A brief description of the partnership work

This partnership was about embodying the radical ideals of arts and humanities education as persistent critical dialogue and intellectual possibility. For two years, University of Sheffield Arts and Humanities (A&H) undergraduate and postgraduate students, academics, and professional services, invited speakers and members of the public have taken part in an evolving conversation about the value or otherwise of the arts and humanities in the 21st Century. This process led to the key partnership work detailed here: the design of a module by a team of staff and students, led by the SALTs with support from the ADLT.

‘Interdisciplinary Research in Practice in the Arts and Humanities’ is a 20 credit module, open to any A&H undergraduate, who will learn with and from other members of the university about research theory and practice. All participants will collaborate on a student-led research project, supervised by graduate student researchers, with the results presented and discussed at an end-of-module colloquium, open to the public.

This partnership evolved out of a workshop attended by members of the Faculty at every stage of an academic career from 1st year undergraduate to Professor. Participants there reflected on key ideas presented at a preceding public forum at which four invited academics and artists spoke on the topic “Against Value in the Arts and Humanities”. 1 The forum itself offered a critical reflection by A&H academics, students and interested publics in response to an event organized by colleagues and students the preceding year, aiming to isolate “The Value of the Arts and Humanities”. 2 “Against Value” in its

Worksheet produced by academic staff after attending the public forum to encourage discussion at the “Against Value” workshop

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1 Information is available here: http://tinyurl.com/cnsjoh4; and the event is archived here: http://tinyurl.com/c746mdv.
2 For information see: http://tinyurl.com/cm8sc9.
turn evaluated the ways in which the fee rise culture has detrimentally economized creativity as “value” in the higher education sector, contributing to an understanding of education as commerce and audit.

“The Value of the Arts and Humanities” and “Against Value in the Arts and Humanities” at Sheffield.

Two manifestos, produced by mixed groups of participants (academics, students, and professional service staff), at the “After Against Value” workshop in 2012.

We demand:

- More accurate portrayal of uni life to college/16 th form students
- College ends at 18 can only join uni at 20+
- Less competitive atmosphere
- Encourage attendance of lectures/seminars outside of assessed modules
- Pass/fail first year
- Degrees without honours
- End to league tables
- Encourage interdisciplinary work/collab
- Encourage discussions between undergrad/graduate/staff
- Communal space
- More open doors
- Less upper/middle class atmosphere
- More diversity of life experience - staff/students

1) Living Wage for the VC
2) Open - anarchic spaces
3) Open plan office space for academics to work together & face students
4) Rather than label "collaborative work" as plagiarism, acknowledge that working in groups can be far more illuminating
5) An end to formal assessment in the humanities, only peer review is legit.
6) University language should not encourage consumer/university as a theme - redefine terms.
7) I'd like to spend at least twice as long with my students when teaching.
After the workshop, the SALTs sought ways to introduce into the curriculum the five key ideals that participants had isolated in a collective “manifesto against value”: more interdisciplinarity; more collaboration; change to the culture of assessment; fuller access for students to the cultures of academic enquiry; and a commitment to an anti-consumerist ethos. Shared ideological and pedagogical aspirations between staff and students inspired a proposal for an innovative module, with the primary mode of curriculum-design research being a pilot programme designed by SALTs. In this, student participants and academics addressed the relationship between knowledge and the economy, the social and economic contexts of shared primary sources, and the ways in which the humanities curriculum should and could do more to address issues outside of the Anglo-European world. Student responses from these sessions directly contributed to the content, structure and modes of delivery and assessment of the module. This has been approved and will be taught in the next academic year, led by an interdisciplinary team of academics who will have shared ownership of the module alongside the Faculty’s Interdisciplinary Programmes Office and the student body.

The benefits from both partners’ perspectives

**Matthew Holman**
The project has been intensely rewarding and intellectually engaging. The opportunity to witness how the university functions at an institutional level and justify the project through the quality assurance process has been invaluable to my personal development, and I have gained confidence from the experience. Knowing how rare our project was in a UK Humanities Faculty motivated me to ensure its successful implementation, and gave me a sense of pride that it is students who have designed the fundamental aspects of the programme. The essential working relationship between ourselves and staff, however, has perhaps been the most creative and constructive of the project and really signifies a powerful partnership based on mutual responsibility. When was the last time anyone in a University attended meetings with representation from every level of academic expertise from 1st year undergrad to Professor, with everyone committed to improving the university education?

