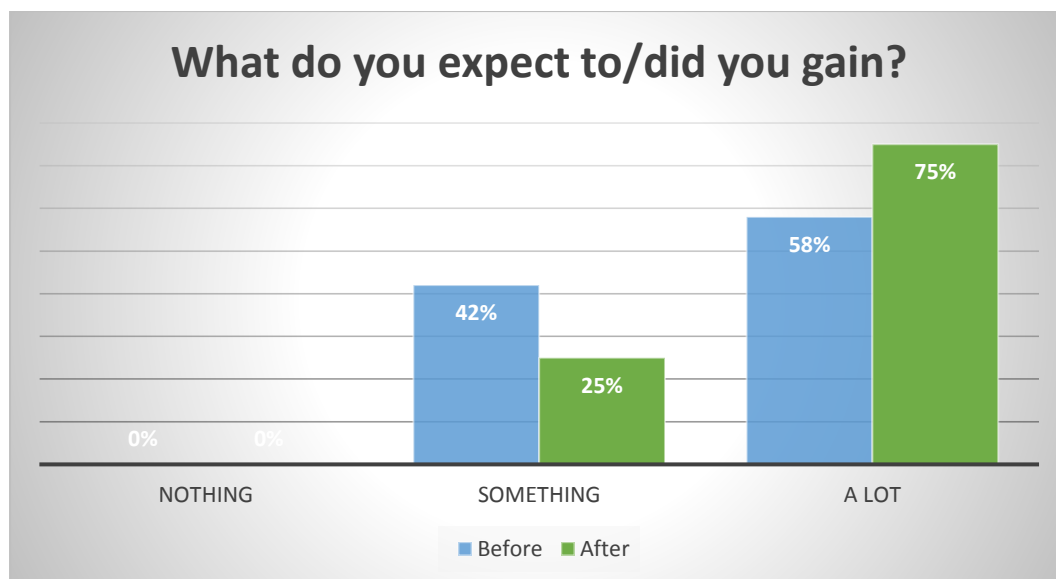
The participants were asked if they were concerned about attending the course, half of them felt ‘a bit’ concerned and 5/12 had no concerns. The main concern was around attending alone and not knowing anyone (34%). Two people were concerned about how to get there, one person worried that they wouldn’t understand the topics and another “*that it wasn’t for me.*”

When asked what they were especially looking forward to on the course, they were mainly thinking about learning new things in general and learning about university in particular. Some mentioned sessions that they were interested in e.g. psychology, and one person put simply “*the unknown.*”

### Comparisons: Pre- and Post-Course Survey



When asked if university was an option for them before the course, 4 participants answered yes, whereas at the end of the 6 sessions, this had increased to 9 with the remaining 3 selecting ‘maybe’; no one thought that university study was not a possibility for them. This is a really striking change in attitude and from the follow up information we have on the participants, it is clear that university is a realistic option for a number of them in the near future.



In general, participants gained more than they expected to and found the course increased their confidence, introduced them to new friends, and increased their knowledge. 75% of the group expected to gain new skills, although only 33% felt that they had acquired new skills at the end.

#### Highlights

When asked what the highlight of the course was 7/12 of the participants chose learning about different subjects/courses (especially Playwork and Psychology).

A third of the group felt the best part was meeting new people and making friends.

*"Interacting with other people in a different environment and finding more about each subject" [P2]*

*"Meeting new friends and exploring different uni courses" [P5]*



Other highlights included seeing the campuses, knowing about options available and finding out what university is like.

*"Knowing what all my options are." [P7]*

In the final session, participants were invited to write comments on a flip chart about the best parts of the course. The focus was mainly on the social aspect, making friends and meeting people, with one comment about learning new things. (Appendix A)

### **What could be done to improve the course?**

For many of the group, nothing needed to change:

*"It was great. I don't think there are any changes that need to be made" [P5]*

*"Nowt at all" [P11]*

Suggestions for improvement:

- Extend the hours
- Choice of courses
- Examples of students' work
- Two sessions on each subject:

*"Nothing much...maybe two sessions on each subject." [P7]*

- Stay on one campus (although some participants liked the change)
- More notice on starting date

### **100% of the participants enjoyed the course 'very much.'**

#### **Blob trees (Appendix B)**

Participants were also asked to select a character from the blob tree that they felt represented them at the start of the first session and then again in the final session. Ten members of the group completed a pre- and post-course blob tree. It was a useful exercise in encouraging the participants to reflect a little on where they see themselves and it also complements the analysis of the participants' experience.

