

Enhancing
Teaching-Learning Environments
in Undergraduate Courses



Subject Overview Report

History

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November 2005

Subject Overview Report:

History

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The ETL Project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its Teaching and Learning Research Programme

URL: <http://www.tlrp.org>

ETL Project Subject Overview Report: History

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overview of the report

This report provides an overview of the work of the history strand of the ETL Project and the main findings that have emerged. In the central phase of the project we have been working with departmental partners in three different universities, focusing in each institution on one first-year and one later-year module. The aim has been to study these course units as teaching-learning environments, and to follow up with collaboratively agreed initiatives to enhance the quality of student learning, drawing directly on the empirical evidence collected by the project team. The data-set from this phase of the work in history comprises 1624 completed student questionnaires and 47 interviews with a total of 168 students. We also had several rounds of interviews, both formal and informal, with the staff teaching the modules. Research activities in the preceding preparatory phase included consultations with the project's History Adviser, telephone interviews with staff in a cross-section of history departments highly rated for their teaching, an analysis of teaching quality assessment reports for history, and reviewing the literature on history teaching and learning.

Introduction to the ETL Project

The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) was set up in 2000 and invited bids for research studies designed to make educational research findings more relevant to practitioners and policy makers. Relevance was to be ensured by setting up projects in which educational researchers investigated ways of improving the engagement of learners and their attainments while working closely with colleagues directly involved in the design and teaching of courses. At university level, previous research on teaching and learning had tended to look for general principles that could be applied across subject areas, and had made considerable strides in describing how students learn and study, and in pinpointing some of the salient influences on their learning. However, colleagues in subject departments often saw the research findings as being too remote from their own experience and specialism. The ETL project was thus designed to look at teaching and learning across a range of subject areas.

Here, it is only possible to describe the research strategies in outline and indicate some of the main findings within the subject area, but further information about the work of the project, can be found on the project web site at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/publications.html>. Electronic documents relating to specific aspects of our work will be indicated in the subsequent sections and these are also available on the project web site.

One of the problems in introducing educational research findings to colleagues in other disciplines is that the nature of the data collected, the analyses carried out, and the ways in which conclusions are reached, may be very different to those adopted in their own subject area. Given the complexities of teaching and learning, neither the ways in which concepts are defined and used, nor the approaches followed in gathering, analysing and interpreting data, can necessarily match the precision found in, say, the physical sciences. In consequence, researchers in education, as elsewhere in the social sciences, seek rigour by adopting research designs that come at a problem from different directions and draw on complementary sources of data. That is the strategy deployed in the ETL project, which draws on substantial experience of combining large-scale surveys with finer-grained, smaller-scale interview studies to investigate teaching and learning in authentic, everyday settings.

Outline of the research design

The guidelines established for TLRP required projects to work collaboratively with potential 'users' of the eventual findings and also to draw on international expertise. We did this initially by appointing a panel of distinguished subject advisers and two international consultants who were eminent researchers into teaching and learning (Professor David Perkins of Harvard and Emeritus Professor John Biggs who had posts in Australia and Hong Kong). For the history strand of the ETL project the subject adviser was Professor Harry Dickinson who has made a strong contribution to our work.

During the first year of the study, the project team analysed a representative selection of the national reports of assessments of departmental teaching quality that had resulted in excellent ratings, and followed these up with telephone interviews with a sub-sample of departmental staff. These analyses generated a framework for describing differences between departments in terms of administration, research, professional liaison, teaching and student support, as well as indicating variations in the mix of students entering the courses in relation to the teaching.

In parallel with this work, the project team also developed two questionnaires for use with students (see Technical Report on Questionnaire Development). The first of these – the Learning and Studying Questionnaire (LSQ) - was given at the start of each course unit and asked students about their reasons for coming into higher education and choosing that particular course unit, but with its main focus being on the ways in which the students had been going about their studying up to that point. The second questionnaire – the Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (ETLQ) – asked, first, about the ways students had approached their studying in that specific course unit, but concentrated on their experiences of the teaching-learning environment provided (i.e. all the various forms of teaching, learning resources, assignments and assessment they had encountered). Secondly, it asked about the demands they felt the unit had made on them and what gains in knowledge and skills they believed they had made. Students also gave self-ratings of their academic progress which would be used in conjunction with actual grades awarded by the institution.

In the main part of the project, we have been working with academic staff in departments, usually over a two or three-year period, looking at one first-year and one final-year course unit in each department. During the first year of the collaboration, the research staff discussed with the course team the rationale for the course unit and the way it was taught. They then distributed the questionnaires at the beginning and the end of the course unit, when they also interviewed groups of students about their experiences. Analyses of these baseline data allowed the research team to report back to the course team on how the students had responded to their experiences of the teaching-learning environment that had been provided.

The reports back to the course teams were the stimulus to a new round of discussion and consultation. The focus of these discussions was the provisional findings of the project team, complemented by the course team's own perceptions and experiences drawing on, for example, staff-student liaison meetings, evaluation questionnaires and end-of-module assessments. The aim was to review the empirical evidence to pinpoint the manifest strengths of the unit concerned while also identifying where and how the teaching-learning environment might be fine-tuned to enhance the quality of the students' learning. Where appropriate and feasible, a collaborative initiative was agreed, and in the history strand of the project an initiative was taken ahead in all six course units. Each initiative was systematically monitored by the project team, enabling comparisons to be made with the unit as previously taught, assessed and organised. In consequence, the project's findings encompass both the baseline data and the data from the collaborative initiatives, and contribute not only to an understanding of the effectiveness of contemporary teaching-learning environments in higher education but also yield insights into how the effectiveness of these environments might be enhanced.

Key findings covering the project as a whole are to be found on our web site. Here we present a summary of the findings, and their implications, solely for this subject area.

Conceptualising teaching-learning environments

As with any major research undertaking of this kind, we have had to find a conceptual framework that is appropriate to the aims of our work and the settings in which it is being carried out, holds out the prospect of yielding fresh – and hopefully powerful – insights, and seems likely to prove worthwhile for practitioners and policymakers as well as other researchers. In part, the conceptualisations that we have arrived at originate in past educational research, particularly the extensive literature on learning and teaching in higher education, which helped to mould our work from the outset. But in part, and equally crucially, the conceptualisations were forged as the project unfolded and we strove to make sense of the data being gathered. Fuller accounts of that process of

analysis are being given in other project publications. Here, for reasons of space, the focus is on the three constructs which resulted from it.

Approaches to learning and organised effort

The first of these provides a means of capturing the engagement of students, which is to be found in the well-established distinction between so-called deep and surface approaches to learning, or the extent to which students are focusing on extracting the underlying meaning of what they were studying or are content generally to reproduce what they have been given (Entwistle, 1997). This needed to be expanded, however, to take account of emerging findings on the extent to which students are organising their studying and using their time effectively, while putting concentrated effort into their work. Organised effort is therefore an important dimension in the LSQ questionnaire which the project has devised and administered (Entwistle, McCune and Hounsell, 2002).

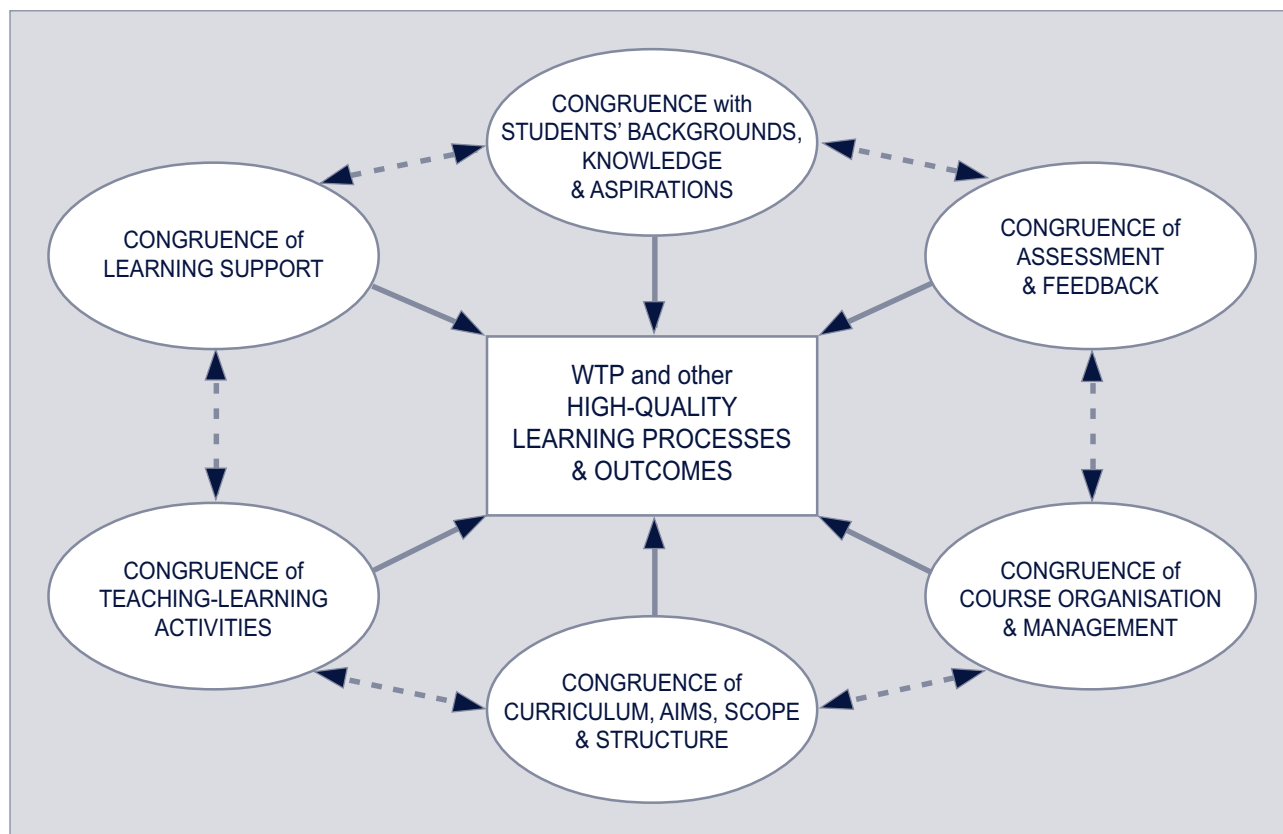
Ways of thinking and practising (WTP)

The second construct is a new one which has grown directly out of the project's work: ways of thinking and practising in a subject (WTP). The subject anchorage is intentional, reflecting a growing body of research about the powerful influences of disciplinary conventions and practices (see for example Anderson, 1997; Becher and Trowler, 2001; Hounsell, 1988, 1997; Lave and Wenger, 1999). WTP has been devised in an attempt to capture the richness, depth and breadth of what students can learn through engagement with a given discipline or subject area in a specific context, and particularly in the later, honours years of undergraduate study (Hounsell and McCune, 2002; McCune and Hounsell, 2005). In the course of the project's work (and particularly in the analyses of the student interviews), it became evident that as the students' grasp of a subject area began increasingly to resemble graduate-level mastery, so too did their appreciation evolve of what might be entailed not only in thinking like an established subject specialist, but also in 'doing the subject', i.e. tackling discipline-grounded activities and tasks in a manner which was akin, in some important respects at least, to that of the experienced subject practitioner. As conceptualised here, then, WTP extends beyond subject knowledge and understanding as generally defined. It can also encompass for instance a sense of how knowledge is generated within a subject, a critical appreciation of the limits of evidence and the contestability of findings, and a growing accomplishment in communicating the subject for differing purposes and to varied audiences.

Alignment and Congruence

The third construct, congruence, serves as an overarching conceptual model within which various key influences on undergraduate teaching-learning environments can be understood. It arose partly from the project team's review of the literature on teaching-learning environments, but it was also subsequently shaped by the initial empirical work undertaken in the first phase of the project together with concerns, observations and reflections arising directly from the whole ETL team's interactions with students and staff in the unit settings that were the focus of collaboration. Prominent in the former was Biggs' work on 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 1996, 2003), which stressed the importance of establishing course aims focused on understanding and seeking to ensure that teaching and assessment strategies were aligned with those aims. As the work of the project progressed, however, it was apparent that a much-modified description was needed of the 'goodness-of-fit' between what we have called ways of thinking and practising in the subject and the whole range of teaching and learning activities provided within the curriculum (Hounsell and McCune, 2002; McCune and Hounsell, 2005). 'Alignment' implies a single 'line of sight' between a WTP and a particular teaching-learning strategy and method of assessment, whereas Biggs himself, and the student learning literature more generally, has stressed the importance of seeing the teaching-learning environment as an integrated whole – a web of interconnections in which any one element out of place can affect how students approach and carry out their learning (Eizenberg, 1988; Entwistle, 1998; Biggs, 2003). The term congruence was judged to convey this broader conception more clearly. The various dimensions of congruence that have emerged in our analyses extend considerably beyond the teaching-learning and assessment activities highlighted in Biggs' model, and are shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Differing Forms of Congruence within Teaching-Learning Environments



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a considerable body of research studies on, and practitioner accounts of, learning and teaching history in higher education; and research at school level has been pursued vigorously. To take ahead the task of reviewing this literature, it was necessary to construct a database which provided an analytical categorisation of relevant studies. This database will be passed on to the History Subject Centre as a product of the ETL project. Given the quantity and variety of literature on learning and teaching history, it is only possible to give a very selective review within the confines of this subject report. Attention is focused on giving a sense of what have been major areas of activity and of highlighting findings and conceptualisations which are of particular relevance to the work of the ETL project.

Insights from school-based studies

At school level, there has been an ongoing enterprise of investigating how children and adolescents think about historical topics, form historical explanations, represent the concerns of history as a subject and understand the nature of causation. A clear, analytical summary of this quite large body of work (and of some related studies at college level) is provided by Voss (1998). Earlier work on children's reasoning about history was guided by a Piagetian perspective (e.g. Hallam, 1967, 1972) which emphasised the limitations on children's capacity to engage in the hypothetical reasoning required within history. In common with Piagetian research on other curricular areas, these early findings were challenged by later research (e.g. Booth, 1987) which pointed up how with appropriate curricular design and teaching/learning activities it was possible for children to examine historical evidence, and with scaffolding in the genres of school history writing to construct coherent accounts of their exploration of this historical evidence. Curriculum development in the UK, particularly in primary

schools, has adopted an active, investigative approach to historical study where the accent is on what children can achieve in terms of historical reasoning with appropriate support (Counsell, 2000).

While much recent literature may have pointed up what can be achieved by school pupils in historical study, research has also drawn attention to the specific intellectual demands made by history and their challenging nature. Some of this school-based research and reflection on the demands of historical study would also appear to have distinct relevance to higher education and illustrative examples of such studies are considered in the following paragraphs.

Lee (2002), for example, notes how: "History is counter-intuitive in the sense that at a certain point everyday ideas not only cease to be helpful, they actually make history an invalid activity" (p.37) and argues for the need to provide students with a meta-level framing of their activities. He observes that "any framework [of interpretation] must be taught within a metahistorical context: that is, it must equip students to understand the different kinds of claims we make about the past and the relation of these claims to the questions we ask and the evidence we adduce" (p.12).

A key feature of historical explanation identified by Voss in his 1998 review is that of contextualisation; the expectation that an individual primary source (Wineberg, 1991a) or a historical topic be considered against a wider historical view of relevant events and issues. In the following passage, Voss brings out well one of the implications of the importance placed on contextualisation: "explanation in history and the justification of historical assertions requires that the statements and evidence set forth are consistent with what else is known historically about the issue under study. In other words, coherence of the available information is a critical aspect of historical explanation (Kosso, 1993)."

The challenge of achieving appropriate contextualisation emerges clearly from the work of Halldén (1986, 1993, 1994, 1998). In a series of studies Halldén has examined secondary school history students' explanations for the process of democratisation in Sweden, finding that their explanations involved differing forms of "personalisation" including personification, rather than, say, a more 'sophisticated' structural explanation. Halldén resists viewing these personalised forms of explanation as straightforward misconceptions and in a later article commenting on the studies of other researchers he observed that "we can look upon the children's reasoning, not as an example of poor reasoning at a lower level in a developmental scheme, but rather as reasoning within a different framework of ideas, which may be inadequate within the historical context at hand" (p.274). He goes on to suggest that "we look upon differences between explanations as explanations within different contexts" (p.278) defining contexts as consisting not just of physical settings but also frameworks of ideas and beliefs (Halldén, 2001, p.276 and Halldén, 1998). On the topic of contextualisation, Halldén (1994, and see Voss, 1998, p.186) draws attention to the paradox that while a student may need to consider a historical episode or topic in relation to other historical knowledge, achieving a coherent, contextualised view is a problematic business when as a learner one's historical knowledge is limited. At the same time, however, this difficulty can be read as highlighting the need to communicate explicitly to students the expectation for forming historical explanations in a contextualised manner and to exemplify the ways in which this expectation can be fulfilled. This theme of the desirability of explicitly communicating central historical ways of thinking that we have picked up here in relation to the school-based literature on learning history will reappear later as a leitmotiv of the collaborative initiatives within the history strand of the ETL project.

Learning and teaching history at university level

Taking account of the wider literature on learning and teaching

Turning to the literature at university level, a number of recent key texts have situated history education within the wider literature on learning and teaching in higher education in an incisive manner. For example, Booth (2003), not only provides an analytical synthesis of studies on history learning, teaching, assessment, course design and innovatory approaches but also considers how the general literature on teaching and learning can inform the efforts of history lecturers, alerting them to the

students' perspectives and pointing up key matters in creating a context for learning. A similar approach is evident in a recent text by Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy (2005) which is referred to later in this review.

Some of the writings produced in the last decade on university history teaching have been inspired by, and have taken forward, the agenda associated with the body of work on the scholarship of teaching. These writings have progressed the dual task of defining and advancing the scholarship of history teaching and advocating that effort invested in this scholarly enterprise should reap disciplinary prestige equal to 'traditional' historical research (Calder, Cutler and Kelly, 2002).

Students' understanding and motivation

Turning to specific areas that have been investigated, studies such as those conducted by Newton and Newton (1998), Newton, Newton and Oberski (1998), have investigated students' conceptions of the nature of historical understanding. The Newtons (1998) have revealed differences between sixth-form history students and graduates in conceptions, with a shift away from a focus on the accumulation of information by the sixth-formers to an appreciation of the provisional nature of historical truth and the complexity of its construction on the part of the graduates.

Surveys of student opinion by Booth (1993, 1997) have provided a clear picture of students' motivations and expectations for the gains to be achieved from a history degree, with the choice of history as a subject typically being described in terms of intrinsic interest. From this survey work Booth (2000) observes that "in the study of history, students place a premium on the personal" and "the ability of the subject to accommodate both academic rigour and personal opinion is a great attraction" (p.33). He also points up how: "Studying history is markedly associated with issues of personal identity. As Hvolbek (1993, p.9) remarks, 'students want to understand their lives, their history, and their place in the world.'" (Booth, 2003, p.41). In addition, his work has illuminated student characterisations of a good history teacher. Key features of the good history teacher identified in his studies included: enthusiasm and expressed commitment to teaching, "often closely associated with a 'passion' for the subject" (Booth, 2003, p.42), evident subject expertise and approachability / willingness to help students.

Conceptions of teaching

Looking at history teaching from the staff perspective, there are quite a number of carefully reasoned, reflective accounts of practice (e.g. Holt, 1990). However, there has been little in the way of educational research investigating lecturers' conceptions of history teaching, with the exception of the work of Quinlan (1999). In a study of eight academics in a department of a US university she distinguished between "Old Guard" members of the department who had a "consumerist" approach, focusing students more on the outcomes of historical inquiry and a younger generation of "producers" who encouraged student "detective work." (All of the lecturers whom we have interviewed in the ETL project took a "producer" approach, emphasising the importance of interpretation and students developing the skills of active analysis.) The picture of a lack of investigation of history lecturers' conceptions of teaching will change, once the findings are published of an ongoing study by Hyland that has involved interviewing over 60 history lecturers on their conceptions of teaching and its relationship to history as a discipline. Preliminary analysis of interview transcripts has revealed both important commonalities in representations of history teaching and contrasts over matters such as the extent to which university history education should concern itself with students' personal development (Hyland, personal communication).

Elements of accomplished history teaching

A recent synthesis of research on what makes for accomplished history teaching has been provided by Paxton and Wineburg (2000). The listing that they produce of key characteristics of the "master history teacher" includes: the foregrounding to students of epistemological concerns, the exploration

of students' prior understandings, giving central place to engagement with "authentic historical documents and artefacts", the modelling of historical reasoning and habits of mind, and alertness to the power of methods of assessment. On the first item on this list, Paxton and Wineburg note, among other observations that "history is first and foremost an evidentiary quest. A history class that does not acquaint students with the epistemological pillars of the discipline – the tools of warrant, justification, evidence; the ability to discern sound from slippery narrative – risks doing more harm than good" (p.856).

Interpreting primary sources

A very important area of research has involved examining (from a cognitive psychology perspective), the stance and thought processes of professional historians and students engaged in interpreting primary sources, allowing comparisons to be drawn between the performance of novices and experts (e.g., Leinhardt and Young, 1996, Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b, 1998). Insights that have emerged from this area of research include the recognition that there are differences in the "epistemological stance" to reading primary source documents taken by novices as opposed to professional historians (Wineburg, 1991b), with novices reading these texts as "sources of information" and seeing their purpose as gathering information. This position contrasted with professional historians' much more complex representation of the nature of sources where texts were viewed as "social exchanges" and central attention was given to how "texts were defined by their authors" (Wineburg, 1991b, p.510). Professional historians could be seen to read for "subtexts", treating the text as a rhetorical artifact and as a human artifact. In using the term human artifact, Wineburg is referring to "how texts frame reality and disclose information about their authors' assumptions, world views and beliefs" (Wineburg, 1991b, p.499). These studies also portrayed professional historians' engagement with sources as one based on a dialectical process of movement between the questions posed concerning a specific source and the textual materials themselves (Wineburg, 1998, p.337). Wineburg has shown how in this dialectical encounter, historians are guided by the general strategies of: sourcing, corroboration and contextualisation (Wineburg, 1991a). An important area of concern within the history strand of the ETL project has been to explore further the challenges that undergraduates face in source work and to identify the features of course design and delivery that can support their engagement with these challenges (Anderson et al., 2004).