**Dr Robert McKay**
Such shared participation was crucial to this partnership, so a key benefit was its confirmation that, against the pressures of the current HE context, members of a university—researchers, teachers, students, publics and administrators—could collaborate in a genuinely non-hierarchical intellectual and pedagogic community to envision the learning they will do together. As one professor reflected on the project: “from the
students, I heard tell of the kind of higher education I have always wanted to work in. Risk, imagination, responsibility and support rather than the normative tedium of established knowledge that exists for its own satisfaction delivered to those who fail to see why they should bother”. It is inspirational to see that by working together, the desire of a few individuals to foster the cutting edge critical research of experts on a topic that matters (education’s value) can inspire a group of students, without hope of credit or reward, to work to change the curriculum for those that follow them. I know that many of my colleagues and I now struggle to imagine why the curriculum of Higher Education should be designed in any other way.

The impact on students and the student experience
The SALT team believes that opening up aspects of institutional decision-making, at both Faculty and university level, has been invaluable in understanding how such decisions affect students’ learning experience. Arguing for the module to be passed at Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee, sometimes against critical responses about key areas of the proposal, meant that we had to make very clear, with practical evidence, their ideals for the module. Completing a module approval form provided an opportunity for us to understand the detailed structures of curriculum creation otherwise unavailable. However, the real impact on the wider student experience will be the legacy of the project to the Faculty’s undergraduates, beginning in 2013/14. Allowing students to engage in interdisciplinary modes of enquiry, and participate through the theory and practice of research within the curriculum will be an invaluable experience for everyone. But the fullest impact on student experience is that future members of the university will also have the opportunity we had to change it. Learning from us, the Faculty has committed to engage in a similar non-credit bearing collaboration between research, teaching, learning, administration and public engagement at least once a year.
Appendix: List of all partners in the full 2-Year Project

"Interdisciplinary Research in Practice" Module Development Project

University of Sheffield Student Ambassadors in Learning and Teaching 2012-13
Matthew Holman; Christopher Thompson; Eden Summers; Lucy Tallentire; Rebecca Foster; Jade Phillamore; Hannah Donkin

Student participants
Emily Foster-Brown; Xavier Bruggen; Christopher Coulter; Daniel Mawson; Alex Mason; Alice Roman; Timothy Burden; Nick Gore; Laura Savidge; Emma Newman; Matt Voice; Rachel Lynes; Kate Moore; Rhiannon Pickin; Michael Hedges; Richita Bhattacharyya; Dan West; Miriam Miller; Minesh Parekh;

Staff participants
Cathy Shrank, Amanda Crawley-Jackson, John Barrett, George Nicholson, Marcus Nevitt, Julia Dobson, David Forrest, Andrew Heath

After Against Value Workshop (28 students; 8 staff)
Robert McKay (organizer), Anna Barton, George Nicholson, Jenni Adams, Sam Ladkin, Frances Babbage, David McCallam, John Barrett, Petr Andreas, Eimear Hogben, Adonis Leboho, Jack Mann, Mike Hukins, Kirsty Moyse, Sophie Allan, Rachel Smith, Jack McGregor, Iain Ness, Jack Windle, Ellie Roberts, Grahame Morris, Janine Bradbury, Natasha Sorrell, Anna Gavrielides, Tony Prince, Tanya Hart, Tom Dowling, Mark Seddon, Ellie Winstanley, Charlie Winstanley, Sophie Redfern, Matt Voice, Sam Rae, Laura Savidge, Dan Perry-Mawson, Abdi-aziz Suleiman (participants)

Against Value in the Arts and Humanities Public Forum
Sam Ladkin (organizer); Marilyn Strathearn, Tim Etchells, Emile Bojesen, Peter Thompson (speakers); attendees from the University of Sheffield and the public

The Value of the Arts and Humanities Public Forum
Members of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities Student Forum 2010-11 (organisers); David Blunkett; Peter Hitchens; Nigel Shardlow; David Sweeney; Robert Hewison (speakers); attendees from the University of Sheffield and the public