8 of the participants selected a different character the second time they were asked to do this task.

Interestingly, in the first session, the 10 participants chose 9 different characters. The only duplication was the sad figure sitting alone on the end of a branch, or as one comment written on the tree described it: *"outside looking in" [P2]*. Three negative images were chosen in the pre-session (with sad expressions) but no negative images were selected in the post task. In the post sample, 50% of the group identified with the character standing confidently and securely on the platform, smiling outwards.

*"I'm on a steady level and understanding on where I need to be" [P10].*

One individual started out as the character giving someone else the leg up, but by the end of the course, she was the one receiving the help:

*"...it's time I got a leg up myself and started climbing the tree." [P9]*

In all cases, those who began on the ground changed to a position moving up the tree and those that started on the edge, moved to a more central position. This indication of inclusion and progression was also captured in the survey data.

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## Tutor Feedback

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Tutors were asked to complete a short survey consisting of 5 questions following completion of the course. All eight tutors completed the survey.

### **What was the best thing about teaching on the course?**

The tutors particularly enjoyed meeting this diverse group of participants and were impressed at how engaged they were and the enthusiasm they brought to the sessions.

*“The participants were really engaged – I wish my students were so engaged! Great to see a mix of ages and abilities. I really enjoyed their enthusiasm” [Tutor A]*

*“[The best thing was the] opportunity to engage with students who have not had the same educational opportunities as most university students” [Tutor G]*

One tutor stated the opportunity to contribute to the programme was the best thing and another cited the ideas and input from the participants as the highlight.

### **Were there any particular challenges of teaching on the course?**

In general, the tutors did not experience any significant challenges. Five tutors (of the eight involved in delivering the course) thought that gauging the level of their session was one challenging aspect of the course for them, but in general they were used to being flexible:

*“We planned quite a fluid session, so were able to adjust things in the moment.” [Tutor E]*

There were also a few technical hitches and issues with the students getting to Headingley on time.

*“It might have been easier for everyone if the class hadn’t been in Headingley.” [Tutor H]*

### **How could the community learning course be improved?**

Many of the tutors felt they didn’t have an overview of the course and so did not have any suggestions for improvements. One tutor suggested a longer planning period and to market it to a wider range of agencies. One tutor found the group size just right, while another thinks the group could be larger in future courses.

It was suggested that the course could be offered on one campus for continuity.

Another recommendation for improvement involved more university investment:

*“More support and funding!” [Tutor H]*

### **Other comments**

It was considered to be a good time of year to run the course, possibly as it was in the summer when the tutors did not have other teaching commitments.

*“Good time of the year, good size cohort” [Tutor D]*

The tutors saw the value of the course both for the participants and the University:

*“I imagine that the course was valuable to each of the participants for very unique reasons. I hope it expanded their horizons.” [Tutor E]*

*"I thought it was a great idea, and very necessary."* [Tutor C]

*"I enjoyed it immensely, and the students whom we met seemed to enjoy it too. I imagine that the course is of value to both the University and the participants."* [Tutor F]

*"I feel these kinds of courses that [are] accessible for local people and seek to serve the local community are really important (for both the university and the learners) and should be fully supported and developed by the university in the future."* [Tutor H]

One tutor highlighted the importance of the practical advice and information provided in the final session:

*"I think the last session with admissions, student finance, students union etc. is really important. It is good to inspire people, but that would be irresponsible without a realistic idea of what going to university entails."* [Tutor A]

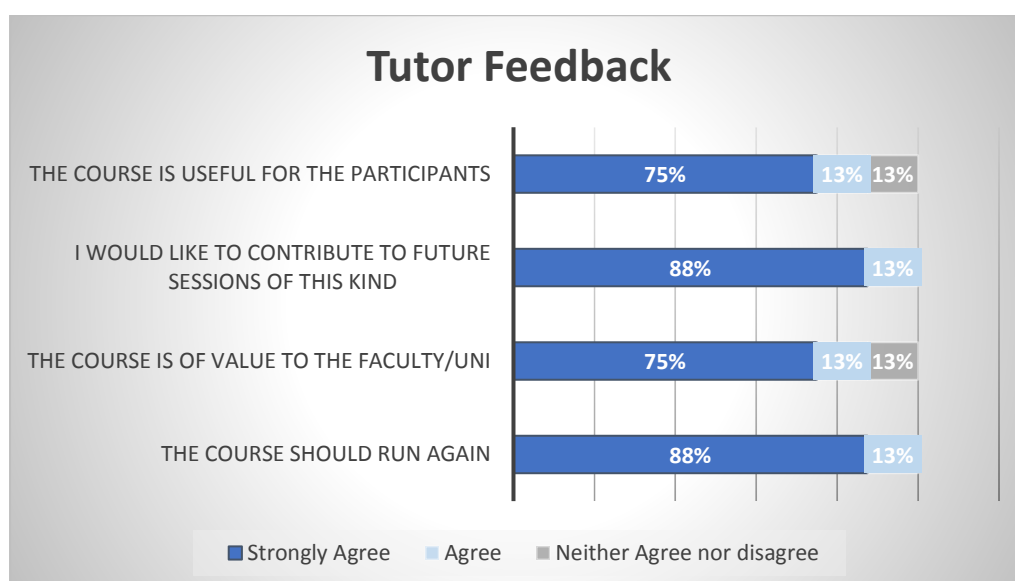
Several tutors commented on the organisation of the course and found the information about the participants (e.g. background and interests) useful:

*"It was really well-organised and we appreciated the detailed info provided to us about the initiative and the participants beforehand."* [Tutor B]

The tutors were asked to what extent they agreed with four statements about the course. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive. One tutor preferred not to comment on the value of the course to the participants or the University without concrete evidence:

*"I imagine that the course is of value to both the University and the participants, but have no evidence other than the participants' enthusiastic contributions to our class..."*

All of the tutors believe the course should be run again and would like to be involved.



- **Time of year:** the classes took place in the summer so tutors had time to contribute which might be more challenging during term time.
- **Day and time:** the day and time worked well for participants and staff alike, but people in full-time employment wouldn't be able to access it. We did not, however, receive any enquiries from people who were unable to attend because of the time.
- **Room bookings:** there were more rooms available as it was out of term time, but in future we need to take other events into consideration e.g. Teach First conference (which books out all of the City Campus teaching spaces), and graduation (which affects parking availability at Headingley Campus).
- **Bus tickets:** we pre-ordered day tickets which could be given to participants in advance. These took time to arrive, so for the first two sessions we reimbursed travel costs at the end of class out of a £50 float from finance. This took time to organise and document correctly which needs to be factored in in future.
- **Evaluation:** the participants need to have sufficient time to complete the surveys and blob trees. Time has to be set aside specifically to capture reflections and feedback.
- **Location:** City Campus was convenient for the participants, but getting to Headingley was more difficult. A member of staff travelled up with the group for one session and for the other they were taken to the bus stop at City and met off the bus at Headingley. It was still difficult to manage and the participants did not arrive in time for a full 2 hour session. The group seemed to enjoy seeing the other campus, but perhaps in future, one session in Headingley would be enough and the majority could take place at City.
- **Promotion:** before future courses, it would be useful to have a plan to publicise it and spread the word through community networks. The first meeting about this course took place in May and the course began at end of June. It took time to recruit tutors, put together a programme and flyer, and to market the course. Considering the limited time available for planning, it ran very smoothly.
- **Refreshments:** the participants enjoyed the refreshments, particularly the buffet option at the end. This is definitely an added incentive to attend the sessions.
- **Crèche:** one interested person was unable to attend because there were no facilities for childcare. We looked into the possibility of having a crèche but were not able to find an appropriate group to offer the service on this occasion. With more preparation time, it may be an option.
- **Minimum age:** One 15 year old (year 10 student) came to the first session but didn't attend again. It is perhaps more useful for people who are 16 and over who are thinking about higher education and who feel confident enough to take part in group discussions.

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### Follow up

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Of the 12 participants who completed the course, two have been accepted onto the Youth Work and Community Development course at Leeds Beckett and two are beginning access courses at other institutions with a view to going on to university study next year. One participant is starting a two year college course.

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### Conclusion

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The course was an enjoyable experience for participants and staff alike; this was apparent from observing the sessions first hand and from the subsequent feedback. One of our objectives was to open up the university and promote an inclusive, supportive environment. The Community Learning Course group were, in the words of the tutors, engaged, enthusiastic and enjoyed it. For the participants, it was an opportunity to learn about their options, and resulted in them gaining confidence, knowledge and new friends. They learnt about different subjects, how courses are structured and what is expected of students e.g. the types of assessment they complete. This knowledge, in addition to the practical knowledge relating to finances and how to apply, means they can make informed decisions about their future and also share their university experience with their communities.

The majority of them felt at the end of the course that university was definitely an option for them and that the course gave them a better idea of what university is like.