Essay-writing

Turning to the topic of assessed work, Hounsell (1997) delineated qualitatively distinct conceptions of essay-writing among the history students in his study, i.e., of the essay as argument, as viewpoint, as arrangement. These conceptions differ from each other along the dimensions of the interpretation by students of essay material, their organisation of the structure of the essay and the role given to data within the essay. In the conception of the history essay as arrangement, little attention is given to interpretation and the essay is considered as a sequence of discrete elements rather than being organised to present a coherent point of view (Hounsell, 2000). In a review article on 'Reappraising and recasting the history essay', Hounsell poses the question of why such a conception might exist among second year undergraduates when it is "manifestly at variance with the expectations of the students' tutors as well as with wider academic norms" (Hounsell, 2000, p.186). As one of the possible explanations for the persistence of such a conception, he draws attention to the largely tacit nature of the knowledge about what constitutes appropriate academic discourse in history, and the difficulties that historians may face in making this knowledge explicit. The article also reviews initiatives that have been taken to assist students in gaining an understanding of the demands and conventions of communication in undergraduate history, including means of achieving "greater explicitness about expectations of essay work" (Hounsell, 2000, p.187).

Feedback and assessment

Concern with achieving greater explicitness of disciplinary practice and standards also features prominently in writing on the provision of feedback to history students. For example, Hyland (2000, p.242) notes that "students need to understand what their tutors mean by such terms as 'structure',

'argument', 'analysis', 'intepretation' and 'evidence' in history writing, so that they know the kinds of question that historians ask when reading, and can organise their material and direct their writing to address a topic in a way that meets the particular requirements of their tutors." The assessment of essay-writing has been addressed recently in a series of studies conducted by a group of researchers particularly interested in gender issues (Read, Francis and Robson, 2005).

On assessment more generally, key texts that we have already referred to display: an alertness to its shaping power over learning (Paxton and Wineburg, 2000), a concern to involve students in the process of assessment (Booth, 2003), and to rethink and reform existing procedures (Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy, 2005). The History Benchmark Statement (2000, para 30) has pointed up the importance of providing diversity in assessment; and both Booth (2003) and Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy (2005) highlight the need for historians to move on from the current concentration on essays as a form of assessment and the wide range of assessment options that are available. Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy (2005) also focus attention on the issue of developing a more differentiated assessment that will support students' progression through their programme of study.

Taking innovations ahead and ICT

These two texts also provide a useful summary of how innovative approaches to specific forms of learning and teaching such as seminar work have been taken ahead within history; and Booth reviews efforts to achieve collegial discussion of, and reflection on, teaching. From its first deployment in higher education, there has been quite strong engagement among historians with using ICT to promote student learning, including the use of data-handling software to allow students to explore and analyse historical data-sets. An overview of current thinking about, and uses of, ICT in undergraduate history degrees can be found in Spaeth (2000), Lloyd-Jones and Lewis (2000), Glasfurd and Winstanley (2000) and in Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy (2005). Aside from work that has reported on how specific forms of history learning can be enhanced, there has also been reflection on the curriculum as a whole and investigation of curricular patterns in the UK. Before we consider this work, it is necessary first to set it against the background of distinctive features of history as a discipline.

3. DISCIPLINARY FEATURES AND THE HISTORY CURRICULUM

Distinctive characteristics of historical knowledge

Diversity

The challenge of curricular design in undergraduate history degrees comes into sharp relief when one considers the enormous range and diversity of concerns of history as a discipline. Not only does it range over different periods and geographical regions, but it also concerns itself with very different aspects of the human past: political, social, economic, intellectual, cultural, religious, gender-relations, imperial, etc. In the words of Jordanova (2000, p.26), " 'History' includes so much and has such fluid edges, that the idea of a delimited body of knowledge is not really appropriate ... there is no body of historical knowledge that underpins the whole field." She goes on to observe that history also does not possess a single agreed, foundational theoretical framework with the consequence that "In this respect the discipline of history is totally unlike the natural sciences; they possess bodies of theory and knowledge without a mastery of which one cannot be said to practise them at all" (ibid. p.28). We shall return shortly to consider the curricular challenges that flow from the fact that there is no specific body of foundational knowledge that all history students are, or can be, expected to acquire.

Within particular domains of historical study, there typically are competing narratives and explanations. The fact that historical knowledge is marked by quite high levels of controversy would seem to have important implications for learning and teaching, suggesting as it does that there may

be more scope and greater need for students to exercise personal interpretation and judgement than is the case in disciplines where the undergraduate curriculum contains much settled territory. In Evans' forceful statement (2000, p.58), "even the most inexperienced history student can dispute interpretations put forward by even the grandest of professors." A later section of the report presents the view from the ETL project of students' pursuit of active, personal interpretation.

Another aspect of the diversity of historical knowledge is fore-grounded by Paxton and Wineburg (2000) in the article we have referred to earlier where they in effect highlight the need to alert students to authorial stance, and the way in which this stance may be related to the historian's political, social and cultural positioning: "there is no such thing as *a* history but there are instead multiple histories that account for the perspectives of the triumphant and the vanquished, the powerful and the marginalized, the mainstream and the minority, the enslaved and the enslavers, and so on" (p.856).

Contingency of the historical record

Looking at a different aspect of the nature of historical knowledge, the earlier discussion of research into the processes that historians deploy in analysing primary sources has given some sense of the complex nature of source interpretation. Differing sources may also provide contrasting, or even contradictory, accounts of an event or phenomenon. Even in historical domains where there are copious sources, they constitute a partial record in the sense that the survival of a particular document or other artefact which can serve as historical evidence involves a considerable element of chance. This contingency in the historical record itself introduces uncertainties into the process of historical knowledge and into its status which are not characteristic of all disciplines. In the words of the project's History Adviser, "Historical interpretation relies on evidence from the past, but that evidence is sometimes scant, sometimes overwhelming, nearly always contradictory, and needs to be read and evaluated with care" (Dickinson, personal communication).

Returning to Newton and Newton's (1998) description of sixth-formers with a conception of historical understanding focused on the acquisition of information and participants in Wineburg's studies who saw the reading of sources in similar terms, there is a need for students with such views to make a considerable shift in epistemological stance if they are to appreciate the provisional nature of historical knowledge and the complexities involved in its construction.

Aspects of school experience of learning history

Before we turn to the discussion of the history curriculum in UK universities, it is appropriate first to draw attention to certain features of the secondary school experience of learning history. As we have noted earlier, efforts have been invested in creating a curriculum where attention is given to pupils' active exploration of historical materials and topics and there is much evidence of thoughtful, skilled practice in history teaching, with history rating very well in inspection reports.

Anxieties have however been raised by the historical profession concerning the narrow content focus of much pre-university history teaching, with a concentration on topics such as Nazi Germany and a comparative neglect of many periods and geographical regions. This narrowing is not simply anecdotal opinion, but has been established by an analysis of the proportion of pupils entered for particular content papers in national examinations (Dargie, 2005; Lang, 2005). Recently the Historical Association Curriculum Development Project (History 14-19, 2005) observed that: "One of our most important concerns relates to the narrowness of current provision in history 14-19, especially in terms of the types of historical work and experience, and of the geographical and chronological range of the topics covered. ... Limited knowledge prevents many pupils from having a broad awareness of history or the ability to make historical comparisons and contrasts beyond the strict limits of their courses" (2.4.4 and 2.4.5). Analysis of the questions set in national examinations has also raised worries concerning a lack of alignment between summative assessment and the skills and understanding that teachers are aiming to develop in their pupils (Lang, 2005; History 14-19, 2005).

The history curriculum at university

Skills and qualities of mind

At university level the History Benchmarking Group worked to create a statement that could command wide support of the essential skills and “qualities of mind” to be cultivated during the course of an undergraduate history degree (History Benchmark Statement, 2000). It details the capacities to be fostered within a history degree, such as: basic critical skills, the reading of sources, intellectual independence and the marshalling of argument. It also highlights matters concerning the development of an understanding of the nature of historical knowledge that we have touched on earlier in this review: “The understanding of the problems inherent in the historical record itself: awareness of a range of viewpoints and the way to cope with this; appreciation of the range of problems involved in the interpretation of complex, ambiguous and conflicting and often incomplete material; a feeling for the limitations of knowledge and the dangers of simplistic explanations.” (History Benchmark Statement, para. 12 iv). In addition attention is given within the Benchmark Statement to assisting students to develop a reflective and reflexive approach to historical study, which involves questioning the discipline’s “social rationale” and “theoretical underpinnings” (ibid. para. 19).

Comparable efforts to delineate the capacities and habits of mind associated with the study of history have been made by historians with experience of educational research (e.g. Stearns, 1993; Booth and Hyland, 2000). Matters within the listing produced by Booth and Hyland (2000) that Booth (2003) highlights as constituting “core practices” are critical analysis of historical texts and other sources, critical reflection on the discipline’s ways of thinking and acting, and imaginative engagement (ibid. pp.24-26).

Progression

The development of understanding, underpinned by increasing skill in the deployment of these central disciplinary practices, is portrayed by Booth (and the staff participants in the ETL project) as an “iterative process” (ibid. p.20). This iterative process “proceeds differentially according to learners’ prior knowledge and existing conceptions of the subject, the interplay between the level of historical knowledge and skill in learning, and the context of learning (including the skill of the teacher)” (ibid.).

While there may be agreement within the historical community on the progressive nature of historical understanding, somewhat different conceptions of what students’ progress through a degree entails have been revealed by an interview study of 12 UK historians by Barker and McLean (2003). Analysis of these interviews led Barker and McLean “to discern two broad, though overlapping, models: progression as the process of becoming a practising historian and progression as becoming increasingly skilled as a ‘general arts’ student” (p.1). This study also revealed these academics’ identification of barriers to progression, including the anxiety that in more resource-constrained settings “students are not getting the attention they need to enable them to progress to the degree to which they are capable” and comments on how modularisation acts against achieving a coherent, progressive student experience.

Looking at progression in terms of course/programme design, the History Benchmark Statement (2000) points up the responsibility of lecturers to design courses in a manner that will facilitate the progressive development of understanding. However, in viewing the current scene of university programme and course design in history, Timmins, Vernon and Kinealy (2005) “urge that a good deal more could be done to formulate and articulate how progression and differentiation are being achieved” (p.7). Aside from emphasising the need to keep the question of progression at the forefront of course design activity, they point up the following dilemma of “the thorny question of how much compulsion is appropriate in history undergraduate curricula to ensure that students achieve some degree of breadth in content coverage when choosing their programmes of study, while at the same time being given sufficient opportunity to pursue their own enthusiasms” (pp.7-8).

Patterns of curricular diversity

Dilemmas regarding the appropriate shape and substance of undergraduate programmes of study may exist in many disciplines, but these may be particularly acute in history given (as we have indicated earlier), the lack of any specific body of foundational knowledge that all history students can be expected to acquire or of a single agreed theoretical framework. This broad disciplinary ambit is reflected in the lack of a standard university history curriculum or degree structure; and surveying the UK scene as a whole, one is struck by the presence at all stages of a degree programme of very different kinds of history, structured in different ways. Within this diversity of content and concern, however, several broad curricular patterns have been identified from survey work conducted by Hitchcock, Shoemaker and Tosh (2000). They labelled the most common approach to curriculum structure and progression the research training model: "In essence this model provides an apprenticeship in historical method, acquired by means of a progression through a sequence of units which bears an ever-closer resemblance to the empirical-source based study usually required for research degrees in history" (p.54). A less commonly found "but equally traditional" curricular type is described as the *à la carte* approach which provides students with "a free choice of the range of units offered, which are largely of the 'options' type" (ibid.). All parts of the degree are designed to promote a range of capacities and a "historical education of this kind can be thought of as a training of the intellect which is cumulative and iterative" (ibid.). A third, least represented curriculum type "places skills teaching at its very core" (p.55) while tending to rely on a much narrower range of historical subject matter than the other two types.

Looking at specific elements of a history degree, a survey of historical source work in UK universities by Aldous and Hicks (2001) found that a "high level of importance" was universally given to undergraduates' engagement with sources, with sources normally being used for teaching in all the years of a degree. They found much to commend in current teaching within this area, and identified "many pockets of excellent (but contrasting) practice." This survey also revealed considerable differences in the purposes and expectations associated with undergraduate source work, in assessment of this work and criteria for assessment. Another recent survey by Gunn and Rawnsley (2005) has identified distinct differences across history programmes in the extent to which an introduction to relevant theoretical perspectives and the promotion of reflexivity were explicitly structured within the curriculum.

4. WAYS OF THINKING AND PRACTISING IN HISTORY

Historians' perspectives

The preceding sections have pointed up the diversity of historical content and distinct differences in curricular structure and organisation. One also needs to be alert to differences between historians in epistemological stance and the influence of particular traditions of scholarship. It is important, however, that this alertness to variety does not obscure important commonalities in historical practice. Becher and Trowler in their study of academic disciplines, for example, found that "more historians used the phrase 'community of scholars' than did respondents in any other discipline" (2001, p.187), and in our research a very strong commonality emerged in lecturers' views of the ways in which they wished students to conceptualise historical work and the habits of mind that they wished students to develop. This was the case as regards the nine staff whom we interviewed in the pilot phase and who were teaching a range of subjects at various levels in four contrasting settings. It was also the case in the main phase when we were working with six other module teams, who again had a spread of subject interests and were quite differently situated. Feedback from presentations we have given to several different groups of historians, numerous informal discussions with historian colleagues and close reading of the literature have allowed us to have some confidence that the ways of thinking and practising identified by the historians whom we have interviewed in the ETL project have wider currency within the profession as a key 'common denominator' in history.

Aspirations for students

These ways of thinking were viewed as both intrinsic to the discipline and as valued outcomes of historical study. Such habits of mind shaped the aspirations that staff had for their students and can be seen to underpin the varied contexts in which, and the various means by which, they sought to develop undergraduates' historical capabilities and understanding. To achieve a high quality of engagement with historical topics students were seen as needing to develop their conceptions of the nature of historical knowledge and evidence and their capacity to interact with that knowledge along the dimensions summarised in the following insert.

Ways of thinking and practising in history

- ◆ appreciation of history as socially constructed and contested
- ◆ skilled interpretation/ synthesis /evaluation of historical evidence, topics
- ◆ placing particular events / topics within broader contexts
- ◆ alertness to interconnections among phenomena
- ◆ sensitivity to the 'strangeness of the past'
- ◆ ability to view events and issues from different perspectives
- ◆ readiness to separate out one's own preconceptions
- ◆ communicating representations of subject matter in appropriate forms of expression and argument

As one element of achieving a greater awareness of the nature of historical knowledge and evidence, entrant undergraduates have to begin to grapple with the socially constructed nature of history and of historical accounts, including the shifts in historical understanding over time and the contested nature of historical interpretations. In keeping with this emphasis on contestation, the history lecturers whom we interviewed had a strong expectation that students would come to exercise personal initiative in creating their own well-argued interpretation, synthesis and evaluation of a topic.

A related development in understanding the nature of historical knowledge and evidence is that of contextualisation, (touched on earlier in our review of the literature). Analysis of historical events, or of an individual primary source, needs to be framed appropriately within a wider pattern of events and/or set of processes – understood in relation to a wider context. Allied to the practice of contextualisation is a growing alertness to the interconnectedness of historical phenomena.

Another key aspect of historical practice that staff wished to foster was the ability to view a topic from different perspectives. Over the course of their undergraduate studies it was expected that students would acquire sensitivity to the 'strangeness of the past' and develop what can be described as their perspective-taking skills, i.e. the ability to decentre themselves and view matters from the very different positions of particular historical actors. This act of perspective-taking entails a readiness to separate out one's own preconceptions. Linked to this concern to view matters from the perspective of the original actors whom they are studying, is a requirement to be vigilant about how accounts of an episode may be recast as events unfold.

While gaining a sense of the practices outlined in the preceding paragraphs, students at the same time require to gain expertise in communicating their increasingly differentiated representations of particular subject matter in a coherent manner and in disciplinarily appropriate forms of expression and argument.

Conceptualising ways of thinking and practising

Attention has been given within the history strand of the ETL project to the question of conceptualising how disciplinary practices, such as the central matters listed above, inform students' experience and understanding (Anderson and Day, 2005). It has been noted that it is important not to reify these practices or to treat them as 'free-standing' elements. They are mediated by a lecturer's personal interpretation of these practices and teaching approach, and appropriated (in differing ways to differing degrees) by students through processes of individual interpretation and participation. These processes of appropriation through participation (Rogoff, 1995) are in turn shaped by the affordances and constraints of specific academic settings. We turn now to consider the characteristics of the specific settings which were the sites of our collaborative work within the history strand of the ETL project.

5. SETTINGS AND SAMPLES IN PHASE 2

Institutional contexts

The main phase of the history strand of the ETL project was carried out in collaboration with three history departments or sections, which all had strong reputations with regard to their interest in and concern for teaching, as well as high research ratings. They were located in deliberately different kinds of universities; the first (H1) a well-established institution that became an independent university in the late 1960s, the second (H2) a post-1992 university strongly committed to serving local needs, and the third (H3) an old university attracting students from across the UK. Within each institution we concentrated on one first-year module and one later-year module whose key characteristics are summarised in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

Accessing the settings

Initial access was negotiated with the assistance of the project's History Adviser and led to us having an introductory meeting with each department head to discuss the focus, aims and time-scales of the project, what departmental involvement would entail, and what benefits might accrue. Whilst the heads were rightly wary about how much staff and student time would be taken up by participation, agreement in principle was fairly readily reached. For the first-year modules there was not a choice to be made, except in the old university, while the selection of a later-year module was a matter for internal consultation. In one case the head of department volunteered his own final-year module, and in the other two settings the staff concerned were also enthusiastic about teaching in general and not resistant to becoming involved.

First-year course units

Certain features of the first-year units (Table 5.1) were more alike in settings H1 and H2 than in H3. In the first two universities the modules focused on Modern rather than Medieval History, and ran for a semester instead of an academic year. The H3 course spanned a rather longer time period and wider geographical area than did H1F or H2F. Enrolment on the latter modules was about double that of H3 (well over 200 compared to a hundred plus), and the educational backgrounds of their students were broadly similar and rather more diverse than in H3. All three modules used a mixture of lectures and tutorials or seminars. In H1F and H2F there were two lectures a week and one tutorial or seminar, whereas the H3 module made somewhat more use of seminars to complement the once weekly lecture. There were also variations in the summative assessment patterns, with H3 requiring the most essay-type written work, and H1 and H2 (in the later year) assessing seminar/tutorial performance. Between three and ten staff were involved in teaching each module. By coincidence (and despite the diversity in history programmes and courses already indicated) these particular first-year units all favoured taking a thematic rather than a chronological approach.

Table 5.1 Summary of First-Year Course Unit Settings

Unit code and theme	H1F Modern History (01/03) Early Modern History (03/04)	H2F Modern History	H3F Medieval History
Institutional setting	A well-established institution that became an independent university in the late 1960s	A post-1992 metropolitan university strongly committed to serving local needs	An old university attracting students from across the UK
Indicative admission requirements	A range of possible qualifications including Highers (BBB) and A levels (CC + 1 other)	A range of possible qualifications for entry to Social Sciences (Highers BBC; A levels CCD)	Mostly A levels (AAB) including history; a few Access, Highers & international qualifications
Unit timing, duration and place in degree programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A one-semester module taken in the second semester (01/03) & the first semester (03/04) - A 10-week module; students take five other modules, one of which intending historians also take within the History department. - History modules = between one third & two thirds of first year study (01/03), possibly less with modularisation (03/04) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - First semester module taken by students in the Social Sciences - A 12-week module; students take five other modules and this is the only History one - History modules = one sixth of first year study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two-term module; core for most participants but element of choice and elective for others - A 20-week module; students take five other modules which can all be in the department. - Choice within three time-period groupings. - History modules = two thirds or more of first year study
Student enrolment	Pre-collab. initiative: 231 (01/02); 240 (02/03) Collaborative initiative: 224 (03/04)	Pre-collab. initiative: 241 (02/03) Collaborative initiative: 227 (03/04)	Pre-collab. initiative: 107 (02/03) Collaborative initiative: 118 (03/04)
Core teaching provision	Lectures (20 in all; two a week) Tutorials (10 in all; one a week)	Lectures (24 in all; two a week) Seminars (11 in all; one a week)	Lectures (19 in all; almost one a week) Seminars (14 in all; not quite one a week)
Assessment (including weightings)	01/03 an essay-type exam and coursework (essay, document-based exercise, project) 03/04 a formative essay due in week 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Primary source investigative project (40%) - Timed essay (40%) - Tutorial performance (20%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One 1500 word essay (30%) - One 2 hour essay-type exam (60%) - Overall seminar performance (10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two 2000 word essays (30%) - One 3 hour essay-type exam (70%)
Guidance / learning support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Course guide - Detailed study guide and workbook - VLE (03/04) including discussion board, further reading, primary source materials, practical exercises, lecture notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Module booklet - Documents and internet sources booklet - Individual tutorials if necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Module handbook - Preliminary Honours handbook - History Department Learning handbook - VLE based materials (03/04)
Staffing input	10 lecturers and tutors	3 lecturers and some extra assistance	3 lecturers

Table 5.2 Summary of Later-Year Course Unit Settings

Unit code and theme	H1L Scotland and the Americas (early modern)	H2L Scottish Political History (modern)	H3L Economic / Institutional History (modern)
Institutional setting	A well-established institution that became an independent university in the late 1960s	A post-1992 metropolitan university strongly committed to serving local needs	An old university attracting students from across the UK
Unit duration and place in degree programme	An elective module available to 3rd and 4th year History or American Studies students. 20 weeks in 01/03; 10 weeks in 03/04	An elective second-semester, 12-week, 4th year module; available to students with a third level pass in either Politics or History.	An elective year-long special subject module 'double weighted'; available to 3rd (final) year History students
Student enrolment	Pre-collab. initiative: 34 (01/02); 28 (02/03) Collaborative initiative: 25 (03/04)	Pre-collab. initiative: 28 (01/02) Collaborative initiative: 11 (03/04)	Pre-collab. initiative: 16 (02/03) Collaborative initiative: 11 (03/04)
Teaching staff for the unit	1 lecturer (and a teaching assistant in 02/03)	2 lecturers	1 lecturer
Core teaching provision	Lectures (20 in all years) (one a week in 01/03; two a week in 03/04) Tutorials (10 in all years) (one every 2 weeks 01/03, one a week 03/04)	Lectures (12 in 01/02; 11 in 03/04) Seminars (9 in 01/02; 10 in 03/04)	Seminars (22 in 02/03 and 03/04) (one two-hour weekly seminar 02/03; one three-hour weekly seminar 03/04)
Assessment (including weightings)	- Two 2500 word essays (30%) - Oral presentation (10%) - one 3-hour essay-type exam (60%)	- Two 3000 word essays (40%) - One 3-hour essay-type exam (60%)	- Required formative coursework (4 document commentaries, 4 book/article reviews, plus in 02/03 two essays) 02/03 - One 3-hour essay-type exam (50%) - One 3-hour gobbets exam (50%) 03/04 - Two 2500 word essays (40%) - One 3-hour essay-type exam (35%) - One 3-hour gobbets exam (25%)
Guidance / learning support	- Course outline - Course guide - VLE provided all years but more intensively in 03/04 as a matter of institutional policy	- Module handbook - Anthology of textual material (reading week) - History Assessment guide	- Module handbook - Large set of documentary source materials - Final Honours handbook

Later-year course units

The later-year units were specialised, honours-level modules, rather different from one another in focus and character. H1L had an enrolment of between 25 and 34 students and was open to third and fourth years in History or American Studies. H2L was a team-taught module for final year students majoring in either Politics or History, with 28 students in the first year that ETL was involved, and for reasons unconnected with its continuing popularity, a group of 11 in the year of the collaborative initiative. H3L, which catered for between 11 and 16 final-year history students, was an elective 'special subject' module with a strong economic history orientation and a particular emphasis on documentary sources. But as well as the contrasts in patterns of teaching, learning and assessment indicated in Table 5.2, they shared a common strategy of having a blend of tutor input, student input and group discussion, with participants taking quite high levels of responsibility for their own learning and for contributing to the learning of others.

