

# A study of motivational factors that influence student engagement and how best to improve course design, delivery and outcomes

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### INTRODUCTION

A variety of factors influence student motivation to attend and participate in courses, an important one being choice. If continued receipt of social welfare benefits is dependent on attendance it may lead some students to view the whole learning experience in a negative light.

The experience of running such a class led to this research project which aims to investigate motivational factors that influence participation with a view to resolving the issues that conditionality to attend involves.

The Career Directions course was created to help students develop the requisite skills to find employment. Sessions were designed to build confidence and empower students by recognising their current skills, attributes and experience whilst also developing job search and ICT skills and being a positive learning experience.

A number of issues that affected student motivation and engagement were identified, and adaptations were made to resolve these. The impact of successive courses and adaptations on student motivation were measured largely using the student ratings of their experience of the course.

### ADAPTATIONS

- Student expectations managed
- Referrals divided into long-term and short-term unemployed
- Critical ICT issues were addressed at an early stage
- Recruitment procedure revised
- Pre enrolment information reviewed
- Group size reduced
- Room changed to reduce interruptions
- Course content changed

### METHODOLOGY

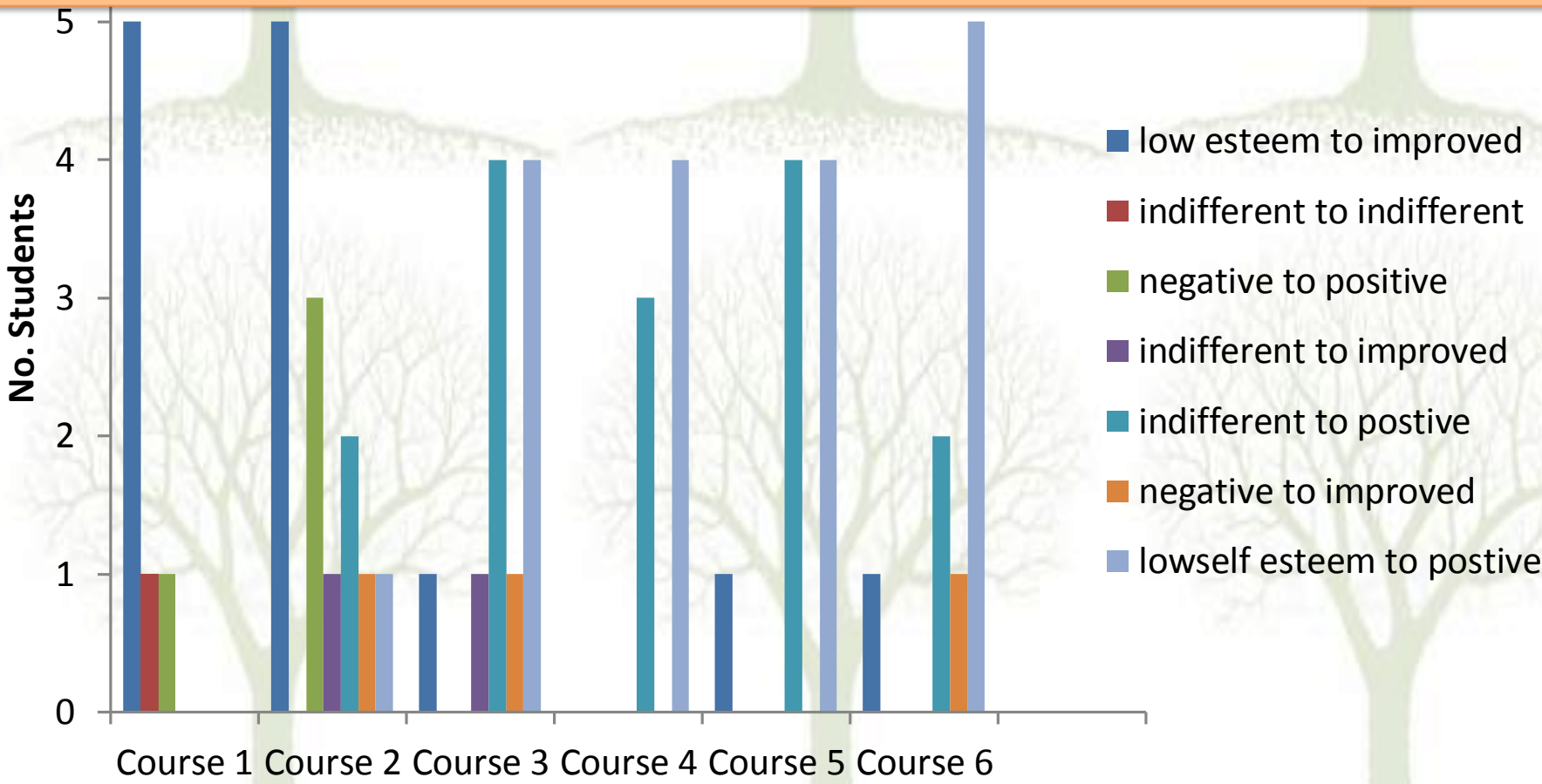
Six courses were compared over successive weeks, and the impact of adaptations to the course delivery were measured. Students rated a number of aspects of the course.

The tutor rated her perception of student motivation for each class. These were then mapped over the six courses to show changes or improvements to student motivation.

### RESULTS

By the fourth course, a number of the interventions that had been initiated were being felt; feedback from students was more positive about many aspects of the learning experience. For example *Induction, Course delivery, the level and content of the Course, and feeling safe and welcomed* were all rated excellent compared to the previous three courses.

By the third course, the rating for motivation improved with more students moving from a position of 'indifferent to positive,' and 'low self-esteem to positive'. See chart above. Some aspects of the course, like accommodation, where improvements that could not be made and were rated consistently as poor.



### CONCLUSION

The courses offered a valuable learning experience for tutors and course organisers. The research data indicates that notwithstanding the many challenges to motivation, there are issues that, if addressed carefully during the planning stage of course content and delivery, will be likely to be reduced in scale

As a result of a series of course adaptations, student morale, attitude and motivation and engagement improved and more students rated a higher number of course elements as either good or excellent. This research project has helped to measure the impact of the course adaptations and the lessons learnt will direct and inform future course design and delivery.

Above all valuing and respecting students and fostering conditions to give students a degree of control over their circumstances has been key to improving course outcomes and student motivation.

by Jutinder Mason



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## Recommendations

- Students do have a voice that needs to be heard in relation to their learning experience. Course adaptations can quickly show improvements in student attitude and motivation.
- Undertake more detailed research into future courses to identify any recurring themes that could be actioned by the WEA and other stakeholders, with a view to improving students' learning experience.
- Additional follow-up research on student responses, perhaps three or six months following course delivery, might help to identify the extent and longevity of benefits delivered by the courses.

## Key Findings

- By the fourth course, a number of the interventions were being felt.
- Feedback from students was more positive about many aspects of the learning experience.
- Induction, Course delivery, the level and content of the course, and feeling safe and welcomed were all rated excellent compared to the previous three courses.
- By the third course, the rating for motivation improved with more students moving from a position of 'indifferent to positive,' and 'low self-esteem to positive'.
- Some aspects of the course, like accommodation, where improvements could not be made were rated consistently as poor.

“The expectations of what the course would deliver seemed to have disparity between the students and what they said that they had been told” Tutor

“I spoke out in a group which I won't have done in the past” student

“There was an Overwhelming sense of frustration by candidates” Tutor

“The exercise draws out your abilities” Student