The Leeds Beckett mission statement is “to ensure we use our knowledge and resources to make a positive and decisive difference to people, communities and organisations.” The Community Learning Course directly contributes to this mission and adds great value to the university, and in this case, the faculty of Health and Social Sciences. The course could have an important role in staff development, student engagement, and increase participation in HE from under-represented groups, as well as having great impact on the lives of the participants. The course is an added stream of community engagement to CommUNity’s work which promotes the development of community partnerships and the exchange of knowledge.

Following the course, two of the participants have been accepted onto courses in HSS and 3 others have gone on to college. The total cost of this course was £696.25 and the fees from two full time students this year will be £18,000. This is quite a significant return on investment.

### References

- Bruning, S.D., McGrew, S. and Cooper, M. (2006). Town–gown relationships: Exploring university–community engagement from the perspective of community members. *Public Relations Review*. 32(2): 125-130
- Johnson, D. (2015). Not your stereotypical young father, not your typical teenage life. *Families, Relationships and Societies*. 4(2): 319-322

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## Summary

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- A group of **12** participants (from groups who are under-represented at university) attended **5** taster sessions of Health and Social Science subjects, followed by one practical session providing information on admissions and finance.
- Taster sessions of the following courses were given by **8** tutors: Youth Work & Community Development; Psychology; Sociology; Playwork; Politics,
- **100%** of the participants enjoyed the course 'very much.'
- **100%** of the tutors think the course should run again and would like to be involved in the sessions
- Following the course, **2** of the participants have successfully applied to Leeds Beckett and began the Youth Work & Community Development course in September 2016.
- **2** of the participants are enrolled on foundation courses with a view to beginning university study in September 2017 and **1** participant is going to do a 2 year college course.
- Total cost of this course = **£696.25**. The fees from 2 full time students this year = **£18,000**. This is quite a significant return on investment.

### Before



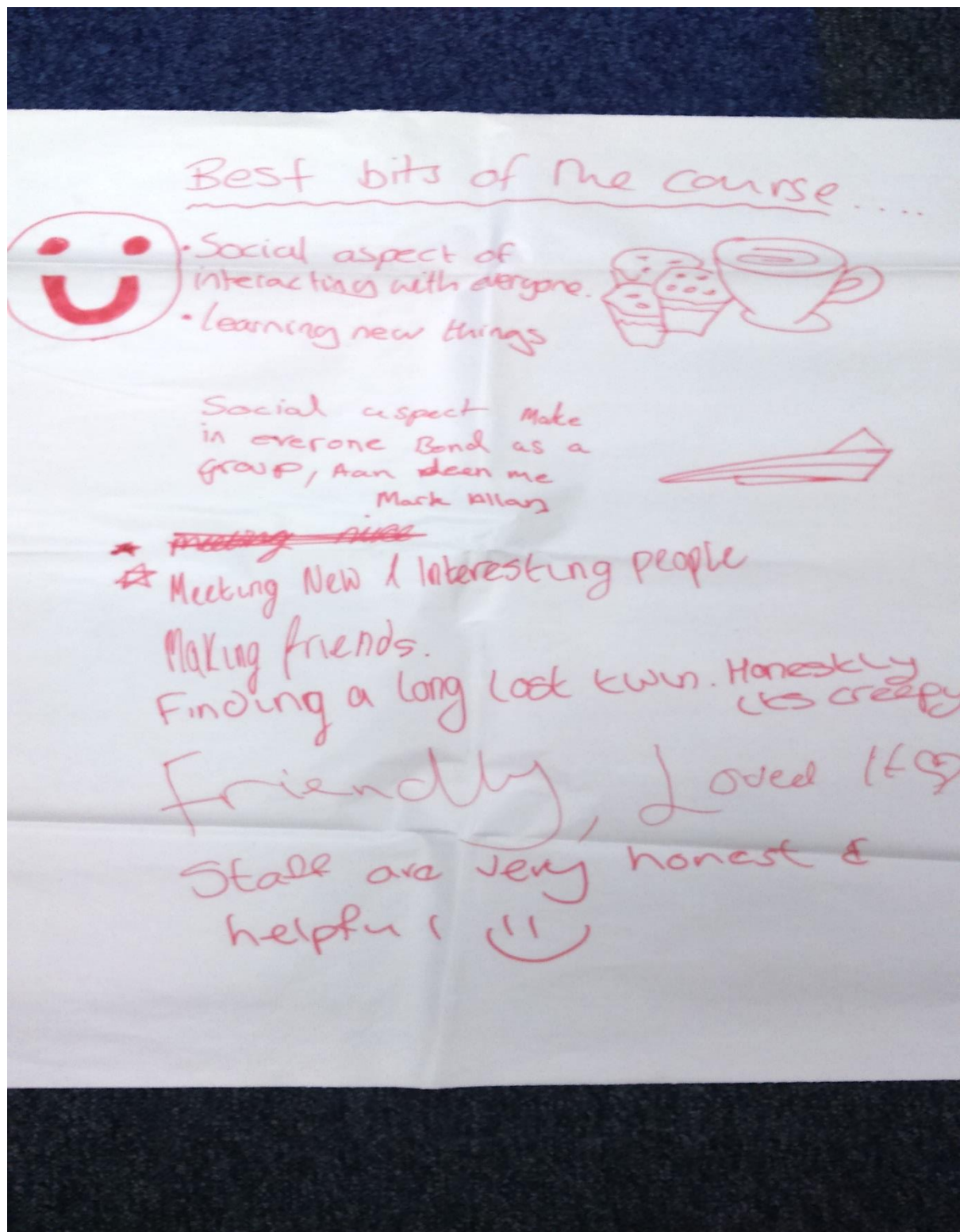
"Outside looking in" [P2]