Opportunities and constraints within the settings

Comparisons across the six modules in the three institutions with which we were concerned reveal clearly contrasting contexts for the study of history. As teaching staff sought to promote students' engagement with, and development of, disciplinary ways of thinking and practising, different sets of affordances and constraints were in play and operating at several levels. The different character and resources of the three institutions were reflected in the student profiles, curricular structures and staffing characteristics, which all had an effect on approaches to teaching and learning and what would be 'ecologically valid'. The other aspect of contextual difference concerned the extent to which aspects of teaching and learning at module level (such as number, length and type of teaching sessions, or assessment requirements and weightings), were regulated, and whether this occurred centrally or more locally.

Undergraduates at the old university were mostly high achieving school leavers with strong history qualifications, whereas the students at the post-1992 university spanned a much wider age range and relatively few of them had prior experience of specialist history study. There was somewhat less diversity at the well-established university, although about a third of the students were mature and/or were people for whom history was a new subject. The relative heterogeneity or homogeneity of student cohorts and their backgrounds clearly needed taking into account at all stages in each of the settings when planning teaching and learning activities. But given that history was conceptualised by staff participants in the pilot and main phases as involving a need to move students away from the familiar and a 'layering' process of progression, then at least in first year a lack of history experience and/or greater maturity could be viewed in a positive light rather than as a disadvantage.

At the same time there were considerable disparities in the opportunities provided by the different degree programme structures as regards what proportion of their time at university students could, or did, spend studying history. The two Scottish universities had four-year degrees but did not offer the same concentration on history as the three-year degree in the English university where history modules made up two-thirds or more of students' programmes in first year and for most students occupied all their time in final year. In the well-established institution, the university adopted a modular structure during the period of the ETL project. For the history department this involved a shift away from a pattern of two common-core modules in first year which had been designed to articulate with each other so as to provide a coherent and progressive first-year experience. Instead of students spending up to two-thirds of their time on history modules in the first two years, with exclusively history modules a possibility thereafter, a rather more 'pick and mix' system (aimed at increasing student choice) was implemented. In the post-1992 university only a single history module could be taken during the first year (along with five other modules), and in later years history modules usually represented no more than two-thirds of a student's programme of study. As well as these contrasts in the amount (number of modules) and duration (short, fat or long, thin modules) of student exposure to history, there were other differences in the historical experience students were able to accumulate and upon which their teachers could draw in subsequent years.

The number and characteristics of teaching staff affected the range and kind of modules (chronologically, geographically, topically) available to students and the choices they had. The old university had over twenty full-time staff and ten 'part-time associates' with a spread of fields of interest and expertise mirrored in the array of course offerings. The history department at the well-established university was about a third smaller but still able to provide a considerable variety of course units. By contrast the post-1992 university had a history section within a social sciences division, with four full-time staff and a strategic focus on Scottish history, leading to a high RAE rating. Larger staff complements obviously afford greater flexibility, including the number and types of modules available to students, and generally more scope for manoeuvre. The small team of historians in the post-1992 university were working with similar staff-student ratios and while they could perhaps more readily develop shared understandings of their aspirations for students taking history modules, these modules were being studied within a much broader programme. The specifically module-level constraints and opportunities will be discussed in the context of the collaborative initiatives (section 8), which also draw attention to the non-static nature of the various settings and the need experienced to accommodate to changing circumstances, sometimes at quite short notice.

Samples

A total of 882 Learning and Studying Questionnaires (LSQ) and 742 Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaires (ETLQ) were collected from the students in the six course units, giving an

Figure 5.3: Samples and Response Rates, History

	H1F	H1L	H2F	H2L	H3F	H3L
Year 1 (2001/02)						
no. or students	231	34		28		
no. of staff	10	1		2		
LSQ	110 (48%)	18 (53%)		26 (93%)		
ETLQ	61 (26%)	18 (53%)		11 (39%)		
LSQ & ETLQ	42 (18%)	12 (35%)		10 (36%)		
staff interviewed	1	1		2		
group interviews	4	2		6		
students interviewed	25	15		13		
Year 2 (2002/03)						
no. of students	240	28	241		107	16
no. of staff	10	1	5		3	1
LSQ	113 (47%)	20 (71%)	27 (11%)		90 (84%)	16 (100%)
ETLQ	94 (39%)		126 (52%)		71 (66%)	15 (94%)
LSQ & ETLQ	62 (26%)		21 (9%)		60 (56%)	15 (94%)
staff interviewed	1	1	2		2	1
group interviews			3		5	3
students interviewed			6		18	12
Year 3 (2003/04)						
no. or students	224	25	227	11	118	11
no. of staff	10	1	5	2	3	1
LSQ	194 (87%)	20 (80%)	137 (60%)	7 (64%)	93 (79%)	11 (100%)
ETLQ	109 (49%)	22 (88%)	129 (57%)	8 (73%)	67 (57%)	11 (100%)
LSQ & ETLQ	102 (46%)	18 (72%)	101 (44%)	4 (36%)	56 (47%)	11 (100%)
staff interviewed	1	1	2	2	1	1
group interviews	4	3	4	3	8	2
students interviewed	12	12	11	4	29	11

overall response rate of 57 per cent for the LSQ and 49 per cent for the ETLQ. A total of 47 interviews were carried out with 168 students, and several rounds of interviews, formal and informal, were held with staff teaching the modules. The details are given in Figure 5.3.

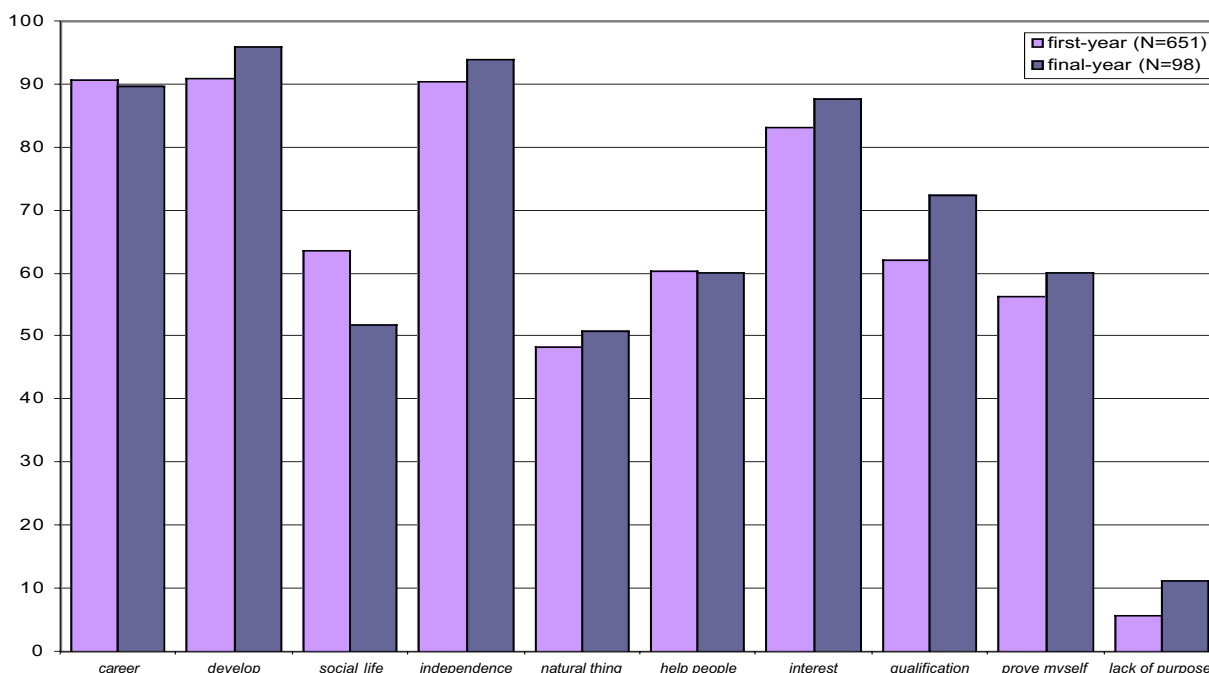
6. THE STUDENTS AND THEIR LEARNING

Orientations to university study

Figure 6.1 beneath summarises the ratings that first and final-year students in the history course settings gave of specific motivations for university study. As can be seen the history students in our sample rated intrinsic rather than extrinsic aims more highly, wishing to: “develop as a person and broaden my horizons” (personal intrinsic), cultivate knowledge and skills that could be used in a career (vocational intrinsic) and “study the subject in depth by taking interesting and stimulating courses” (academic intrinsic). The high rating, particularly in final year, of personal intrinsic aims for studying is worth highlighting, given Booth’s (1993, 1997) findings which revealed the concern among the respondents in his surveys to achieve personal development through their study of history. In line with the rating of a personal intrinsic orientation to study, respondents were eager to exploit the opportunities to become more independent and self-confident (independence) and few wondered “why I ever decided to come here” (lack of purpose). Comparing the responses of first and final-year students, some small changes in responses to individual items are apparent, but the overall picture is one of stability rather than change.

Stability in response is also more evident than change when one compares across year groups within individual courses. There are only a few movements of any size occurring, such as somewhat higher scores on personal intrinsic orientation for the collaborative initiative group in H3L compared to their pre-initiative counterparts, and on social extrinsic orientation for the collaborative initiative group in H1F. Comparing across the final-year sites, only a few contrasts in ratings can be discerned, with a considerably higher score on academic extrinsic orientation being registered in H3L compared to H2L.

Figure 6.1: Learning Orientations (percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed)

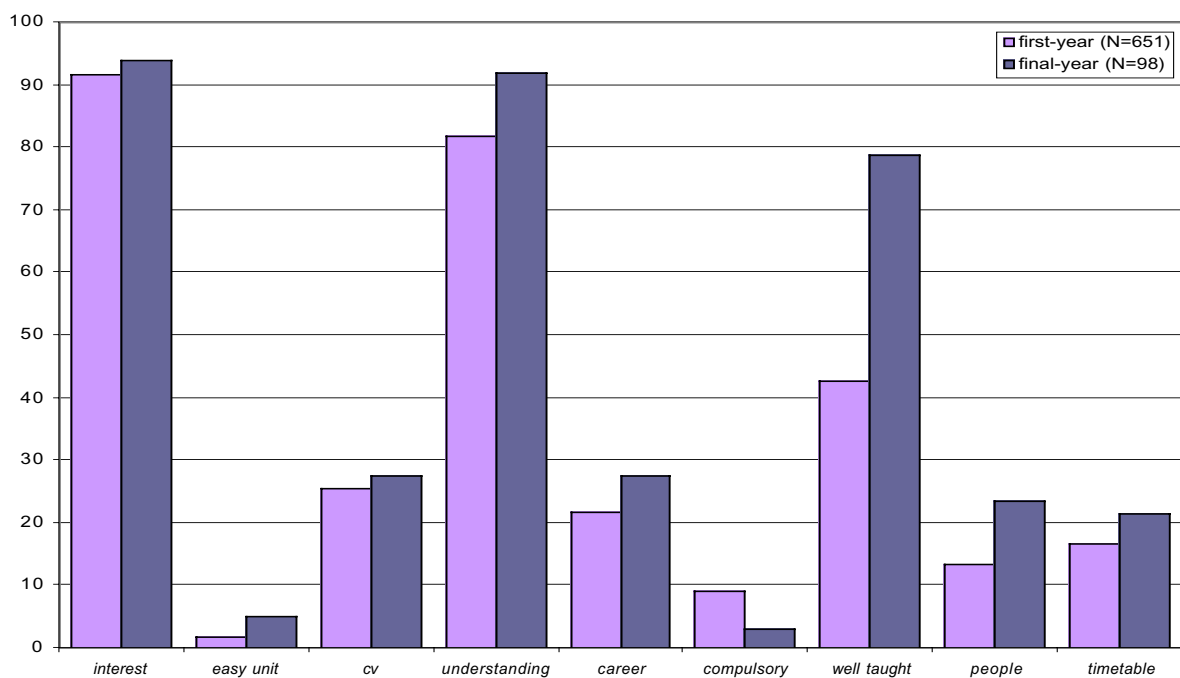


Reasons for course choice

Reasons for course choice were consistent with the pattern of responses concerning orientations to study, with the intrinsic reasons of expectation of interest and the development of subject understanding being the most highly rated items. Most respondents also reported being attracted to the course by good teaching. It was not common to choose courses on the grounds that they were perceived as easy options. As history is not a vocational subject, it is not surprising that lower ratings were given to the matters of career development and curriculum vitae enhancement. Comparing first and final-year scores, at least slightly higher mean scores are evident in all but one item and a rather more positive response in favour of choosing a course because it was well taught. This change needs to be considered against the facts that by their final year students will have a clearer sense of the teaching reputations of individual members of staff and in two of the settings had considerable subject choice in final year.

Looking at differences within individual modules between year groups in their ratings of reasons for course choice, the collaborative initiative group in H2L reported giving less attention than their pre-initiative peers to career development and curriculum vitae considerations and a somewhat higher expectation of interest in the module.

Figure 6.2: Reasons for Taking Course Unit (percentage of those who agreed or strongly agreed)



Approaches to learning and monitoring of studying

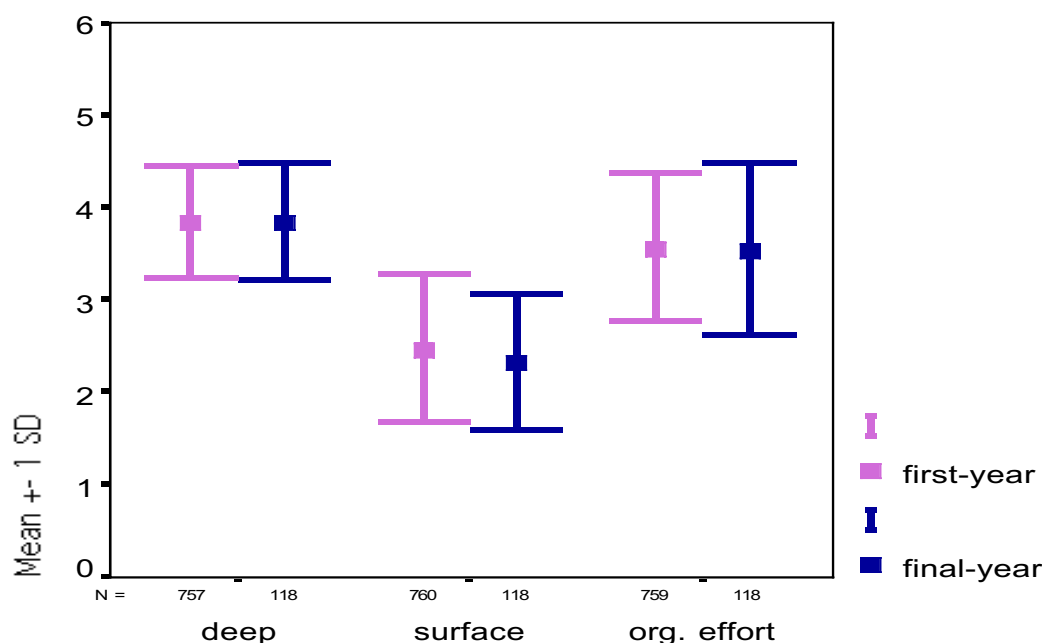
The respondents in all of the course settings typically indicated that they were taking a deep approach to learning where there is an intention to achieve personal understanding of a subject and to study in ways that will achieve this understanding, with almost identical mean scores and standard deviations being recorded for first and final-year students on a deep approach. A comparable pattern of much lower scores on a surface approach to studying was displayed by first and final-year students, with a slightly lower mean score for surface approach being registered in final year.

Considerable stability in response patterns across first and final-year (Figure 6.3) was also shown in relation to organised effort. Responses to items within the scale of organised effort and deep approach revealed that students in the main reported attending to: the monitoring of their studying, its

organisation and the management of time, and the investment and management of effort. Given that history is a 'reading' subject requiring considerable independent study of a range of texts, these findings on the monitoring of studying can be read as suggesting that students largely were taking on board the demands made by the subject for disciplined organisation and self-monitoring of effort.

Focusing in on individual modules, a consistent pattern of higher scores in the monitoring of study, organisation of study and management of effort is displayed by the collaborative initiative group in site H2L, compared to the pre-collaborative initiative students. The collaborative initiative respondents in H2L also had somewhat higher ratings on a deep approach to studying and lower ones on a surface approach.

Figure 6.3: Approaches to Learning and Studying



7. STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING-TEACHING ENVIRONMENTS

In reporting students' perceptions of the learning-teaching environments of the six history units, we start out by presenting summaries of the findings from the Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (ETLQ) completed by students towards the end of a module. This is then followed by an illustrative account of central findings from the student interviews which adds finer shading to the outline picture provided by the questionnaire results.

Overview of the questionnaire findings

Figure 7.1 provides a summary view of, and Table 7.1 presents mean scores and standard deviations for, the eight sub-scales of the ETLQ that attempt to capture students' perceptions of a particular learning-teaching environment. All of these features were rated positively by the combined group of first-year students, and even more positively by the whole later/ final-year sample. (The rather clumsy designation 'later/ final' is used in recognition of the slightly different situation in the three sites. While two of the modules were taken only by final-year undergraduates - 3rd years in one case and 4th years in the other - the third module was open to 3rd and 4th year students.)

A number of factors need to be taken into consideration in interpreting the rise in ratings across all the sub-scales between first year and later/final year. Later-year students themselves have made a commitment to studying history, which will not be found in all first years, and are likely to have become more attuned not only to the discipline’s ways of thinking but also to a particular departmental culture. In two of the later/final-year settings students were able to exercise considerable course choice, which was likely to result in a closer fit between personal interests and course content and concerns. Also, as the preceding section describing the later/final year courses suggests, these modules tended to allow for a more interactive, involving experience, on account of their size, approach and expectations as regards student input.

