Motivation: managing the spiral of apathy

Student feedback is valuable for individual teachers to enable ongoing improvements to courses. This is particularly important in Economics where we are revamping what and how we teach.

In recent years we have experienced:
- Decline in response rates (to as low as 12%)
- Staff sceptical of value of feedback, partly due to low response rates
- Wider student apathy (“how does this help me?”)

This project focused on improving response rates both through how module evaluation was carried out and with broader measures to improve engagement.

In order to test the effects of different evaluation setups on response rates, we carried out a pilot involving 7 undergraduate modules (including a mix of core and optional modules, and those with low and high enrollment), which included all first year students and nearly 70% of the third year students.

As these tables show, the main result of the pilot is that an in-class start to the evaluation at least doubles response rates. While the biggest effect resulted from the switch to paper evaluations, an in-class nudge has a similar effect for online evaluations.

Convincing students that it matters – what else do we do?
- Mid-term evaluations introduced, with staff responses to student feedback during term
- ‘You Said, We Did’ for all courses and NSS on Moodle pages
- Summary statistics from previous years’ evaluations on websites and Moodle pages to inform module choices

A nudge can make a difference – Conclusions
- The pilot clearly shows that in-person “nudges” raise response rates - the Economics department is incorporating this finding in designing the process for 2016/17
- Highlighting the value of evaluations to students is essential – this has already been implemented through “You Said, We Did” and user-friendly reports of summary statistics