### After

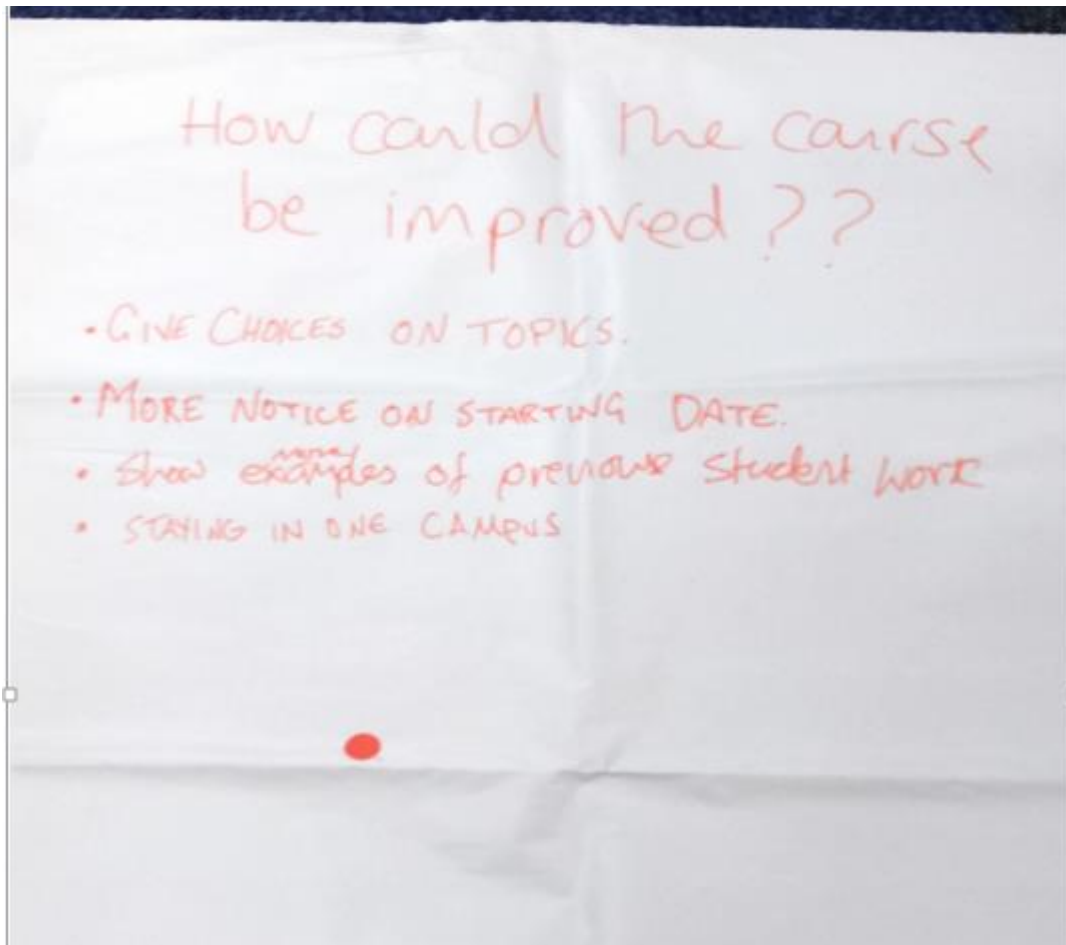


"I'm on a steady level and understanding on where I need to be" [P10].





Flipchart comments cont.





## The Blob Tree