Figure 7.1: Perceptions of the teaching-learning environment

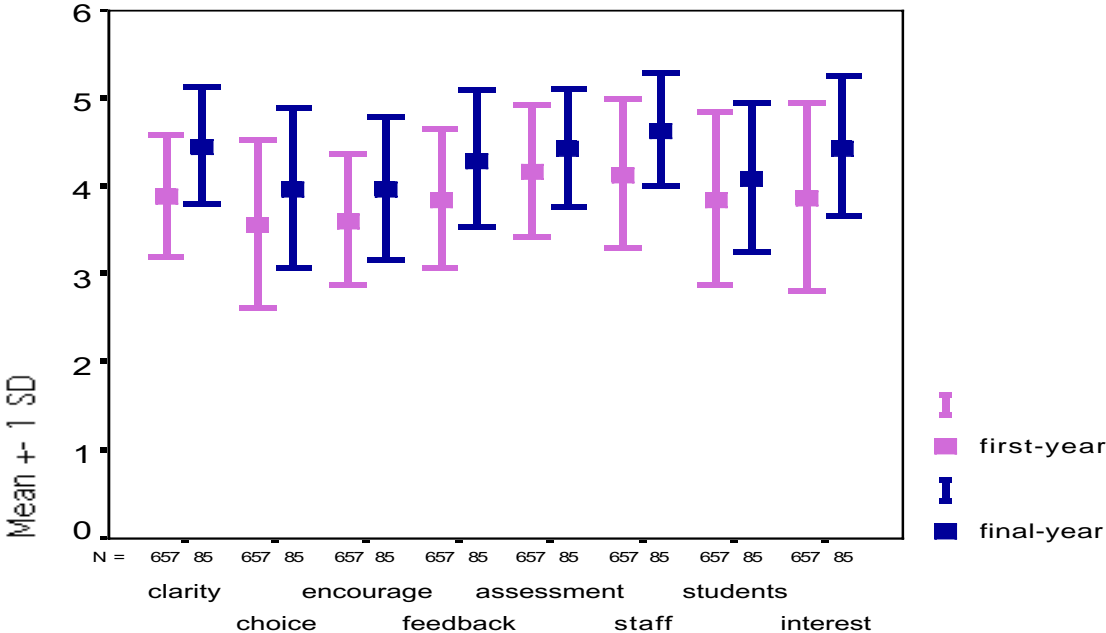
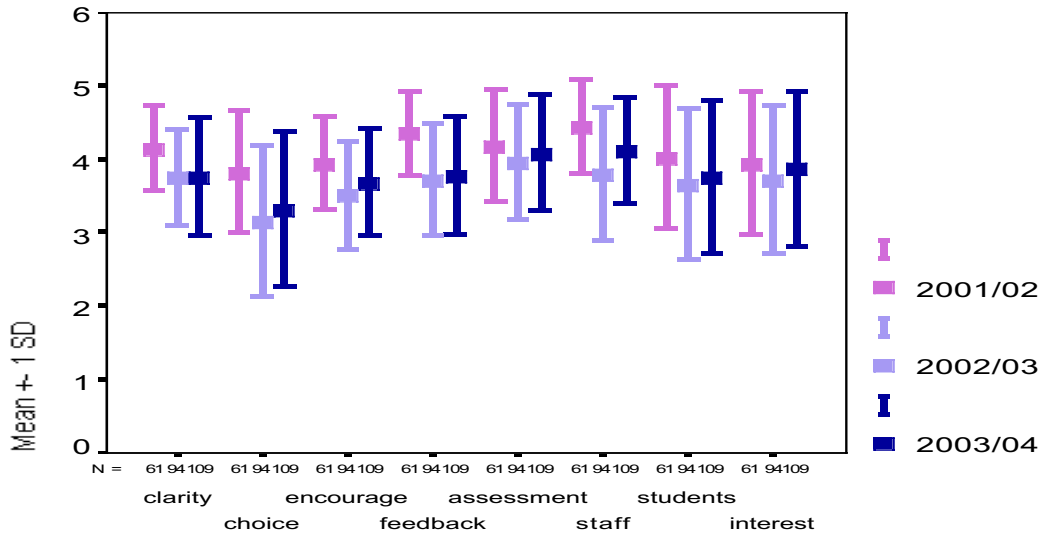


Table 7.1: Perceptions of the teaching-learning environment

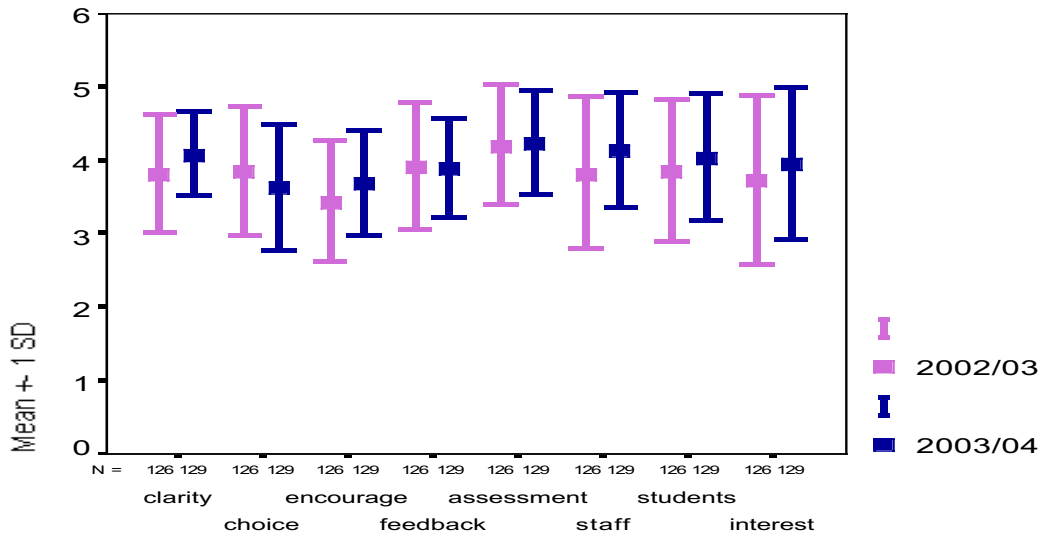
	First-year		Final-year	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Clarity and coherence	3.89	.70	4.47	.67
Choice allowed	3.57	.96	3.98	.90
Encouraging learning	3.62	.74	3.97	.81
Set work and feedback	3.85	.79	4.31	.78
Assessing understanding	4.17	.75	4.44	.67
Staff enthusiasm and support	4.14	.84	4.64	.64
Student support	3.85	.98	4.09	.85
Interest and enjoyment	3.88	1.06	4.45	.80

Figure 7.2: Perceptions of the teaching-learning environment, first-year course units

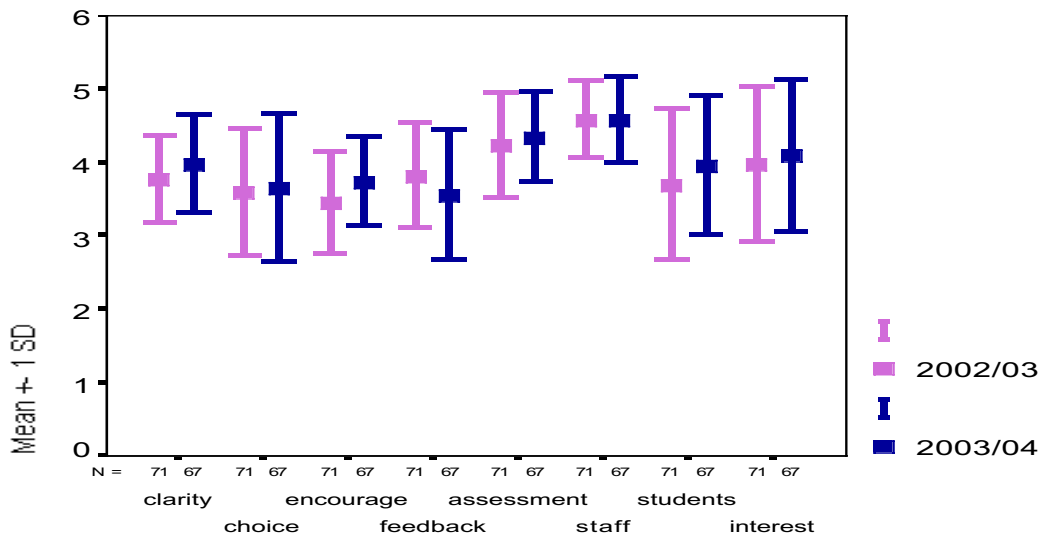
H1F



H2F



H3F



Questionnaire findings: first-year modules

Figure 7.2 sets out the summary findings for the three history first-year course modules, providing results for the 2002-03 and 2003-04 year groups in the case of H2F and H3F. In H1F where there was a 'fallow' year before the collaborative initiative took place, findings for three year groups are provided. It will be seen that the general perceptions of each of these teaching learning environments were positive. The picture is not, however, a static one. The change over the years in scores in scores in 1HF needs to be read against the contextual background of considerable change and disruption that has been described in section 5 of this report. From an initially very high baseline in 2001-02, there is a decline in scores across all the sub-scales in 2002-03, particularly on choice, feedback and staff support. The overall pattern of response is similar between 2002-3 and 2003-4, with some increase in the perception of staff support being evident. More consistency across the years in perceptions of the teaching-learning environment can be seen in H2F and H3F. In H3F generally very small increases in ratings are evident across six of the eight sub-scales, with a slight decrease in ratings of feedback and a more marked positive change in relation to the integration of learning materials. A broadly similar pattern can be seen in H2F where very small increases or a 'steady state' are visible in the sub-scales.

Questionnaire findings: later / final-year modules

Looking at the summary questionnaire results for the three later / final year modules (Figure 7.3), a strong commonality in response pattern can be seen in H1L and H3L, with almost all course elements being highly rated in both of the years that are represented. In H3L it will be observed that ratings of certain matters, such as staff support, are as high as could possibly be achieved and that there is very limited spread of student opinion in many of the sub-scales. In H1L ratings on seven of the eight sub-scales are slightly or somewhat lower in 2003-04 compared to 2001-02; and in H3L there is a less consistent pattern of change in ratings between the two year groups. Distinct change is evident, however, in H2L, where in the initial year one can see a moderately positive general perception of the course. Following the radical restructuring of the module marked increases can be seen in scores on most of the sub-scales, producing a very similar overall pattern of response to that observed in H1L and H3L.

The interview findings

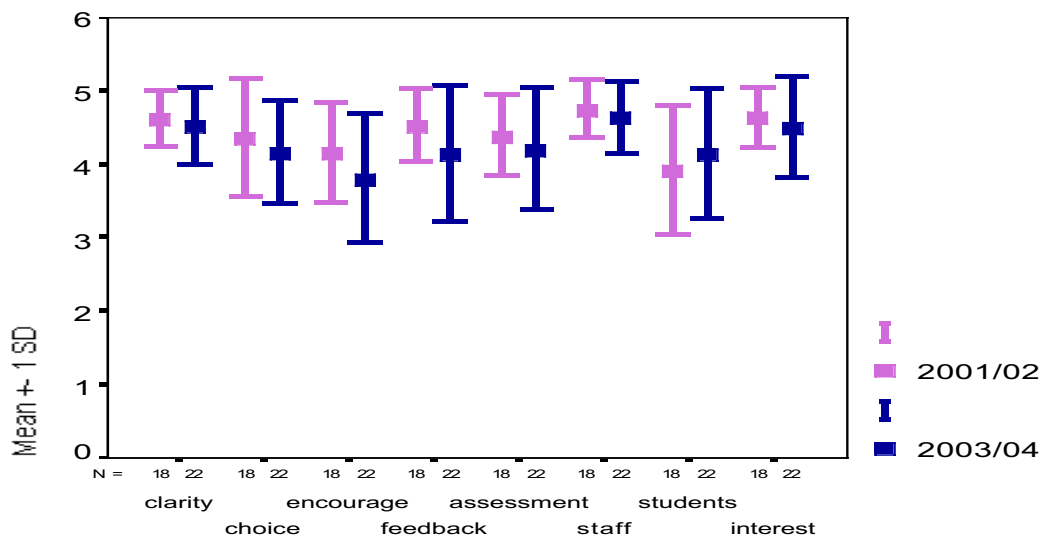
Presentational focus and structure

In all of the course settings, the perceptions of the teaching-learning environments that emerged from the interviews were broadly consonant with the questionnaire findings that we have just considered. For the purposes of this overview report, it seemed best not to focus on presenting the fine detail of students' reactions to individual module environments, but to give a more thematic account which is grounded within the overall conceptual framework and concerns of the wider ETL project. Accordingly, the presentation of student interview findings¹ reveals how these undergraduates were understanding and positioning themselves in relation to historical ways of thinking and practising, highlighting the actions of staff and fellow students that fostered engagement with these practices. There is thus a focus on how within the teaching-learning environments concerned, the communication by staff of course purposes, the organisation of content, the alignment and sequencing of different course activities, individual teaching and learning methods, peer support, staff support and guidance, assessment, feedback and course management were congruent (see McCune and Hounsell, 2005), with the pursuit of high-quality learning and engagement with historical practices.

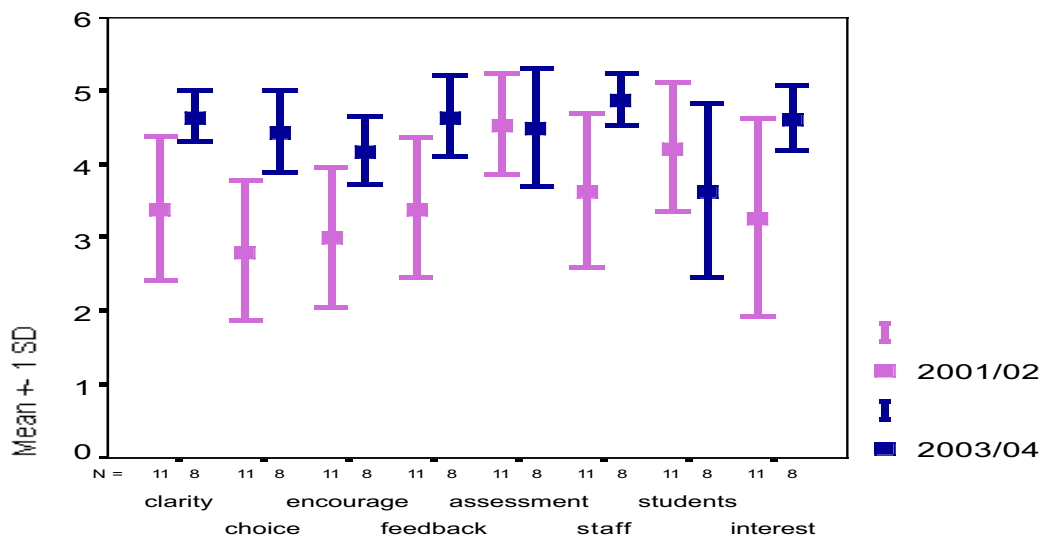
¹ In common with the biology subject report, quotations from interviews are presented to illustrate rather than to substantiate themes. It is anticipated that other publications will allow for more detailed presentation of individual themes, allowing the warrant for analysis and interpretation to be more fully displayed. For clarity of exposition quotations on a particular topic or theme are sometimes drawn from an individual course setting, but (unless otherwise stated) exemplify wider opinion.

Figure 7.3: Perceptions of the teaching-learning environment, later / final-year course units

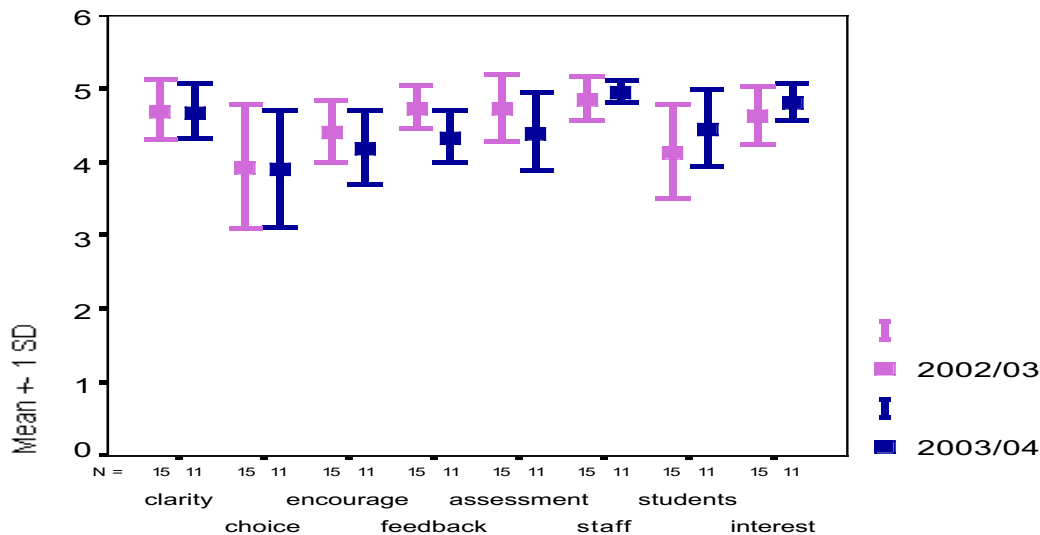
H1L



H2L



H3L



Our presentation of the findings is organised as indicated below.

The first part provides an *overview of students' understandings of ways of thinking and practising in history (WTPs)*, by considering:

- ◆ perceptions of history as a reading subject and associated study organisation demands
- ◆ students' engagement with historical WTPs in the first-year modules
- ◆ students' engagement with historical WTPs in the later/ final-year modules

Attention then moves from a general account to the particular case of *source work as a key element in historical study* and as a means of *exemplifying the facilitation of student engagement* by particular elements of course construction and teaching approach. Discussion of student understanding of, and engagement with, source work highlights how students' work with sources and understanding of module content was fostered by:

- ◆ carefully articulated course design
- ◆ explicit communication of disciplinary purposes and practices in source analysis
- ◆ display of commitment to teaching and subject enthusiasm
- ◆ a teaching approach which provided support and encouraged independence
- ◆ a supportive group ethos and effective group work
- ◆ opportunities for continuous feedback and guidance.

The final part of this section portrays *student's experiences of the modules in terms of what aspects of the teaching-learning environments they found helpful*, and how individual course elements may serve to advance (in tandem) both substantive knowledge and understanding and historical ways of thinking and practising. Aspects discussed include:

- ◆ students' perceptions of course design: thematic organisation
- ◆ perceived connections between learning and teaching activities
- ◆ lectures and the displaying of historical ways of thinking
- ◆ seminars and the supporting and challenging of understanding
- ◆ perceptions of staff approachability and learning support
- ◆ matters to do with assessment and feedback.

Overview of students' understandings of ways of thinking and practising (WTPs)

Perceptions of history as a reading subject and associated study organisation demands

A particular demand of historical study that was brought to our attention by students in the first-year interview groups was the need for disciplined application of effort to achieve the required reading. In the words of an H3F participant:

I think a lot of people think history is a relatively low key, quite easy subject. ... And the amount of time that I spend in the library writing notes is so much more than my friends who do other subjects. I don't think they appreciate that, you know, it really is a question of self-motivation.

Another H3F student noted how "you have to be quite well self-disciplined to do it" and that achieving this type of self-discipline could be challenging. However, consistent with the quantitative findings we have reviewed which have indicated generally high levels of intrinsic motivation and reasons for course choice, some students presented a large quantity of reading as being a disciplinary requirement and/or a matter of intrinsic interest. As an example of this disciplinary socialisation, one individual in H1F talked of how:

... the amount of reading is necessary. There aren't many other ways of learning it. ... It's onerous definitely. Yeah. But how else are you supposed to know.

Another student in the same site talked of his own deep interest in reading historical texts, but noted the challenge of choice and focus:

I mean I read anyway, as I say I'm almost obsessed with it, so it's not too bad really. But I can appreciate why people don't like reading. Because it is very difficult and there is such a choice of material out there. It's very difficult to know which you're going for.

Students' engagement with historical WTPs in the first-year modules

An earlier section of this report has set out the key ways of thinking and practising that historians wished to foster in their students. Encouragingly even in the first-year interviews, most student groups were able to give a fairly fluent account of historical purposes and practices and, as we noted in our first report back to one department, "discussion concerning the nature of historical study was quite general, rather than being confined to an articulate, reflective minority." Central matters concerning these students' understanding of historical WTPs are illustrated in this section mostly by extracts from interviews with the first H1F cohort.

In common with the other first-year settings we investigated, this cohort of students recognised the need to take an *analytical approach* to historical study. For some individuals this had involved a distinct, rather challenging, movement from their preceding conception of history, as in the following example:

S: [at school I found it] a very factual subject, now it's much more based on analysis. I found that quite difficult to get to terms with initially.

I: So how are you feeling about it now?

S: I'm feeling better about it – I'm enjoying it.

Intertwined with this recognition of the need to take an analytical approach was a movement away from a straightforward chronological treatment and narrative account to a conceptual and thematic understanding of historical events in which processes of argumentation were fore-grounded. In the words of another student,

There's very much an emphasis which I found surprising. It's not learning dates, it's, or events, it's actually learning concepts and themes. Arguments. How to argue.

[other students echoing] Arguments.

There was a strong awareness of the *contested nature* of historical knowledge: "Like different historians with different ideas. It is not just straightforward, this is what happened."

The interviews with students involved in the first-year modules revealed that they had been drawn into viewing themselves as having an active role to play in this process of contestation and interpretation. They accepted responsibility for *active interpretation* and emphasised the importance of an *openness to consider different perspectives / interpretations*, with one H1F student, for example, describing the need for "an enquiring mind and an ability to analyse different points of view."

Allied to this concern with personal interpretation was a recognition of the need to adopt a *questioning, analytical approach to evidence*. Analysing the evidential basis of historical claims and arguments could require not only independent thought but also quite wide research:

Reading widely, definitely because of the nature of the interpretation of evidence, you really can't take one person's word for it because you find such differing views and interpretations so you really have to read as widely as possible.

The following extract shows a willingness to engage in active individual interpretation and construction of an understanding of a topic in a discipline where there are not necessarily any 'ready-made' answers. It also displays at least some understanding of the need for a second-order perspective on the historical interpretations being judged, while displaying some inconsistency in the way that historical "truth" is represented:

... so people coming from different backgrounds are never going to give the same story. You know the French don't have the same version of Waterloo as the British do, for example. So you know you've got to look round and try and find *where the truth is*. And it's a bit of a detective game. It's a bit like being Hercule Poirot at times.

As well as pursuing the central theme of displaying agency in analysis and synthesis, an interview participant from H1F drew attention in an unusually explicit way to the importance of a *readiness to separate out one's own preconceptions*:

... reading through a lot of history books on one subject and getting different interpretations put on things. From that you realise that you *cannot*, you have to more or less block your thought out before you go into that and your perceptions and start more or less from scratch and then build up as you get each point of views: and come up with your own interpretation of those events from the information you've gathered.

Fulfilling the responsibility of coming up with your own interpretation of historical topics involved looking at *connections* between events and themes. Aside from establishing personal connections, some students from H1F, (in line with their peers in the other course settings), talked of how their experiences on the module had enabled them to develop more of a felt sense of the *interconnectedness of historical phenomena*, as the following quotation indicates.

... it was the fitting together of things that I found the most interesting part of the whole, of the module, is, is suddenly to realise, although this is a self-evident point, that, that everything has an effect on everything else so that when you're studying the EEC you might also be learning stuff which is relevant to, you know, the economy but defence or alignments outside of Europe. So that, you know, 'cause once I understand these kinds of things, studying becomes easier.

Related to this developing sense of the interconnectedness of historical events, some students displayed at least an implicit grasp of the need to *contextualise* their approach to a specific topic by framing their understanding of that topic within a wider context and / or time-frame of events. One interview participant, for example, talked of how in constructing a thematic understanding of a topic:

To understand what's really happening you have to understand what the antecedents there are [chorus of agreement from other students] what the past is.

Later parts of the report will point up the elements of course design, specific teaching actions and learning activities which furthered students' engagement with the historical WTPs we have reviewed in this section. The following student comment also provides insight into how agency in analysis and interpretation was enabled by what can be termed an open teaching approach. It highlights how lecturers' avoidance of any authoritative, one-sided stance on topics left students room to construct their own interpretations.

I think our lecturers do try their best to be objective. I don't think there's too much of a slant anywhere in any of them. They do try their best to do that so I mean that is [important] ... 'cause it leaves open for you to make up your own sort of conclusions, you know, sort of thing. I think the lecturers' style is quite good.

Consistent with the general profiles of orientations to study and reasons for course choice, the accent in the first-year interviews was on intrinsic interest in history and acceptance of the need to follow the discipline's (sometimes challenging) ways of thinking and acting.

There was, however, a minority of students who showed some resistance to engaging with these ways of thinking and their associated demands. Here is one participant describing her lack of attunement with historical practices and demands.

I also think that science degrees, the ones that have a lot more contact hours, are actually more structured. Not that the history department isn't structured: but a history degree isn't structured in that sort of way. This is an idea, go away and *think* about it – just the thinking about the reading takes up a lot of time if you are not used to doing [that].

She then went on from this description of a lack of enthusiasm for engaging with the demand of active personal interpretation to indicate her difficulty with 'breaking the code' of reading history texts.

Students' engagement with historical WTPS in the later/final-year modules

Such notes of resistance were absent from the later/final-year interview groups, which of course were composed of students who had decided to specialise in or have some concentration on history, and in at least two of the three sites had by this stage received an intensive exposure to historical practices. Whilst drawing on material provided by students in all three later year modules, most of the illustrative quotations in this section come from the H1L interview participants.

Later/final-year interview accounts gave a sense of how understanding of the key aspects of historical practices from the first-year interviews had developed over time. As an indication of their socialisation into the norms of historical practices, it was sometimes presented as a given that by this stage of their university career they ought to have internalised historical ways of thinking and acting. For example, a student in H2L responding to a question on the communication of staff expectations on the module observed that: "I don't know so much about expectations, I think at that point you should know roughly how you're researching, you're going into things."

A heightened awareness was displayed by these more advanced students of how important it was to have a sound evidential basis for any statement or argument that was being propounded. They recognised the need, in reviewing a historian's work, to look at his or her use of evidence in an analytical fashion: "People, other people can make mistakes when they look at evidence." At the same time the students were well aware that 'original' evidence would not speak for itself and some comments revealed an understanding that sound historical enquiry and interpretation required a judicious interplay between the *appropriate questions*, methods, and framing perspectives acting on the *appropriate sources*. This appreciation of the close linkage between appropriate questions and sources is expressed in the following quotation:

It's not just, you know, what have they looked at; it's what questions have they asked of that source and whether that source is appropriate to back up what questions there are or if they've got, it, the wrong source – asked the right questions, looked at the wrong sources: and therefore brought up the wrong answers.

At this point in their university careers there was a clear acknowledgement among the interview participants of the importance of alertness to a historian's personal stance on a topic. As one person observed, "You do find everyone's got an agenda for what they're writing", and in the words of another student:

You start looking, you don't take things at face value. You look behind and see the motivation of the person writing, can I rely on this person.

This consideration, however, did not lead the students whom we interviewed towards a wholly relativist or cynical attitude towards the historical enterprise. Some statements also pointed up the matter of being aware of an historian's focus, as in the following comment where an H1L participant argued strongly for the desirability of maintaining a wide, balanced view of a topic and touched on the related theme of the alignment of questions with context:

... or double voting certain aspects of that area, so they'll look at, you know, like over Engels, they'll split it down into economics, they forget the moral side, so I mean, so if you've got that balance of whether they vote [i.e give due weight] to all the information, whether they vote, whether they ask the right questions; where they're asking questions, whether they're in the rightful context.

Contributions made by many third or fourth-year students during the interviews indicated that they had internalised the disciplinary standard of making an active personal interpretation of academic

texts and primary sources. This entailed taking responsibility for regulating their own understanding and maintaining a flexibility of approach, as the following extract reveals:

You've got to be prepared yourself to change your own views, like considerably. Because you, you read one thing and you were going along with them and they'll say have you totally agreed with this thing, you totally oppose them. You've got to assess it yourself.

A distinct sense of agency in putting forward their own interpretations was also visible in the statements made by a number of later/final-year students. For example:

... the presentations allow you to go and do that. If you felt that you wanted to challenge something that the tobacco works [secondary texts] was saying, you can do that, you know, put up good arguments, you can.

The widening of historical horizons over the years of the degree and a greater sense of the contested nature of history was described by certain students as heightening their interest in history. Here, for instance, is a student telling of how:

... as soon as you get to third year you realise there's all these different schools of historians, different French ones, British ones, with all these different ideas behind them too, you know, and it's actually really interesting because it's controversial. And in first year you can't just hear the whole story.

Another common theme across the later/final-year interviews was the value of a personal, intrinsic interest in history in spurring effort and achievement: "If you've got a real passion for history, you'll do it, take your time over it." A different student explained matters as follows:

I think the reason why I took history as a degree was mainly because I enjoyed it. ... I'd say that's the most important thing. If you don't like it you're not going to put the effort in, you're not going to get the results.

Turning to the gains students had made over the course of their degree, one area particularly highlighted was that of writing on historical topics. Some of their comments mentioned in addition developments in the ability to judge the standard of one's own writing:

Confidence in writing by the time you get to the third year, a style has developed. ... By the time you're in the third year it's quite tweaked. You know when you hand something in that's good. You know when something is half decent. Also if you've got the knowledge you're able to write confidently about something. That's something I've developed.

Some of their observations about change over time in writing were also revealing of their acceptance of historical practices and forms of writing, as the following quotation demonstrates:

I think you spend the first two years going through the motions of making your essays up and putting them in. Come third year, fourth year that's when you've actually woken up to what you're supposed to be doing.

Some recent work on student writing in higher education has tended to bring to the centre of the stage students' resistance to disciplinary norms and forms of writing (e.g. Ivanic, 1998). But these findings from the history strand of the ETL project would suggest the need to provide a more balanced picture by drawing attention to the cases where there is a more ready acceptance of disciplinary norms and practices.

There was appreciation of specific gains in reading and writing voiced by a number of interview participants, including the following individual who talked of growth in the skills of synthesis and logical, coherent presentation:

Also synthesising things as well, there's a lot more to read through. Synthesising all the facts together and present it in a logical argument. Things you learn in the first and second year. You can bring them to your dissertation. ... With dissertation because you have the experience everything

flows together much more. You can link the different areas, that's another skill just to move from one point logically to another point.

This student, and others, saw a history degree as having developed skills that could be of more general value. In the course of the interviews a number of such skills were highlighted and described in different ways, as the following short extracts illustrate:

An analytical and methodical approach to essays will be useful in the future and jobs, etc., the approach you take to work. Independent learning which is quite an emphasis here. Not spoon-fed.

Becoming more concise, getting to the point, you don't have time to waffle too much.

Presentations, a bit of public speaking, it makes it a lot easier once you've done that. You have to be quite analytical.

Thus, among the skills identified were those of argument, analysis, a questioning approach, clarity in written exposition and oral presentation, and working in an independent fashion.

Source work and enabling engagement with history

Against the backdrop of the overview provided of students' general engagement with historical WTPs in the initial and later years of university study, we turn now to a more in-depth consideration of final-year students' understanding of what source work entails. The analysis of primary sources tends to feature prominently in the final-year curriculum of most history degrees, in taught modules and commonly in a long essay, project or dissertation. Here we will focus on the experiences of students taking the H3L module, where the topic was examined in particular detail and where we were able to interview a high proportion of the two cohorts (12/16 in 2002-03 and 11/11 in 2003-04). Moreover, examination of the support provided in H3L for students' engagement with source work will also enable us to highlight the interconnected set of elements of course construction and teaching approach that would seem to make for congruent, coherent design and delivery in undergraduate history.

Student understanding of, and engagement with, source work

The literature review has drawn attention to central elements of the complex practice of primary source analysis; and the interviews with the H3L students gave a picture of how they were grappling with these key aspects of the task. With a clear appreciation of the contested nature of history, the students emphasised the need to display an *active, questioning stance* towards sources, as the following quotation indicates:

You're always questioning things, rather like a lawyer. So you question why did they write that? When did they write it? Who helped them? Why was it published? You're always asking questions, you don't take things for granted.

Implicit in this statement is a firm commitment to focusing this questioning stance on the careful scrutiny of primary sources and secondary texts. It is instructive to compare the quotation above with the following extract where Wineburg (1991,b, p. 511), reporting on an expert vs. novice study, compares the practice and epistemological stance of historians with that of students lacking experience in the craft.

Historians worked through these documents as if they were prosecuting attorneys; they did not merely listen to testimony but actively drew it out by putting documents side by side, by locating discrepancies, and by actively questioning sources and delving into their conscious and unconscious motives. Students, on the other hand, were like jurors, patiently listening to testimony and questioning themselves about what they heard, but unable to question witnesses directly or subject them directly to cross examination. For students, the locus of authority was in the text; for historians, it was in the questions they themselves formulated about the text.

Our interviews with the H3L students revealed that they had been socialised into adopting the stance of “prosecuting attorneys”, and thus taking ahead a dialectical encounter with sources. Their experience on the module of analysing documents, and the scaffolding of this documentary work which involved the marking up of salient concerns, had also given them a more precise sense of what the interrogation of evidence involved. The following extract summarises the thrust of a number of students’ comments and provides a clear account of how the course activities and teaching had given a much more differentiated sense of what is involved in the analysis of sources.

It places quite a lot of importance on the actual process of studying history. How valuable a bit of evidence it is. What benefit it gives us. He’ll make sure we notice who it is written by. How much experience that writer has of the City of London [as a financial institution]. Whether that’s a piece of evidence that’s going to be strong in the factual department, as that writer has a lot of experience in the City. An outsider writing on the City or an insider in it. Lecturer X makes us notice the different writing styles and places, you know that’s important for all historians when they’re studying primary source material ...

Commenting on some of the matters raised in this quotation, there is a clear alertness to analysing the effects of the background and personal stance of the creator(s) of a source. Implicitly at least, there is also some recognition of the importance of how a phenomenon, in this case the City of London, is being *represented*. In addition attention is given to the *form of writing* of a document as well as its content.

Looking at some of the central aspects of source work in more detail, the students interviewed appeared sensitive to the importance of considering the ‘reliability’ of particular pieces of evidence; the background of the author(s) and authorial intentions; and the time and context of production of a source. The following two extracts, taken from different H3F interview groups, illustrate student talk on how these key points of historical practice needed to be observed in their interaction with primary sources.

Usually to ask yourself: who’s doing it and why they are doing it, what is the period they’re in looks [like], probably what’s happening to them in, at the time, and stuff, these are the things that you’ve really got to cue into as soon as you start looking at a primary source.

S1: It’s reliability, I’d say; and how is it, is it subjective or objective; and can you believe what it’s saying and when was it written, it was, and its circumstances. ...

I: What kinds of questions would you have in your head when you’re trying to weigh up whether it’s reliable?

S1: Well who, who wrote it. What their motive was?

S2: When they wrote.

S1: Yeah.

S2: Some standard general knowledge of the content as well from the secondary sources and just prior knowledge and so on.

S3: Why they’re writing this source.

Other contributions, which drew attention to the importance of understanding “the kind of mindset, values” of the creators of sources, demonstrated concern not only with the “reliability” of the picture that sources give but also with how sources *represent* an event or issue and the motives for this representation. In other words, they were developing an alertness to what sources may have been designed to *do* as well as what they tell us. In addition to this recognition of authorial purpose, there were glimpses in the interviews of consideration being given to the reception of primary documents by their original audience, “what people thought initially.”

Some student comments revealed how developing the habit of critical analysis of primary sources could possibly encourage a more challenging approach to secondary material (particularly if this material was related to primary documents that they had interpreted):

Perhaps it encourages you to challenge what people are saying slightly – especially if it’s the secondary material you’ve written on some primary material you’ve already looked at or something of that nature perhaps it will make you more critical of the, their views.

In summary then, one can see from the interviews how these final-year students were coming to have a clear appreciation of concerns that are identified as key in the literature. They saw the need to take a questioning stance towards and have a dialectical engagement with sources, were concerned to read for “subtexts” and to apply the general strategies of sourcing and contextualisation. Attention was being given to the form of writing of a document as well as its content and there was evidence of the development of perspective-taking skills – the ability to decentre themselves and view matters from the position of particular historical actors.

It is also important to note the very enthusiastic tone in which both the cohorts of students whom we interviewed in this setting talked about source work. They described how the interest engendered by engaging with primary sources had increased their enthusiasm for historical work. Comments on affective engagement with source work are illustrated in the following insert.

- S1: I think the primary material brings it to life a bit more. ... actually, you know, seeing a bit or gaining ... this nice insight in the lives, like running through the topic itself.
-
- S2: And also we look at primary sources; as I have mentioned before you get interested more, well-rounded in the whole, the whole history that you do there.
-
- S3: It’s very good bringing the primary materials. We haven’t really had that before and it’s a different discipline in itself. That’s definitely very helpful and contrasting it with the secondary materials.
-
- S4: [encountering primary materials on third-year modules] basically it’s become a bit more alive really.
-
- S5: It’s a bit more interesting, I suppose [Another student: Yeah] because you’ve got to do it as though it’s real history as opposed to reading [what historians have produced in secondary accounts]
-
- S6: ... it is just something which is like different, it’s like your dissertation which is kind of very interesting, the whole history. You’re doing more sort of practical history in a way, it’s, you’re not just churning up stuff, there’s much for you to go on, yeah, in the interest ...

The last two comments draw attention to students’ sense that primary source work involved active, authentic engagement with “practical history.” In the words of another student:

It is much more focused on your critical analysis which is a very good thing which is pervasive throughout my other module in third year. We are doing this emphasis which is much more focused on primary sources ...it is about moving away from, from concentration on historiography – actual the, *yourself* doing it ...

The contribution of congruent design and teaching approach

The student interviews also provided insights into how this sense of affective engagement with source work may have been brought about and students’ understanding of, and proficiency in, source work fostered. Students’ engagement with source work and understanding of module content were enabled by the interaction of positive characteristics of the teaching-learning environment, each of which will now be touched upon in turn.

♦ carefully articulated course design

A successful articulation of course purposes with learning activities led students to perceive coherence between module purposes, the secondary literature and source activities, as illustrated by the observations of two different students.

We all think that we learned just looking at the different things that made up the City of London, so we have a good idea: and now it's more chronological. That's worked really well rather than jumping in at the deep end where we are not quite sure [of] the definitions and things. So at least you would, you knew where we were when we actually started looking at the period in question and we could see how things have evolved.

Also the choice of documents complement each other quite well. He's chosen high profile City reports written by members of the Bank of England. It gives us one aspect of the City of London. Next week it may be written by an anonymous commentator who's writing a little bit on the City. The different perspectives we gain from the documents give us a very rounded view of the subject we're studying.

In addition seminars integrated the study of primary and secondary sources, which as another interview participant explained:

Definitely it helps to put it in context, so your critical analysis of the primary material which is obviously quite bi-direction[al]. I think it's very helpful.

Thus, central to achieving this articulation of different course elements was the investment of considerable time and effort in the choice and sequencing of sources, materials, documents and activities, so as to be in alignment with the main module themes and purposes.

♦ explicit communication of disciplinary purposes and practice in source analysis

Consonant with this care in producing a carefully articulated and sequenced course design, there was a clear communication not only of course content and purposes but also of specific points of historical practice in source analysis which encouraged student engagement with sources. This explicit communication about, and scaffolding of, source work has been exemplified in the preceding pages of the report.

♦ display of commitment to teaching and subject enthusiasm

Careful course construction and communication were coupled with authentic involvement in conveying content and historical practice. Students' own efforts were inspired by a display of commitment to teaching and enthusiasm in the subject, as these extracts strongly indicate.

S1: And he conveys his kind of like passion for it.

I: Does that rub off?

S1: Yeah, I think it's definitely,

S2: Yeah,

S1: made us more enthusiastic.

He's very enthusiastic and he does care about the students. He's not someone who does a module because he has to teach. He's interested in how the students get on, make sure they understand.

I think it's almost testament to the teaching that people [students] come in every week and they've actually spent quite a lot of time researching the topic that [they] want to present. Virtually everyone has given a decent presentation on their topic and a decent handout that will be helpful for revision and stuff like that. If you have a bad teacher, you can't be bothered.

♦ a teaching approach which provided support and encouraged independence

This active engagement with teaching and the subject was allied to a teaching approach that achieved a balance between supportive structuring of students' source work and other course activities, and encouraging independence of judgement on the part of students.

It's not trying to say read this and you'll be OK. It's more suggestions. He's making you think for yourself which I find important. There are some modules and you'll learn what they tell you but you won't have a chance to think for yourself. This one you get given all the information and you construct your own arguments. You're not told what to think.

This open teaching approach was viewed by interview participants as enabling their own efforts to form personal interpretations of historical issues:

... you're actually encouraged to take them all on board [i.e. different arguments and positions] and formulate your own ideas. That's turned out to be in practice what you've been able to do.

♦ a supportive group ethos and effective group work

The exercise of independence in judgement in source work and other course activities was also encouraged by informal interaction and the presence of a supportive and productive group ethos.

I: We talked earlier about the importance at this stage to actually come up with your own interpretations, so does that informal atmosphere help with that?

S1: Yes.

S2: Yes.

S3: It is more conducive to discussion.

S4: You're not scared to sort of say anything.

Another component was the collaborative sub-group work on presentations and engaged group discussion, where the sharing and exploration of different perspectives promoted the development of understanding.

It's just a good combination of ideas that you don't realise when you're reading something. Someone who's reading the same thing can get [a] different idea. You get a combination of both ideas – that you hadn't thought of but because there's two of you.

♦ opportunities for continuous feedback and guidance

Students appreciated how the range of feedback received in relation to all course activities, including but not confined to written work, assisted them in developing their understanding of module content and practice in source work.

The formative coursework that was a feature of the module was described as giving a "structure" which encouraged the continuous application of effort and provided "good practice". The formative essays in particular were seen as requiring engaged interaction with, and reorganisation of, knowledge.

I think without the practice, you can go to it, you can read the book, but without the practice. Actually writing an essay you have to think differently and you have to do [a] different thing with the things you've got there.

Moreover, obtaining individually geared feedback and guidance was a straightforward and valuable process, as the following two students made clear:

When he gave us our essays we all went to see him, and had a chat with him. You get one-to-one help where you need to improve if you've got any problems.

You have a ten minute sit down with him. The fact is you do feel as though he does know what you have written rather than just going on his cover sheet.

The supportive feedback was made available to students very much on an ongoing basis, as indicated by this individual's observations:

You get feedback from the discussions in the seminar. If you give a presentation, he'll pick you up on points and say if they're good points or not so good points. Whether you're actually inaccurate, whether your interpretation is a good one. Even if you're just asking questions or providing answers he'll comment on these.

As well as being seen as a source of sound guidance, the lecturer was also viewed as approachable and welcoming of interaction.

You can approach him, it doesn't matter how stupid the question is. He'll give you a frank and honest answer without being patronising. Some lecturers would say you should know that sort of thing by now. If you don't understand things then he will explain them, it's not [a] problem. I'm perfectly happy to go up to him and say I don't understand this. Even though he knows everything about the module and he's very interested in it, he'll explain everything to you on your level, make you understand.

This section has looked at how the presence of an interacting set of elements of course design and teaching approach can advance understanding and bring students to engage in a whole-hearted manner with key aspects of historical practice. Students' comments revealed that a combination of communication by the lecturer and feedback on formative work had given them a clear sense of what was expected of them in undertaking the different types of assessment for the module.

The one area singled out by some H3L students as not contributing particularly well to taking ahead key historical ways of thinking and practising was the gobbet form of assessment (a well-established task associated with source work). A student in the pre-initiative cohort felt that it did indeed promote the active analysis of sources:

In the gobbet you're asked to comment on the following. You have to make your own questions in a sense. You say to yourself, what questions do I need to ask this source. We haven't really done [that] before. There's a set question, you pick a topic. That's good as well.

Yet the same concern for taking a well-grounded historical approach led one of the collaborative initiative interview groups into producing a trenchant critique of gobbet exercises *per se*.

... how does that particular gobbet, what does that actually represent and what it actually means or what's actually sort of special about it. What does it tell us really about – written on its own? It all seems very regimented, I find.

Their perceptions that gobbet answers “can simply be formulaic and not original perhaps” or “just like a technique really” resulted in the expression of doubts about the purposes being served by the gobbet exam and its disciplinary authenticity.

Students' module experiences and what helped to enhance learning in history

The previous section concentrated on how a carefully articulated course design, together with an enabling yet demanding set of teaching actions, had helped foster student engagement and proficiency in relation to source work. It provided a detailed example of how disciplinarily appropriate ways of thinking and practising, as well as substantive knowledge and understanding, were being developed within a specific final-year course unit. But the intention was also to illustrate some key features of design and delivery that are likely to be conducive to the creation of productive learning environments for students in other history modules. The aim of the present section is to expand the illustrative account of these features by considering findings about individual course elements from interviews conducted with groups of students across all modules.

Whilst concentrating on specific aspects of teaching, learning and assessment we would draw attention to the appreciation, expressed here by two H1F students, for being actively involved in the craft of history, by “getting your hands dirty, getting your hands on something rather than just sitting and

talking about things actually getting, getting down”, and having opportunities for “insights into being, not only studying history but being ... an historian”.

Students' perceptions of course design: thematic organisation

Mounting thematically-based courses was viewed by staff, in descriptions of course design given in the first phase interviews and in the three ETL first year settings, as in part a means of easing the necessary transition from a descriptive/narrative approach to history to engaging in active analysis. It is therefore instructive to see what views students expressed (and their associated reasoning), about the thematic dimension of the modules.

The first-year module that featured a strongly thematic organisation of material and conceptual approach was perceived by most of the students interviewed as positively challenging. As one student in the pre-initiative interviews noted:

I sort of find all these big, broad concepts really interesting – in some ways difficult to do well in. It's very different, I think.

Other comments indicated that these students had taken on board the module's demands for an analytical approach, where the focus is on gaining a conceptual understanding as opposed to a more straightforward chronological treatment and narrative account of historical events.

The module isn't really about narrative, it's about the how, and the how and the why, rather than the what.

For some students, however, the conceptual and thematic approach of this module was distinctly demanding and thus part of the collaborative initiative involved investing time and effort in revising the structure of the course. The collaborative initiative interview participants were very conscious that what they were encountering was an *analytical* thematic approach with questions of historical interpretation fore-grounded: “emphasising the different historical perspectives, certainly compared to other modules.” One student talked, for example, of how “I think if you are interested in the interpretive side of history then definitely this is going to be the unit to do.” Dealing with contested interpretations of themes could be difficult but could also be assisted by the teaching approach adopted, as explained by another interview participant:

... there is always different arguments and different ways of looking at each theme. So as well as having all the different themes to cover you've got all the different ways of looking at them as well. So it can get a bit confusing. And it does make it a lot to remember. But it does, it, the way it is taught is clear to me anyway.

For a number of students, the specific themes addressed were seen as discrete entities rather than interconnected. However, the large majority of comment on this matter displayed an alertness to the interconnection between themes. In the words of one student, “They are obviously very interwoven. In my mind they are anyway.” In some cases, such as the student quoted beneath, this awareness of interconnection may have cut a bit deeper and awakened them to a more general sense of the interconnectedness of historical phenomena.

That's just really a matter of, you know, linking the social, economic and political. I mean they are all, you know, intertwined. You can't, and you can take certain themes but they feed back into each other. You can't look at kingship without looking at, you know, the political situation.

The factors that had assisted students to make connections between themes included principally the structure of the course itself and particular actions taken by the lecturer to establish coherence and relationship. It was noted that “the way they are structured makes it, forces you to link them together.” In a similar vein, another student observed: “You look at specific themes ... But within that structure you're still cross-referencing all the themes and events that are going on.” Specific teaching actions

on the part of the lecturer also helped to establish connections across the themes, as the following extract indicates.

... he'll just give you a memory prompt, "and that's what I was talking about last week in such and such a lecture." Just as a pure, a reminder that these things aren't stand-alone topics and that they do relate to each other.

Turning to the other two first-year modules, there was among some students a developing sense of the interconnectedness of historical phenomena, as illustrated by the interview participant who explained how the course "wasn't segmented, it wasn't bitty ... that's just the way it is ... it is very much interrelated." This kind of appreciation allowed certain participants in both modules to perceive the rationale for the way in which course content had been structured:

... because of the nature of, you know, if one, one event's relevance may not be clear, there's twenty years' other events may follow on from the other but there are so many arrows pointing out from different periods that you can't really do it chronologically.

Yet in both these settings divisions of opinion were evident. Some interview participants saw their module's thematic approach to history as clear and unproblematic but certain others found it troublesome and expressed dissatisfaction. As an example of the more critical comments on course structure, one participant talked of how: "... it is difficult if you are going over the same period and doing different aspects of it, but it jumped all over the place." In an interview group from the other module it was evident that some participants were still undecided about what to make of the course structure:

S1: Yeah, it jumps. I mean it flows but it jumps ...

I: Do you think it'll come together by the end? Is it getting clearer as it goes further on, or is it ...

S1: I'm not sure.

S2: I don't know either. I think it's all relevant at the end of the day because ultimately the period that we're doing is the period we're starting from and finishing at. So I guess what the approach that they've used is that they want to just involve everything, like all the areas around in that time through this period. ... I hope at the end it does kind of all make sense and really you look back and think right, I can see why that was done that way.

As will be seen in section 8, the potential usefulness of the thematic approach coupled with the evidence that some students were experiencing difficulties led to it becoming an area of focus in the collaborative initiatives for the first-year modules and one of the later ones.

Perceived connections between learning and teaching activities

It was evident from talking with the module leaders and examining the various sets of course documentation, that as in the case of H3L, considerable thought and effort had been invested in trying to create 'joined-up' course designs that would have a careful articulation of different course elements with one another (as well as with module purposes). The students interviewed varied in whether they felt that things had fitted well together. On occasion, as in this quotation to do with H1L, not only were helpful connections between different course elements perceived to operate, but the student's view of the relationship between lectures and tutorials closely mirrored the lecturer's own conception of their respective functions:

I think the lectures are there to give you a skeleton of the course. Whereas, if you sort of like [to] put it that way, it's the bones; then the tutorials are going to be your sort of fleshing out of that giving you the depth and maybe the insights that you'll be able to discuss issues and like, you know, as long as you need to.

At other times interview talk yielded useful information about particular difficulties some students were experiencing and what improvements might be worth considering.

With regard to the first-year modules, a sense of helpful connections between different course elements arose in several, though not all, of the interview groups. Apparent at the same time were the challenges in large courses of trying to keep lectures and tutorials 'in step' with one another on account of time-tabling pressures and the involvement of several tutors and/or lecturers. Within a first-year module which one student described as "very well connected", contrary views were also expressed:

S1: I think ... the seminars don't match up with the lectures,

S2: Yeah. I found that one week we had a lecture and two presentations ... a History lecture and then followed by the seminar and there was three subjects covered that morning ... there was new stuff and there was old stuff ... if you were talking about something two weeks ago or whatever, you know, you don't seem to get that balance. You've forgotten what was said in the lecture you know, you are reading and you're aware you've just come out a lecture and your head's full of all that and you've got to tuck that away. It can be difficult.

S3: Yeah, I think that's the main point they could match them up ...

Sometimes an individual, such as this interviewee participant from a different first-year module, would assume some personal responsibility for the perceived lack of linkage:

I don't find myself really being able to take anything from the lectures to the seminars so far. I am hoping that will tie up somehow: but at the moment I am not really feeling that.

Particularly in first-year courses students are likely to have somewhat varying understandings of the historical enterprise as well as differing general study orientations. The quotations above serve as a reminder that even when care is taken to articulate the different elements of a course, alignment resides to a degree in the perception of the student beholder.

On H3F in particular some students displayed a perception that the course as a whole had been designed in a coherent fashion:

Yeah, I mean I think the lectures are very focused and interact really well with the seminars, so there's definitely a sense that there's design to it, or rather than some modules which you think, you know, what's going on here?

Opinions were expressed indicating that an appropriate balance had been established between lectures and seminars: "it is a very good balance," "a good mix." A considerable number of students also indicated that clear connections between the lectures and the seminars were evident, as in the following enthusiastic response.

I: ... how you found the teaching and learning activities, the balance between them? The way that lectures, seminars, essays connect up, or not.

S: It's been brilliant actually. A lot of the time I was sitting in the lecture thinking, 'Oh, I did a seminar on that,' and I could see all the points that had come up, they were coming up in here. There's quite a lot of close correspondence.

Pursuing the topic of perceived connections between different parts of this course, a number of interview participants noted how student presentations within seminars had been of considerable value for taking ahead the task of essay-writing. In the words of one student, "it feels as if the essay and the seminar really are sort of integrated. So that's good." The particular benefits for essay-writing that flowed from the presentations are identified in the two extracts beneath.

Well we write our essays just after we have done the seminars. I think that is quite a good method. It means you have got quite a lot of work. There is lots of work preparing for the seminar and then doing the essay. Having done the reading for the seminar it is really helpful because it gives you time to think about it. And helps write the essay straight away.

I think the link 's pretty good between essays and presentations. Yeah, actually, yeah. It's more of a clear link than [in] some other modules. And your presentation does help you kind of understand what you're doing in the essay. And if you listen to the other people, it does help you also.

It was also noted how the seminars in this module allowed the communication of staff expectations concerning the essays.

It's good for the way they set out the seminars before the essays because you really know what the tutor expects from us after the seminar. Whereas in **Y subject** we do the essay first and we have the seminar on the subject, so you don't really know what you are expected to do.

Lectures: displaying historical ways of thinking

Turning to look at specific forms of teaching and learning activities, students' comments on lectures were very largely positive. Key matters raised by students in relation to lectures will be illustrated from first-year courses, where this form of teaching had a more prominent role than in final year. Their accounts of lectures also gave a clear picture of how staff had acted to present material and arguments in ways that were congruent with the needs and background of entrant undergraduates and drew them into disciplinary ways of thinking.

Indeed, some student statements not only praised the clarity of presentation and structure of lectures but also judged them to have been carefully planned and tailored to their audience in terms of content and process. The following quotation exemplifies this latter point and notes the role played by lectures in giving a clear overview of topics and pointers to students' own knowledge-building efforts:

... its lectures are tailored to our needs as well. They cover the general points but give you some threads that you can tease out and then expand your knowledge.

In this site, particular appreciation was expressed for lectures cast in the form of a debate on a topic between two speakers. Some students pointed up the fact that these debates not only sparked interest but also helpfully modelled the process of active argumentation of issues that they themselves were expected to pursue:

Student X said about ... teaching ... at school, you know, where there is only one point of view. It was good that ... we were allowed to experience debates because when the onus in the essay-writing is on, you know, you've got to provide two arguments and then come up with a conclusion. So that was really helpful.

A similar recognition of student-centred lecture design is evident in the following quotation, drawn from another first-year site:

He's actually thought about how he should present it to a group of people at 8.45 in the morning. And it's set out clear and – it's just the one I know that when I go back over the notes for the revision they will be clear and they will make sense ...

It is important to point up that appreciation for the lectures in this first year setting went deeper than a helpful student-centred presentation of content. Two recurring themes in the post-collaborative initiative interviews for this course were the explicit modelling in lectures of historical practice and how this provided support for *independent* thinking.

... this module, in doing the historiography in the lectures, we're being told more how to look at it. Rather than other ones [i.e. modules] that, if you want to analyse historians, we're doing it for ourselves without any suggestions, anything like that. So it's more independent in our critical thinking. But it's not as encouraged or supported in other modules.

A large body of student comment in this location revealed how lectures that were found to be very engaging were firmly focusing students' attention on key aspects of historical ways of thinking and practising. At a basic level the importance of taking into account differing representations and perspectives was being flagged up:

Yeah, they sort of might put an argument forward and then contradict themselves in other arguments. I think the fact that there's different views coming in does show you that there's so many different interpretations. So you can't just look at it from one viewpoint. So that's come across ...

This emphasis went alongside a stress on the provisional nature of historical knowledge:

In a way it's one of the most interesting things about this module, is that there is no certainty and that's what the lectures do focus on.

These lectures were seen to be geared to communicating and modelling:

- ♦ historians' representations of aspects of the period,
- ♦ the contested nature of these representations and the provisional nature of knowledge of the period,
- ♦ the process of argumentation and interpretation of evidence underpinning a historical representation, taking into account *differing* representations and perspectives,
- ♦ the need to consider the shaping effects of the world-views and socio-political contexts of historians themselves,
- ♦ engaging with ongoing debates and constructing a personal, defensible interpretation.

To illustrate how some of the above were talked about, the following quotation describes the way the interrelationship of evidence and argument had been clearly modelled in lectures:

... it's purely the structure of the lectures. And they emphasise, both aspects that are important are continually – so at the end of it, I mean, if you are going to pick up on the evidence then an argument will be presented: and then a piece of evidence and another argument and a piece of evidence. And it's just reinforcing that which obviously they deem as important.

A strongly expressed perception in the interview groups in this setting was the way in which the lecturer's energetic display of evident enthusiasm for the subject enlivened the students' own *affective engagement* with the history of that particular period.

... definitely the lectures are just so good 'cause the lecturer himself is just really into his subject, which is very, very good.

... I said that I found this module quite difficult but it isn't that it's not interesting, where other modules I do find a lot easier but they're quite boring. Some of them will just throw up a load of notes on PowerPoint and then you just copy them down and that's the end of the lecture.

In some cases the display of lecturer enthusiasm worked to overcome a student's scepticism about the value or interest of the subject matter.

This one is really lively which is really helpful because the subject has potential to have boring areas. So it is really helpful that he makes it lively. ... Someone who is really enthusiastic and interested in it really makes you think, well it must be quite interesting.

The importance of this active display of enthusiasm as a means of energising students' involvement with a discipline has been well recognised in the general literature on teaching and learning in higher education. Less attention, however, has been given to the question of the *voice* adopted by lecturers in arts and humanities subjects. For example, do they present themselves as fairly authoritative interpreters of knowledge or as commentators who bring students into debates in a way which leaves novices room for their own work of personal interpretation. We have already presented the perception from another first year of staff as leaving it "open for you to make up your own sort of conclusions." This perception also very much featured in students' comments from the course we are currently using to exemplify how lectures were fostering engagement with historical WTPs. A number of interview participants pointed up the fact that the module not only required active personal analysis on the part of students but also "gives us the space to handle these different interpretations."

The following extracts highlight how an "open", dialogic presentation of different views can be seen to encourage students to display initiative in interpretation.

Because he is enthusiastic about it and because you do hear so many different people's opinion, you have to care a little to want to say which one you believe in.

... most historians want to, they want to try and find, try and make the picture clearer, try and delve deeper and I think we wouldn't be doing this if we weren't curious and ... because of the way he is and the nature of the module is sort of quite an open delivering to you. It does make you want to go there and try and work it out for yourself.

... it's just in lectures, say, they seem to kind of compare what, contradict what they say which can be annoying at times 'cause you never get a straight answer, but it does kind of teach you to always think about the information and where it comes from. Which actually, I really get that from this module more than the other ones, definitely. So I think it's quite educational that way.

Some students in this site also indicated how the form of interaction established in the seminars supported an engaged, exploratory approach to historical interpretation; and we now turn to the topic of how seminars could be structured and run in ways which supported students' engagement with WTPs.

Seminars: supporting and challenging understanding

A clear picture emerged from all of the sites in the collaboration of key factors in seminars/discussion groups that fostered engagement with historical ways of thinking and acting and the advancement of understanding. These central matters will be exemplified primarily from the first-year settings.

A foundation for effective social interaction and the exploration of ideas was the establishment by staff of a supportive ethos in seminar groups. This was dependent in part on how staff presented themselves to students: " 'Cause both are very approachable people and so I don't feel – and I don't think anybody else feels – intimidated whenever we go into his seminar." Some interview participants talked of the importance of creating an atmosphere where students felt free from any threat to their public face of competence and knew that their views would be given serious consideration.

You need to feel that there isn't a huge gulf between the student and the lecturer or whoever's taking the seminar, because then you're just not going to feel confident [about] saying anything. And I'm the sort of person who has to really, really feel confident about something before I'll offer it up in a seminar. And I think if you feel that you're not going to get instantly shot down and that your view 's going to be accepted, that's OK: and that's, definitely occurs in the module.

Feeling "very relaxed" about participation in seminars where the tutor had established a climate of safety could also mean that a student was prepared to take an exploratory approach to presentation and discussion and test out an interpretation.

You are more relaxed as well, I think, doing presentations if you know that he's not judging you. ... And perhaps explore possibilities that you are not entirely sure of but you think should have a mention.

Students in one interview group emphasised the fact that their tutor "does really make the effort to let us talk", acting to "draw out" students' own ideas which were then discussed. At the same time it was appreciated that the tutor not only contributed his own viewpoints but also presented a rationale for these views: "and he'll give his point of view as well. He doesn't just say, "Well, I think this" and then go on why he thinks that." Praise was expressed not only for the responsiveness that this tutor showed to students' views but also for his "encouragement":

Also in the seminars they're very good. He is very encouraging whatever you do. It's fantastic. He'll never criticise a presentation, which is good because I was so scared the first time we did one. He actually challenges you in a way that's not confrontational or undermining, which is [a] really nice way of doing it. He includes the whole group.

Interactive discussion was viewed as in part the product of the skills of a tutor in facilitating student engagement without putting individuals under undue pressure to participate. The following two extracts from a participant in a final year interview group note a tutor's skill in *drawing in* student knowledge and contributions and in *taking the subject out* to students at an appropriate level:

Lecturer X kind of gleans the information out of you, that you already know anyway.

Lecturer X is pretty good at getting the – keeping the topic going because she doesn't talk about it in lofty terms, she brings it down to a level where it's common sense almost and especially when we're talking about devolution and stuff.

In addition to facilitating discussion in a skilled manner, tutors could also support the development of understanding by setting the expectation that students would display an *analytical* engagement with each other's ideas. For example, students in one first-year interview group drew attention to how involved discussion was linked to the tutor establishing the expectation that statements would be examined in a "rigorous" fashion.

There's much more in-depth discussion and like everybody in the group is encouraged to become involved and it's a lot more the testing of your own opinions, like the things that you say are actually tested. In one other history module, it's kind of like they just kind of swept it under the carpet in the need to get through all of the presentations really quickly.

The following extract reveals how a questioning stance towards evidence had been modelled and required by the tutor:

The first seminar wasn't very good: and he said what makes you think that, what evidence do you have to support that and you really have to get to the bottom of it.

Rigorous questioning of historical arguments had been fostered in some first year interview groups by the tutor's supportive challenging of students' statements, as the following exchange reveals:

S1: Lecturer X [is] always speaking out about little things in the crits: being critical in a constructive way really helps you to strengthen your argument.

S2: Because you know you can't get away with anything, you can't just come out with woolly statements because you are always going to be pulled up on it. So you really need to make sure that your arguments are clear.

...

S3: he won't let you gloss over things, just with a vague statement. He will always ask what the evidence is.

Student comments also drew attention to group norms concerning the investment of time and effort in preparation for discussion and presentation. For example, in one first-year site, the tenor of some student comments on presentations was that informal expectations had been set up that individuals would fulfil their obligation to the group by investing effort in preparation. The following extract describes the respect that arises from mutual input of effort to the tasks of presentation and discussion.

We respect each other as well because everyone's done their presentation, everyone's done ... Everyone's in the same boat, everyone's put the effort into the pile and you do, you respected people for the effort they put in and comments ...

In this particular first-year setting, displaying appropriate effort in the presentations had been assisted by the specific directions and reading provided. Students indicated that it had been very helpful to have an initial framework for the presentation on which they could then construct their own interpretation. The enabling effect of this scaffolding of students' presentation efforts comes through clearly in the following exchange.

S1: Like the presentation they'll identify three or four key things that they want you to look at. And whereas, you know, you can discount one of them or extend the other one or take a slightly

different perspective, but that's up to you. But the key foundations are written there. Whereas, the other modules, they just throw you in the deep end.

S2: Yeah. There's a framework which you can start from and then the idea is, yeah, you go off and you do extra reading and move things around a bit. But there is actually some angle that you can start looking at it from if you've got no idea about what's going on.

A preliminary meeting with the tutor before a group made their presentation was also identified by some students as a helpful source of guidance and contrasted favourably with the practice on other modules.

It's certainly the only module I have where you meet the professor before you actually do a presentation. All the others just let you get on with it, without checking it's going to be all right, so I think it's helpful too. ... It sort of gives you a lot more confidence and know you are on the right track.

While these first-year interview participants brought attention to the supportive structuring of presentation efforts, students in a final-year course expressed appreciation that there was a degree of choice over the topics of presentation/discussion and found this element of choice motivating. For example, one student described how:

... you come in this one, it's like we all kind of sat down at the beginning, chose more what we wanted to do than, you know, what was left to do. [assenting sounds from other students] And then we managed to do the effort ...

In addition, freedom given over the format and style of a presentation combined with support for their efforts from the lecturer was viewed favourably, as the following short exchange indicates:

S1: You've enough scope in there to do a bit just as you want it to be not just, you know, how it has to be.

S2: Lecturer X leaves it up to yourself. He said at the start, you can do it any way sort of – video, he'll help you ...

Concluding this section identifying the features of seminars that supported and challenged understanding, the following quotation from a first-year interview participant exemplifies well how small-group discussion could lead students into historical ways of thinking and acting:

When you sort of discuss things in seminars regarding that kind of evidence, you become aware of other people will, may raise ideas that would question it. So ultimately you begin to start asking those sort of questions yourself.

Perceptions of staff approachability and learning support

Perceptions of staff support for learning need to be set against the fact that for some entrant undergraduates the transition to adopting university ways of working had been a considerable challenge. This was the case for some people regardless of their prior qualifications, as a couple of 'traditional' entrants explained:

It was definitely a culture shock from A-levels: because A-levels don't prepare you at all for university teaching, which is a shame.

... it's unusual just not having such a vast amount of teaching that you are used to at A-level. You can pretty much write an essay from what you've been told in lessons.

Given that the demands of studying history were, at least initially, challenging for a proportion of students, it is encouraging that across the sites of the collaboration the large majority of interview comments presented staff as readily approachable and indicated satisfaction with the availability of support for learning. A partial exception came from the interviews in a pre-initiative first-year setting, where the common reaction was one of satisfaction with the availability of support, but some

participants perceived there was less help and accessibility on this module in comparison to certain others, “because of numbers and resources.”

Comments on the attitudes and approachability of staff were generally very complimentary, as in the following extracts from interviews in one of the first -year settings:

I thought [in] history we were quite welcome. I didn't feel sort of at any point as though I shouldn't be there or I shouldn't go and ask. No, I felt quite happy and comfortable. So I was quite happy if I'd felt stuck I could have went to anyone.

I must say that they are very supportive here [in the institution generally] ... the history department, they are supportive and especially the module leader. The work 's hard but there's help offered if you need it, so that's good.

As the following quotation reveals there was not an inhibiting sense of a power differential:

You don't feel intimidated or anything going to, to see your tutor, to speak to a member of staff, they're always really down-to-earth and understanding.

A readiness to interact informally with students was clearly much appreciated, as in this description of one participant's experience:

They are very forthcoming. If you've got a problem, they are very forthcoming, they will try and discuss it with you and you can go to their office, or if you see them ... if you see a tutor going for a sandwich ... 'excuse me, I need ...' 'Certainly. No problem, I'll give you five, ten minutes'. Although they are busy as well, you know, so ... very approachable.

It did, of course, sometimes take time for a student to develop confidence to make contact:

At the beginning I didn't really feel as if I could go and see anybody just like that. I didn't want to bother anybody but by the end, like I had an essay plan I would go and show X or Y and just make sure I was doing the right thing and covering all the points and stuff.

In addition students found it helpful for several reasons to consult one another. Shyness and a wariness about approaching members of staff undoubtedly underlay some comments:

I'd say we like, rely more on each other rather than going to the tutors, I would definitely say so. But then we're all sort of in the same position as well, probably not the best thing but, I think we all feel a lot more comfortable asking each other.

But it could also be a positive choice, based on the recognition that “they see things from a different perspective, they have different perspectives” or that peer groups can indeed be beneficial: “we get together and talk, discuss. It's good, it's a good support network to have.”

Appreciation for staff support in taking ahead assessed work was also evident in some final year interviews, as in the following comment:

... very, very helpful in everything, you know. They're not telling you what the answer is as such but they're there if you're [needing guidance]

The first round of interviews in one first-year setting revealed not only a perception of a friendly, supportive ethos where individual guidance was available but also a concerted effort on the module to provide an induction into studying at university. This cohort valued the structured introduction to study demands and had a strong impression that staff displayed confidence in their ability to cope with these demands.

Because they're absolutely positive and that's what [is] needed when you're in an environment that you don't know. You need to be shown the system: and that's exactly what the history department does.

The structured introduction to studying within the module, which included the use of a skills workbook, was accompanied by clear communication about the course:

... there's always somebody about up, upstairs that you ... can ask. ... and the notice-boards are full of information and things like that as well which helps, so that's an advantage.

Assessment

We have already noted in our account of H3L the value that students perceived in formative work on that course which allowed them to develop their performance. We focus in this section on assignments that had a more summative function.

In general, students across the interviews expressed appreciation where a degree of *choice* had been provided in relation to assessment activities. Students in one first year course, for example, valued the fact that a range of assessment activities had been provided and in some assignments a considerable degree of choice. Comments on this matter included the following exchange:

S1: A wide, a wide range of assessment topics.

S2: Wide choice.

S1: Which is, which is very good.

Some final-year comments drew attention to the motivating effect of being given a degree of initiative over the framing of an assignment topic. The following participant expressed her sense that having a considerable degree of choice over the topic of the first essay on the module was a distinct bonus and went on to comment more generally that:

I quite like the essays where you are asked to basically form your own question, or form your own topic because you can actually look at something you're really interested in, rather than doing a forced question, where you really don't have any options. If you're not interested in any, then it makes it quite difficult, I think, to do an essay on it.

A predominant perception in the interviews was that the *expectations* concerning the purposes and processes which students should be pursuing in their written work had been clearly communicated and that helpful *guidance* had been provided. In the words of one first- year student:

... certainly they gave you the guidelines to go ahead and there was – well it was up to you whether you followed the guidelines but they certainly said right this is what we want you to do.

An interchange between a group of H2F students in the collaborative initiative year highlighted what they felt was the nature of the challenge facing them and how they had been helped:

S1: I found my tutors helpful. I was struggling a wee bit with the exams, like the essays a bit ... you know they put notes and all that on the web based thing and all that, exactly what they wanted.

S2: Mm,

S1: I think that was another thing. I know for my essay I could have researched all the information, I could have all the information but how much did they want and how did they want it presented? That was the difficult thing and it's the same for the exams. It's not a case of studying ... I think actually studying the subject and taking the subject in, isn't going to be the problem. It's what they are looking for and how they want it. That, for me, I found the most difficult bit. But speaking to my tutor, she did help me and she pointed me in the right direction. I think ... I don't think I'm the only one with that fear.

All: No, that's true.

S1: You have the information, that doesn't seem to be for me, that was my preconceived idea about how am I going to remember all this stuff, you know, for history and all that but that isn't ... hasn't been the worry, the worry has been exactly

S2: What is wanted

S1: Yeah, and how do you want it? Far more that.

S2: That's it.

The collaborative initiative cohort of students in H2L recognised how guidance on reading and the general support provided within a clearly structured course had assisted efforts on assessed work:

I think they obviously tell you what kind of reading to do that's going to benefit you the most in your coursework and in your exam, so yeah, I mean, it's all kind of laid out for you and pretty well, yeah.

Students in the pre-collaborative initiative phase of H3F saw its essays as more demanding than those of other history units and for some students there were uncertainties concerning the approach to adopt:

I must admit I always find the essays really difficult. I don't really know where to start at times. I suppose it is because it is such a broad issue, it's hard to know what angle to take or what you're ultimately aiming to achieve with the essay.

The more explicit communication of purposes to be pursued featured largely in the collaborative initiative with this site and we return to this matter in the following section of the report.

At the H3F site, and particularly in the collaborative initiative year, there had been clear communication to the students of the need to exercise active, personal interpretation of controverted historical matters. Some student comments, such as those presented beneath, showed that such an active, individual approach to historical analysis was being applied in a wholehearted fashion to the task of essay-writing. These comments also reveal how the emphasis in the module on controversy and uncertainty in historical accounts allowed students to see that knowledge was not cut and dried and thus there was space for them to exercise agency in interpretation.

I think probably just to do with especially [in] our essay-writing, is reaching our own conclusions. Not just accepting something that someone else has written as being the truth 'cause, obviously in such a period, there probably isn't any exact truth in history. And analysing say one person's argument with another person's argument and making your own conclusion, and if necessary, not agreeing with either point of view. Coming to your own conclusion.

So then you continually have to remember that they don't know what they're talking about exactly so you can't know what you're talking about and you always have to kind of weigh that up. And you would get information about towns were developed like this, or towns were developed like this, but directly contradict each other. So I found that quite interesting 'cause you have to draw your own conclusion from that. And it's more than from the other modules because I think, because the evidence from this period is quite – can be quite hard to interpret, I think. So I really, definitely from this module I get that. ... Yeah, you have to draw your own conclusion, or maybe not even draw a conclusion but just say that you don't know.

Turning to the matter of marking, some students in one first-year setting expressed dissatisfaction at what they perceived as inconsistency in the level of marks given and interpretations of what was required across tutors. A few of these students identified problems of inconsistency in marking as a problem of first-year courses in general, rather than being unique to history, and one person presented the following analysis of the situation:

When you've got so many students doing one subject and the guys who are, you know, correcting the papers at the end of the day have to go through God knows how many. Things like that [inconsistencies] are bound to happen. I don't think really [you can] do anything about that.

Feedback

Throughout the student interviews the comments on the feedback which they had received were generally appreciative and a very considerable number of participants indicated that the feedback

which they had received had enabled them to make progress in beginning to *bridge the gap* between their current performance and what was expected of them as history students. As already indicated in relation to H3L and source work, feedback that was intrinsic to all learning activities, rather than being confined to comments on written work, was seen as particularly productive.

Before illustrating how feedback was described as aiding performance, it is important to note those instances where problems relating to feedback were identified. In one first-year pre-initiative cohort some interview participants indicated that feedback could have been provided in a more timely fashion and differences between tutors in the time taken to deliver feedback was identified as a source of some irritation:

Some of the teachers were quicker than others. Like you'd had all yours back and we were still waiting on ours, you know.

A few interview participants in a final-year collaborative initiative cohort would have liked more feedback, but interestingly other students were quicker to see the task from what they took to be a marker's viewpoint.

I thought the feedback was alright. He could have said more but then at the same time if you look at it he does have the whole class to do himself, so you kinda see why he might not have given as much feedback as you were given in previous years.

In a first-year module the comments received on written work were viewed as helping to improve performance, but some students would have preferred greater opportunity for face-to-face feedback sessions. Again it is interesting to note that a few of the students advocating greater opportunity for verbal feedback were at the same time able to see this matter from the perspective of the module staff.

... what was wrong with it and how you could make it better. So, yeah, perhaps you would have got more from speaking to someone directly about it. But then again it's so hard when so many people are doing essays. To do that I do like understand that that would be like using up a lot of the lecturer's time ...

Turning to appreciative comments on feedback, one first-year interview group described their tutor as both enabling and demanding; and described the feedback that he gave on written work as combining support and challenge. Discussing this tutor's feedback students said:

S1: He's a nit-picker. [from the preceding context, this is a positive comment]

S2: Yeah. Yeah. Lecturer X really does haul it out of you. He's very, very good at getting you. But if you, there's some interest, he'll throw some kind of commentary and he does get the most out of you. And the feedback when you've got the essays in, I thought is very reconstructive [*sic*].

First-year comments concerning feedback on written work indicated how it had assisted progress, as in the following two quotations, (where typically there is an implicit expression of willingness to take this commentary on board).

It's [i.e. feedback] been quite good because like the first essay we did in our first module I got feedback for that and I took into account that and then it was obvious in my second ... essay, I think, that it was noted that I had taken that into account and I think the mark reflected that.

... but from the feedback he gave me there, it's certainly, did – and from the first essay onwards it gave me the right track of where I would really have to go.

A student in another first-year course made an important observation concerning the focus of formative comments on essays: "It's like they're looking at it in terms of the entire module rather than just that particular question I've been answering." It was also noted that useful points had been made in the seminar about the essays in general, in addition to the specific written comments given on individuals' work.

Students who had received verbal as well as written feedback on assignments found this a valuable experience:

X had office hours that we could go and get our feedback so that was quite good: and then Y sat down and told us where we went wrong and what was good, so that was really, I really did feel the benefit of that because it kind of put me in the right direction. So I was really happy with sort of one-to-one with the teacher rather than getting it in e-mail.

Some of the specific gains that flowed from detailed verbal feedback are illustrated in the quotation beneath:

... he went through it paragraph by paragraph. It was really useful. I hadn't really done many essays of this length before and didn't know how to structure it. Told me what I'd done wrong and what I'd done right. It really helped me for when I was doing the next essay.

As an example of good practice in giving verbal feedback it is appropriate to highlight the following account of how commentary had been provided in a distinctly dialogic manner.

When he gave mine back he asked me first what I thought of the essay, which was quite an interesting way to give an essay back. Then he sort of talked to me about what he thought and matched it up with my evaluation of the essay. So that was quite useful to see whether we were thinking on the same lines.

As a cautionary note on the largely positive picture of the provision of feedback that has been portrayed, it is necessary to point up that students' capacity to make appropriate use of the feedback they received on written work may have been constrained or enabled by their existing conception of essay-writing (see Literature Review). At the request of the staff at one final-year site we engaged in a small-scale, but detailed, investigation of students' conceptions of, and processes in, essay-writing, (in addition to the standard ETL data-collection activities). We noted of one participant in this study that: "This student valued the feedback that she had received. However, there may have been limitations in the extent to which she was able to interpret this feedback in the manner in which it was intended, given her conception of history essay-writing, with its focus on coverage and a possibly limited role for herself as an active interpreter and debater."

8. THE COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

Reporting back to module teams after the first round of data collection

In all the settings we sent a full report to the course teams based on our previous interviews with them, the findings of the two ETL questionnaires and the outcomes of the group interviews with students. The analyses, and any suggestions made, were very much grounded in teaching staff's specific aspirations for the students taking each module, as well as in relevant aspects of the student learning and course design literatures. In two cases we also collected additional information about issues of concern raised by the specific course teams. One supplementary enquiry surveyed students willing to be contacted further about how hard they had found it to submit coursework on time, what kinds of difficulties had arisen, and what had or would have helped with timely submission. For a second module we conducted a small set of interviews tapping into students' perspectives on the feedback received about their essays. In compiling the reports we took care to flag up the many elements of good practice which emerged, and would be important to maintain in future, as well as highlighting any aspects that seemed to warrant further attention and could perhaps be improved.

The next step was to meet with course teams in order to consider the possibilities and priorities for, and practicalities of, making changes to their module in the year ahead. Whilst the results of the ETL data gathering activities were a key element in discussions, our reports needed to be set alongside information about the running and impact of the module that course teams had available from other

sources; for example, customary student feedback processes, external examiners' observations, students' assessment results. In every setting account also had to be taken of some change(s) in the landscape within which the module would be operating the next time around that would entail making certain module adjustments. Examples included a new modular degree programme structure, a history curriculum revamp, a change in the overall weighting of the module and the component assessment tasks, the mandatory usage of a VLE, a much larger student cohort due to over-recruitment, and staff changes (as a result of sabbatical leave, promotion, redeployment, or taking up a post elsewhere). In half of our sites the changes were such that it made sense from the viewpoint of the project and our partners alike to have a fallow year between the pre and post collaborative initiative phases. Despite the contextual changes, the learning purposes being pursued in the modules remained essentially the same and the contours of the modules sufficiently similar, to make a collaborative initiative an appropriate enterprise.

Shaping up the collaborative initiatives

Without exception the teaching staff were very responsive to the reported data, identifying resonances with their own accumulated experience and making links with existing information. They readily discussed the findings, drew out practical implications and explored what actions might best be taken in the light of: local and institutional parameters, the characteristics of the student cohort, and the module's capacities to foster appropriate kinds of engagement with history and its characteristic ways of thinking and practising. The collaborative initiatives agreed upon were thus very much tailored to the individual modules. At the same time, and despite the contrasting contexts, there were some striking similarities in the sorts of difficulties some students were encountering in coming to grips with key matters, and in the ways the module leaders proposed to try to enhance their scaffolding of student efforts and understanding.

First-year modules

Nature of the collaborative initiatives

For the first-year units, the common issues concerned students' management of the transition to taking on increasing responsibility for their own learning, to developing a more nuanced understanding of the nature of history as a field of study, and to dealing with the thematic rather than chronological approach that characterised these particular modules. The underpinning ETL findings indicated that a variable proportion of respondents (always *far* from a majority) in each first-year module had found elements of these transitions problematic; toiling to, for example, acquire sufficient mastery of baseline knowledge, do the amount and type of reading required, use argumentation and evidence effectively. The other common theme, which applied particularly to the modules with comparatively large teaching teams, was the sometimes less than consistent experiences of students as regards the activities, briefing and support provided across the various tutorials or seminars. These two main concerns led to plans for action to be taken in each of the modules, some examples of which are given in the listing below.

The favoured strategies for making changes in the first-year settings were:

- ♦ to refine and reinforce the thematic structure of the module, without demoting the importance of chronological/geographical frameworks;
e.g. by redesigning the lecture programme and structuring of content, by running thematic threads more energetically across all elements of the module, by giving essays or seminars a stronger thematic focus
- ♦ to share more explicitly with students (and other teaching colleagues) the reasoning behind module structures, processes and requirements, and in turn their connections with history as a disciplinary enterprise;
e.g. by means of a more measured orientation in the opening lecture, or revamping the course handbook to lay out objectives more boldly

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- ♦ to provide students with more detailed discipline-nested guidance about tackling specific academic tasks;
e.g. by indicating more fully what are productive ways of going about reading, essay writing, seminar presentations or handling documents
 - ♦ to increase the support and guidance given to module tutors and /or opportunities for them to share information, practices and resources;
e.g. by means of meetings, making materials available or using a VLE

The other area of change envisaged in these first-year modules was that of trying to encourage students to be more self-reflective; in one case about their approaches to learning (as prompted by the LSQ) and in another about what progress they were making.

Factors affecting implementation

In the event it was these last, perhaps less defined, aspirations, together with the wish for greater dialogue among course teams, that under the pressures of time and competing commitments tended to go by the board in the first-year modules. Also apparent was the dominance of the need to simply 'get the show on the road' in the setting where there was the most contextual change – with a new course leader who had not previously been involved taking over a large first-year module, new substantive content and different positioning in the curriculum, and organisational changes happening quite late on in the planning cycle. But even in this case there was considerable evidence of the effort made to carry through in good faith on the agreed collaborative initiatives.

Later / final-year modules

Nature of the collaborative initiatives

Turning to the issues that surfaced in relation to the later / final-year units and decisions about the alterations to be effected, there were somewhat fewer thematic similarities – not altogether unexpectedly because they were more specialised modules. But the fact that the course units were located within the more intensive, sometimes culminating, phase of students' historical studies did make for shared interests in highlighting historical controversy, the critical evaluation of primary and secondary sources, and the use of evidence. As in the first-year settings, the ETL findings often served to endorse the retention of 'tried and tested' aspects, as well as to spotlight new possibilities. In one module the strongly positive tenor of the first round of data collection meant that initially there did not appear much scope for a collaborative initiative, but the member of staff concerned remained keen to identify ways in which students' learning experiences on the module could be further enriched. In the other two settings there was a fallow year due to the effects of the institutional changes on one course and the combination of staff leave and a change in the time period covered in the other course. However, partly because the same lecturers were involved, this delay was beneficial inasmuch as it allowed more time for considered reflection on our findings and discussion of pointers for further development.

The nature of the collaborative initiatives in the different sites is indicated below:

- ♦ In the unit where there seemed potential value in activities and assessments that would require students to reflect more explicitly on their learning and also present a somewhat higher level of challenge, the course organiser decided to capitalise on an existing core component of the module, the classroom trial. In addition to making use of the institution-wide VLE to enrich the trial activity, he planned to change the focus of one of two required essays to a reflective analysis of the *experience* of the trial in terms of, for example, why a particular decision was reached, what students had learned about the nature of history, and differences between oral and written arguments in history.
- ♦ The report about a second unit lent direct support to the course team's decision to shorten the historical time period covered and to strengthen the thematic structure, as well as their continued

efforts to achieve a more integrated synthesis of political and historical aspects. In addition to more explicitly communicating course purposes and disciplinary concerns, there was a more strongly thematic approach to the organisation of content and restructuring of course activities. The reconfiguration involved integration of lectures and seminars (instead of having a 'front-loaded' pattern of lectures), and reducing the overall study demands by putting less emphasis on the presentation.

- ♦ With the third module it was mainly a matter of conserving strengths in slightly changing circumstances; making sure that movement over time to larger group sizes did not reduce student interaction and engagement, that general historical and technical aspects of the course were in balance, and that a new assessment regime did not reduce the overall amount of formative feedback and guidance. Whilst expectations concerning students' approach to historical work would be more explicitly communicated, the nub of the collaborative initiative was the more structured shaping of the seminars themselves. Students would take on more well-defined roles following the lecturer's input, and discussion of controversial matters would also play a key part. To encourage the interactive consideration of primary and secondary sources within individual seminars, student presentations relating secondary materials to the primary documents would be instigated.

Factors affecting implementation

With the later/final-year modules there seemed to be a slightly easier follow-through on the agreed collaborative initiatives. In H1L and H2L there was a 'fallow year' and thus a less pressured timetable for determining what changes could and would be implemented. In addition, the same people continued to run all the later year modules, whereas leadership of H1F and H2F passed to a different person in 2003-04 from the year before. But more general factors such as the scale of the module, the number of staff involved in running it, and where 'ownership' was felt to be located, probably also had a part to play. For consultation processes tend to be more streamlined if only one or two people are involved (rather than a large group), and those individuals are likely to have a stronger personal investment in the unit, the student participants and the future trajectory of the course.

Nevertheless, it was the case that in all the history sites there were generally high levels of commitment among the module teams and in none of the settings did the collaborative initiative fail to happen.

Effects of the collaborative initiatives

Assessing the impact of the collaborative initiatives is not a straightforward matter. Inter-relationships between all the components that make up a teaching-learning environment are complex, with individual elements subject to change. As already indicated the history settings were no exception. While there were continuities between the two runnings of a course, this was far from a laboratory-like situation in which research-informed interventions could be made and measured, unaffected by other factors. For there were changes at both module and institutional levels which also had to be accommodated and which make it hard to separate out the effects of the initiatives *per se*. At the same time it is clearly important to compare the reactions of respondent students who participated in the modules before and after the alterations made to them.

Although different cohorts of students were involved, their initial profiles (as shown in section 6) regarding orientations to university study, reasons for course choice, approaches to learning, and monitoring studying were reasonably similar. In the overview of the questionnaire findings about learning-teaching environments (section 7), we reported the generally high ratings given by the initial groups of respondents across the modules for all eight sub-scales of the ETLQ. Such positive 'baseline' data, which was particularly marked in relation to two of the later/final-year modules, indicated that these were already largely successful courses serving the students on them more than reasonably well. As a result there was relatively little scope for dramatic improvements in the mean ratings, and it is unwise to read too much into small fluctuations especially when the respondent pool is not large.

Overview

Nevertheless the response patterns following the collaborative initiatives, as reported in section 7, were quite encouraging, with either a 'steady state' or slight increases apparent in most of the subscales for most of the modules. In the final-year module, where the initial ratings were below the rest and the course team implemented the most thoroughgoing set of ETL informed changes, distinct improvements were evident in respondents' scores on all but one of the subscales, resulting in an overall pattern very close to that of the other two later-year modules. It was heartening to the course team to see, for instance, the very affirmative student responses overall and to individual items in the subscales 'organisation, structure and content' and 'alignment' because they were matters to which particular attention had been paid in the redesign of the module.

For analytical purposes it is instructive to consider what happened in the group of modules operating within the more stable contexts, compared to those modules that were more subject to changes happening apart from, and in addition to, the alterations associated with the collaborative initiatives. If we focus on the first-year module where there was the most scope both for implementing a collaborative initiative and for tracing out its impact, unaffected by other kinds of change, the picture that emerges is very much a positive one. There was fairly close comparability in the degree of spread of student opinion concerning most of the course elements. With the exception of a small drop in ratings concerning clarity and feedback about assessment, the mean ratings for the other subscales were all somewhat higher in 2003-4 than in 2002-3, and a considerable gain was evident as regards the integration of teaching and learning materials (2002-3 mean, 3.3 s.d. 0.5 and 2003-4 mean 4.1, s.d. 0.6). Apart from these generally positive patterns at the subscale level, there were improved ratings for many of the individual inventory items which had a direct connection with particular elements of the collaborative initiative. For example, the increases in mean ratings for items such as 'the topics seemed to follow each other in a way that made sense to me', 'plenty of examples were given to help us to grasp things better', 'the handouts and other materials we were given helped me to understand the unit', and 'it was clear to me what I was supposed to learn in this unit', suggested that the efforts invested in the restructuring of topics and their sequence, in conveying even more explicitly in lectures the module's main themes and conceptual frameworks, and in revising the course handbook had been worthwhile. This interpretation of positive linkages between the changes made to the module and the enhanced nature of student experiences tended to be reinforced and exemplified by the opinions expressed during the group interviews.

As well as illustrating the beneficial effects of a collaborative initiative in one of the more stable contexts, it is worth noting the maintenance of good ratings in settings subject to a substantial amount of collateral change. In such settings the shaping up and running of modules, whose various aspects continued to be rated really quite highly by the student respondents, could be viewed as an achievement in itself, and one to which the implementation of the collaborative initiative may well have made a positive contribution.

In order to round out consideration of the effects of the collaborative initiatives we also need to take account of what came through in the interviews with students. Looking at the post-collaborative initiative interviews as a whole, their main thrust was to reinforce the productiveness for student learning in these history modules of the kinds of approaches to course design and teaching already detailed in section seven of this report. The interview data tended to confirm the value of the aspects of design and delivery identified as key matters and targeted by the collaborative initiatives, and to establish that their implementation was going some way to assist in further developing disciplinarily appropriate forms of student engagement and understanding. The challenges for students remained – and indeed needed to do so – but the modules were moving in directions likely to be helpful to students in constructing their understanding of history. The more intractable elements in terms of the efficacy of the collaborative initiatives were those associated with trying to provide parity of student experiences in larger-scale first-year modules with more teaching staff involved.

First-year modules

The common thread in the changes made to the first-year modules revolved around a greater explicitness; as regards their thematic orientation, the character of history as an intellectual enterprise, the provision of more discipline specific guidance about academic tasks, and the sharing of information among course tutors. Efforts made to strengthen the thematic emphasis may have enabled a more ready engagement among students with historical purposes, easing the task of grappling with a more conceptual organisation of content. Indeed, the highlighting and explication by course teams of the adoption of a thematic approach did seem to result in quite a widespread appreciation among students of the contrast with previous history courses and of how this kind of structuring connected up with the nature of history as a discipline. The first two illustrative comments by students relate to one of the first year modules and the second two extracts to another of these modules.

S1: We got a handout telling us exactly where we were going, what they were trying to achieve but like I say, I feel it's been kind of fragmented ... as opposed to staying in a sort of chronological order ... It is difficult when you are sort of taking one map up and having to get another map out.

S2: For me I can bring in these different themes and they layer for me and eventually towards the end of the course you get a broader picture. But I think that's because, coming to this as mature student, my learning experience is distanced from school, where you are given this very direct route to history.

S1: I think it's ok, it's very clear. It's, it is a little bit daunting I suppose to start with when you are using an example. But again that's because we're new to this subject. But I think it works quite well. Because, I think you can't really go through it chronologically because there's too much... I think it's the only way you can cross-reference

S2: I think that's quite good because at school it's often the chronological approach taken but I think a thematic approach is more suited to more advanced studying than looking at changes throughout the period. You realise that things don't just follow on chronologically all the time. In some cases they obviously do but – so I think it works quite well. Studying things thematically you get to see links between and get a sort of holistic picture of everything.

In the third first-year module the increased upfront explicitness about the purposes to be pursued during the course helped make for keen understandings of what is entailed in studying history – as expressed by the following two interview participants.

S1: For new students [it is important that] you look at things from a different perspective, that you go into, you don't make judgements, that you try and analyse it and see why things happened and understand why things happened.

S2: Because, you know, one thing about History I find is that it's actually, unless you know what to go and, how to approach it and what to look for, you can't really make up your own judgement and mind. You have all these facts in front of you, let you see, ... you really just, you need to delve into it. And I think once you grasp that, it makes it so much easier and enjoyable and I think that's what the tutors are trying to sort of get you to do.

Having a firmer grasp of underlying rationales for course organisation or course activities and the nature of the discipline sometimes helped students to take on board the demands placed upon them, for instance for reading.

Later / final-year modules

As already indicated one of the final-year initiatives was quite substantial and involved decisions to shorten the time period covered, to organise content more thematically, to interleave lectures with seminars, and to reduce the overall student workload, as well as to place further emphasis on conveying course purposes and synthesising the political and historical aspects of the module. The positive impact of these adaptations, which the quantitative data made clear was also apparent in the interview

data, either because of what was said or not said. Thus, for instance, the post-initiative interview participants made no mention of course coverage being too extensive and they clearly appreciated the reduction in course requirements.

I felt that on other history course you were asked to do a presentation and hand in like the essay to go with the presentation. I felt that this way it was less demanding because you didn't have to worry about the presentation and then have that done and then a week later hand in the essay and then hand in another essay. It just seemed to make a bit more sense and be useful.

What came through strongly was the feeling of those interviewed that the module had been put together with considerable care and attention, with the various elements articulating well together. In particular the history and politics elements were generally seen to have been effectively integrated so as to encourage the making of close interconnections.

S1: You know, when I read the description of it, it was like a History module but there was a politics element to it. But I felt it was maybe fifty / fifty in the end.

S2: Having to adopt a historical perspective on issues that are really not that far away from us. That, for me has been the big one ... has been the big plus.

Also attracting student praise was the joined-up thinking that linked together module content, the lectures, and the seminars (reading / preparation and activities).

The need to adjust to significant contextual change, including the compression of the module into a much shorter time-frame than hitherto, and the attendant pressures on student learning and course resources, had quite an impact in the second later-year setting. Nevertheless the course leader also wanted to exploit the potentialities of the very successful classroom trial that was already a strong feature of the course to further promote student reflection and analysis. The new challenge for module participants involved focusing the second of two required essays on such issues as the reasons for the trial outcome, what the trial had taught them about verbal and written argumentation, and what light the trial proceedings had cast upon the nature of history. All those interviewed alluded in some way to the fact that "it was different, not your usual question", and some reported finding it hard to adapt to different expectations. More commonly however the switch in focus was welcomed:

Well, I think, I'm in fourth year now so I've had four years of straight essays and they all fall in the same structure and they all have the same things expected of them even though they are on different subjects, and so it's, it's like a new type of essay to try to get into and kind of breaks the monotony of essays a lot so ...

In general the students we talked to felt that the experience of "delving into greater depth what the trial was all about" had given them particular insights. Whilst not elegantly expressed what one student had to say got encouragingly close to pinpointing the underlying intentions, as well as the complementary relationship between the essay and the trial as learning activities.

I think it was most of the time reflecting [on] your own work and normally you should be the three persons in one person when you write your essay; so, not only prosecution or defence just, first being one person then the other and at the end make your own judgement over the case. And this was, I think it was my idea of splitting it [in the trial] that everybody is only allowed to concentrate on one side. But at the end you get an idea of what you have to do when you write, or when you concentrate on a very complicated topic where there is not only one opinion. And normally you don't have one opinion which is right, and I think he wants us to reflect [on] our work and what we have done during the trial.

We have noted already that the collaborative initiative in the third final year course centred on a much more structured organisation of the seminars themselves, which involved students taking on more clearly defined roles. This worked out well except for the element involving students adopting an explicit commentary / 'judging' role as the audience of presentations. Students attributed the failure of the 'judging' element to take off largely to "time constraints." At the same time students saw the

seminar group as one where challenges and counter-challenges could be taken forward in a safe, amicable atmosphere so that participants would engage with the student presenter as a matter of course. It is also the intention of the lecturer to pursue this commentary role in future runs of the module.

The move to a more structured sequence of student presentations involved a considerable number of students in the work of delivery leading to the perception of a somewhat “overcrowded” session. This problem was resolved by reducing the number of speakers in the second term. With this adaptation in place, student comments on the seminar structure and the quality of discussion achieved were distinctly appreciative, as can be seen from the following illustrative quotations.

because ... everybody was doing it we found ... there wasn't actually enough time to discuss the, the actual documents and the actual themes, whereas this time we're doing it, there's only one person doing the text and one person doing secondary: we have a lot more time to discuss and work as a group and also get ideas from everybody for it, rather than just the person.

I think this term's got more time too actually, which is good. There is more interaction coming up with the people. There is more questions asked that I think add to the actual knowledge because all of us will see it with slightly different perspectives, so it's nice to have that opportunity too.

Student comments in the interviews also revealed their sense that there had been a collective commitment to the work of presentation and contribution within the group.

It's very much, it's much more practical really because ... we all, it's like team work really, we are working.

A major change within the seminar structure was the move to include a presentation on secondary materials that were related to the primary sources that were being considered in a specific session. This innovation was described by the lecturer as “an immediate success” and an earlier section of the report has highlighted the benefits for understanding that students perceived to flow from analysing primary and secondary sources *together interactively* within seminars. On this theme, students talked, for example, of how:

And it does tend to give you a more balanced view, I think, and is very helpful to have the secondary. It gives you more of an overview.

It also told you, sort of shows you why the primary source is important, what it involves ...

In a paper written for an ETL history symposium, the lecturer on this course has set out an account of how his collaboration with the ETL project has influenced the design of this final year module, including its effects on the choice and structuring of content as well as the matters that were highlighted in the collaborative initiative. This paper describes the ways in which the sharper definition of purposes and activities achieved as a result of interaction with ETL will be taken ahead in the future. In addition it provides a clearly-articulated vision of how research-led special subject teaching in final-year can be designed to benefit students and historians alike.

9. CONCLUDING SECTION

Engagement through dialogue

In line with the close focus adopted in the ETL project on the disciplinary dimensions of university teaching and studying, preceding sections of this report have described how central ways of thinking and practising in history were informing teaching efforts, very often in ways that were congruent

(McCune and Hounsell, 2005) with students' own background, concerns and experience. At the same time, we have been at pains to stress that these ways of thinking and practising should not be conceived of as free-standing entities independent of the agents who deploy them in specific situations. As we have noted earlier, these WTP are mediated by lecturers' personal interpretations of these practices and teaching approaches, appropriated by students through processes of individual interpretation and participation, and are shaped by the constraints and affordances of specific academic settings.

Focusing in on the constraints and affordances of different settings, even within the limited number of settings examined in the history strand of the ETL project, differing means were being used in different courses to engage students in historical ways of thinking and practising. The interaction of institutional-level and module-level factors had a strong bearing on what teaching strategies and activities made sense within a given context. In addition conditions were rarely static, and there were examples of the need experienced at module level to accommodate changing circumstances, sometimes at short notice. Among the adjustments made were those required in response to institutional re-organisation, semesterisation, staff changes, etc. Thus, rather than seeking to identify an ideal type set of teaching actions that can be applied across all university history departments, it can be argued that teaching development activities are best directed at assisting staff in considering how teaching activities can be carefully crafted to pursue disciplinary purposes and practices in ways that are well tailored to the situation of specific groups of students and what can be achieved in a local setting. It also needs to be acknowledged that planned changes, whether as the result of an external input from educational researchers or developers or a course team's own efforts, will always be affected both by the contingencies of everyday life and the conditions of current university life where structures and procedures are far from static.

While we have pointed up in the preceding paragraphs the variety of ways in which historical ways of thinking and practising were being taken ahead in individual settings and the need for undertaking tailored course design that is congruent with a department's students, it is important also to underscore how in the ETL history settings what are regarded in the educational literature to be general features of good course design were being pursued. As examples of how generic desiderata in course design were being followed in the collaborative initiatives, we have illustrated how in specific settings actions were taken to achieve a better articulation of course purposes with the sequence and nature of learning activities and assignments, and create and display clarity and coherence in thematic organisation of content.

In addition, one can discern certain commonalities in approach underpinning forms of teaching and learning activities that students appreciated and that enabled them to engage with disciplinary ways of thinking and practising. These commonalities can be captured within the general phrase *engagement through dialogue*, which encompasses a number of different, albeit interrelated, meanings of the term dialogue and forms of dialogue. Various arenas and kinds of dialogue – among teaching staff, between staff and students, and among students – could be seen to be productive, including the matter of *making the rationales underlying the particular design features of a module more explicit and accessible*. Particularly in the first year modules, with large student enrolments and correspondingly greater numbers of tutors, students were more likely to report getting consistent guidance and having broadly equivalent learning experiences when all those teaching the course had similar appreciations of module purposes, procedures, expectations and criteria. As we have illustrated in this report, understanding the reasoning behind the structuring of content, organisation of activities and assessment of a module had benefits for students, particularly if explanations were explicitly related to key features of historical study.

A theme running through the collaborative initiatives was the *explicit communication of expectations concerning the pursuit of historical study* and we have detailed earlier examples of staff *acting in a deliberate fashion to foster students' awareness of the nature of the discipline*. Such activities can also be seen as acting to give students a language within which to talk about history. These actions of taking out to students disciplinary perspectives and their associated forms of expression may be viewed as creating the grounds on which dialogue between staff and students, and between students themselves, concerning historical topics could proceed and where a degree of meeting of minds could be achieved.

We have described earlier how staff actions cut deeper than the straightforward communication of expectations concerning historical study and attempting to provide a more explicit account of central points of disciplinary practice. Students whom we interviewed indicated the helpful impact of staff directly *modelling historical reasoning* or otherwise flagging up appropriate ways of thinking in history. In one first-year site in particular, the prominence given to the controverted nature of historical accounts and the provisional nature of historical knowledge, coupled with the modelling of the process of historical reasoning, provided a very dialogic introduction to the module's content and concerns, which enabled students to develop the work of personal interpretation of issues and topics. In the words of one interview participant, students were given "the space to handle these different interpretations". Thus not only was clear communication of disciplinary concerns and modelling of historical ways of reasoning being achieved, but this was being pursued in a 'dialogical' as opposed to a 'monological' form, providing scope for and encouraging student agency in interpretation. We have also noted how students' *affective engagement* with history was energised by staff's active display of subject enthusiasm.

In addition, attention has been given to how *the encouragement of student agency* in terms of formulating their own historical arguments and positions was assisted by a sense of staff approachability and the creation of learning climates in which students felt free both to ask questions of one another and of historical materials, and to expose their individual understandings or conceptual struggles. The communication of the expectation that students would display active interpretation of historical material in assessed tasks and come to a personal position on contested issues has been pointed up, (though questions have been raised as to whether the precise forms of assessment employed were always best suited to support such a dialogical encounter with the secondary literature and primary sources). Consideration has been given to how in a final-year course setting the dialectical process of the analysis of primary sources described by Wineburg (Wineburg, 1998) was scaffolded and students' independence in judgement was encouraged.

In conclusion, the preceding paragraphs have drawn attention to a number of different senses in which engagement through dialogue would appear to be central to taking ahead the disciplinary purposes and viewpoints that actuate university history learning and teaching environments, including the importance of staff acting in ways that involve dialogic engagement with students and the drawing of students into active debate.

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APPENDIX

Shortened Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (SETLQ)

This questionnaire has been designed to allow you to describe, in a systematic way, your reactions to the course you have been studying and how you have gone about learning it. We will be asking you a series of questions, some of which overlap so as to provide good overall coverage of different experiences. Most of the items are based on comments made by other students. Please respond truthfully, so that your answers will describe your **actual** ways of studying, and work your way through the questionnaire quite **quickly**. It is important that you respond to **every** item, even if that means using the 'unsure' category. Your answers will be **confidential**. Please put a cross in the appropriate box to indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements.

1 What do you expect to get from the experience of higher education?

	<i>very strongly</i>	<i>fairly strongly</i>	<i>somewhat/ not sure</i>	<i>rather weakly</i>	<i>very weakly/ not at all</i>
a. I hope the things I learn will help me to develop as a person and broaden my horizons.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. I'm focused on the opportunities here for an active social life and/or sport.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I hope the whole experience here will make me more independent and self-confident.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. I want to learn things which might let me help people, and/or make a difference in the world.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. I want to study the subject in depth by taking interesting and stimulating courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. I mainly need the qualification to enable me to get a good job when I finish.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. When I look back, I sometimes wonder why I ever decided to come here.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 Reasons for taking this particular course

a. It's something I expect to find interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. It's supposed to be a fairly easy course unit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. I thought it would look good on my CV.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. It should help me to understand the subject better.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. It's an area I will need to know about for my career.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3 Approaches to learning and studying

Next we are interested in the ways you have been going about studying in this particular course. The responses in this section mean

✓ = agree ✓? = agree somewhat X? = disagree somewhat X = disagree

Try not to use ?? = unsure unless you really have to, or if it cannot apply to you or your course unit.

	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
1. I've often had trouble in making sense of the things I have to remember.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I've been over the work I've done to check my reasoning and see that it makes sense.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I have generally put a lot of effort into my studying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Much of what I've learned seems no more than lots of unrelated bits and pieces in my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. In making sense of new ideas, I have often related them to practical or real life contexts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
6. <i>On the whole, I've been quite systematic and organised in my studying.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. <i>Ideas I've come across in my academic reading often set me off on long chains of thought.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. <i>I've looked at evidence carefully to reach my own conclusion about what I'm studying.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. <i>When I've been communicating ideas, I've thought over how well I've got my points across.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. <i>I've organised my study time carefully to make the best use of it.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. <i>It has been important for me to follow the argument, or to see the reasons behind things.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. <i>I've tended to take what we've been taught at face value without questioning it much.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. <i>I've tried to find better ways of tracking down relevant information in this subject.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. <i>Concentration has not usually been a problem for me, unless I've been really tired.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. <i>In reading for this course unit, I've tried to find out for myself exactly what the author means.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. <i>I've just been going through the motions of studying without seeing where I'm going.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. <i>If I've not understood things well enough when studying, I've tried a different approach.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4 Experiences of teaching and learning

We would also like to know about your experiences of teaching and learning in this particular course. Try to avoid using ?? (unsure).

Aims and congruence	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
1. <i>It was clear to me what I was supposed to learn in this course unit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. <i>The topics seemed to follow each other in a way that made sense to me.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. <i>What we were taught seemed to match what we were supposed to learn.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. <i>The handouts and other materials we were given helped me to understand the unit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. <i>I could see how the set work fitted in with what we were supposed to learn.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Choice allowed

6. <i>We were given a good deal of choice over how we went about learning.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. <i>We were allowed some choice over what aspects of the subject to concentrate on.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Teaching and learning

8. <i>On this unit, I was prompted to think about how well I was learning and how I might improve.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. <i>The teaching encouraged me to rethink my understanding of some aspects of the subject.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. <i>This unit has given me a sense of what goes on 'behind the scenes' in this subject area.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. <i>The teaching in this unit helped me to think about the evidence underpinning different views.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. <i>This unit encouraged me to relate what I learned to issues in the wider world.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Set work and feedback

13. <i>It was clear to me what was expected in the assessed work for this course unit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. <i>I was encouraged to think about how best to tackle the set work.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. <i>The feedback given on my work helped me to improve my ways of learning and studying.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. <i>Staff gave me the support I needed to help me complete the set work for this course unit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. <i>The feedback given on my set work helped to clarify things I hadn't fully understood.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Assessing understanding

18. <i>You had really to understand the subject to get good marks in this course unit.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. <i>To do well in this course unit, you had to think critically about the topics.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Staff enthusiasm and support from both staff and students

20. <i>Staff tried to share their enthusiasm about the subject with us.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
21. Staff were patient in explaining things which seemed difficult to grasp.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. Students supported each other and tried to give help when it was needed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. Talking with other students helped me to develop my understanding.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interest and enjoyment generated by the course					
24. I found most of what I learned in this course unit really interesting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. I enjoyed being involved in this course unit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 Demands made by the course unit

In this section, please tell us how easy or difficult you found different aspects of **this course unit**.

✓ = very easy ✓? = fairly easy ?? = unsure/not applicable X? = fairly difficult X = very difficult

	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
a. What I was expected to know to begin with.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. The rate at which new material was introduced.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. The ideas and problems I had to deal with.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. The skills or technical procedures needed in this subject.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. The amount of work I was expected to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Working with other students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Organising and being responsible for my own learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Communicating knowledge and ideas effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Tracking down information for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j. Information technology/computing skills (e.g. WWW, email, word processing).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6 What you learned from this course unit

Now we would like to know how much you feel you have gained from studying **this course unit**.

✓ = a lot ✓? = quite a lot ?? = unsure/not applicable X? = not much X = very little

	✓	✓?	??	X?	X
b. Ability to think about ideas or to solve problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Skills or technical procedures specific to the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. Ability to work with other students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. Organising and being responsible for my own learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Ability to communicate knowledge and ideas effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Ability to track down information in this subject area.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Information technology/computing skills (e.g. WWW, email, word processing).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Finally, how well do you think you're doing in this course unit as a whole? Please try to rate yourself **objectively**, based on any marks, grades or comments you have been given.

very well	well	quite well	about average	not so well	rather badly			
9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please check back to make sure that you have answered every question.

Thank you very much for spending time completing this questionnaire: it is much appreciated.

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