

Bringing Student Voice to Evaluation:

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USING Q METHODOLOGY FOR CREATING A STUDENT-
LED QUESTION BANK

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Presentation outline

- Project background
- Aims of the project
- Q Methodology
- Outcomes of the project
- Evaluation of staff perceptions
- Q Methodology research outcomes
- Future steps

“The module evaluation questions are not relevant...”

- Workshops for course reps explored student views on the existing institutional surveys and how student voice could be strengthened
- Module evaluation questions, although clear/non-ambiguous, were perceived by many reps as non-relevant
- Some students used free text comments to comment on topics that were deemed important, others ‘didn’t bother’
- 5 core questions; staff question banks and self-written questions have been used by 30% of module leaders – ‘question personalisation’

Literature

- Surveys rarely, if ever, provide a nuanced understanding of student concerns, issues and acknowledgements (Harvey, 2003)
- When student feedback is disconnected from the everyday practice of students, it presents limited perspectives of respondents, students become more cynical and information less valid and reliable (Darwin, 2010)
- Survey creators should consider tailoring survey content to what students themselves consider to be highly important and be sensitive to student learning (Scott, 2006; Harvey, 2011, Tucker et al, 2013).

Explorance's Faculty Research Grant Program

Successfully applied for a grant for Blue Explorance Users:

<https://explorance.com/blog/explorances-faculty-research-grant-program/>

Resources for:

- Employing four student-researchers for four months
 - Our thanks to: Oghenefe Otoberise, Karston Wood, Kay Biela & Michael Johnson
- Incentives for participants of the research
- Dissemination of the findings

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Aims of the project

- Make the student voice central in the institutional module evaluation survey by developing a student-led question bank (SQB); use it in Semester 2 survey
- Raise academic staff awareness of student priorities
- Use the project and its output (SQB) as a vehicle for student engagement in module evaluation
- Explore key factors and different patterns of thoughts about module level experience; identify groups of students with similar opinions

Q Methodology

- Invented in 1935 by British physicist-psychologist William Stephenson
- Combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research traditions
- Particularly suitable for researching diversity of subjective experiences, perspectives, and beliefs
- The methodology is based on correlation and factor analysis of the ranked statements, and interpretation is supported by participant commentaries while doing the sorting exercise.
- Can facilitate the identification of similarities and construction of broad categories of the phenomenon being investigated

Project stages

Stage 1: gathering opinion statements

4 focus groups facilitated by student- researchers and exploring students' module level experience and priorities in module evaluation

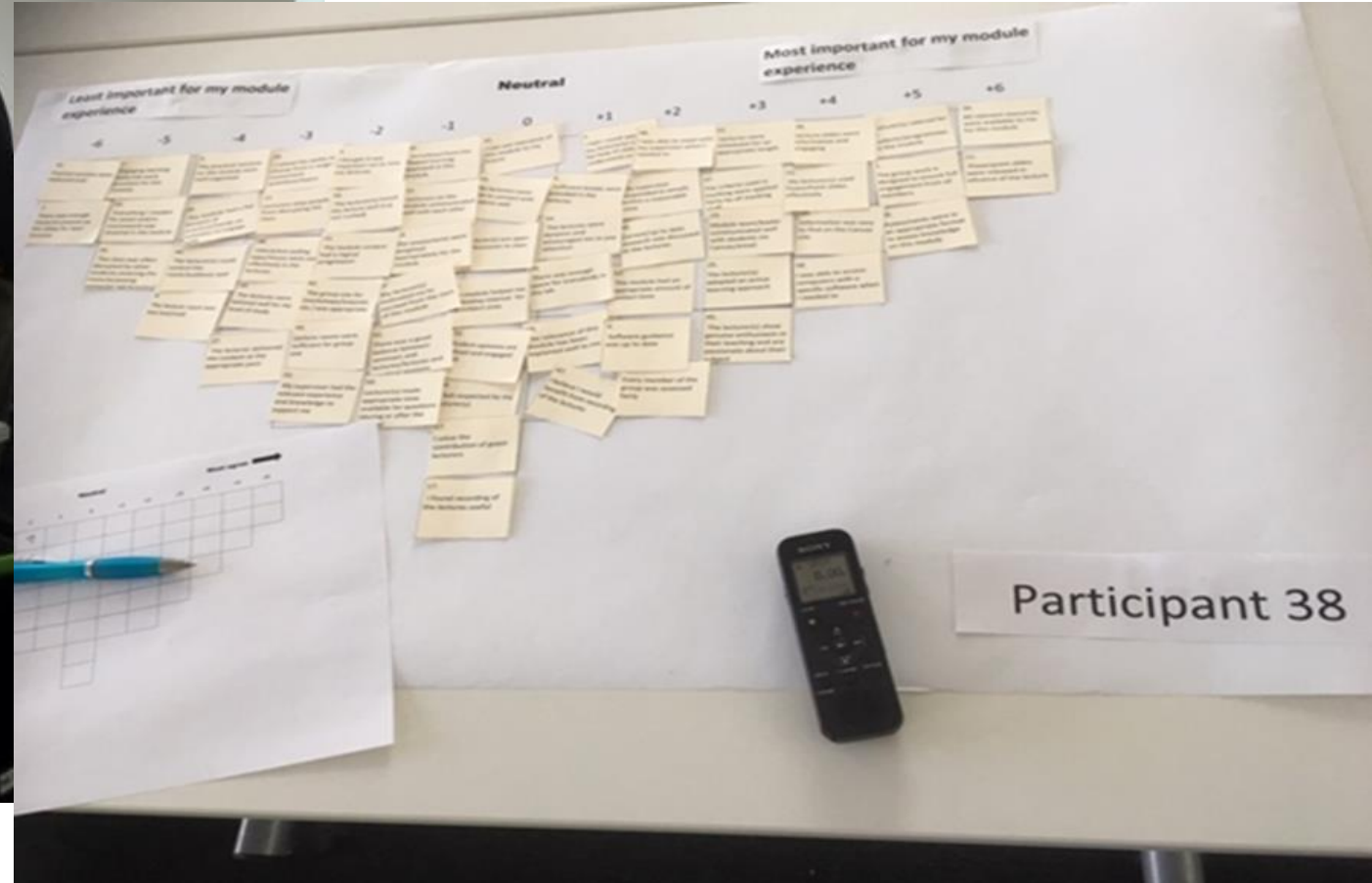
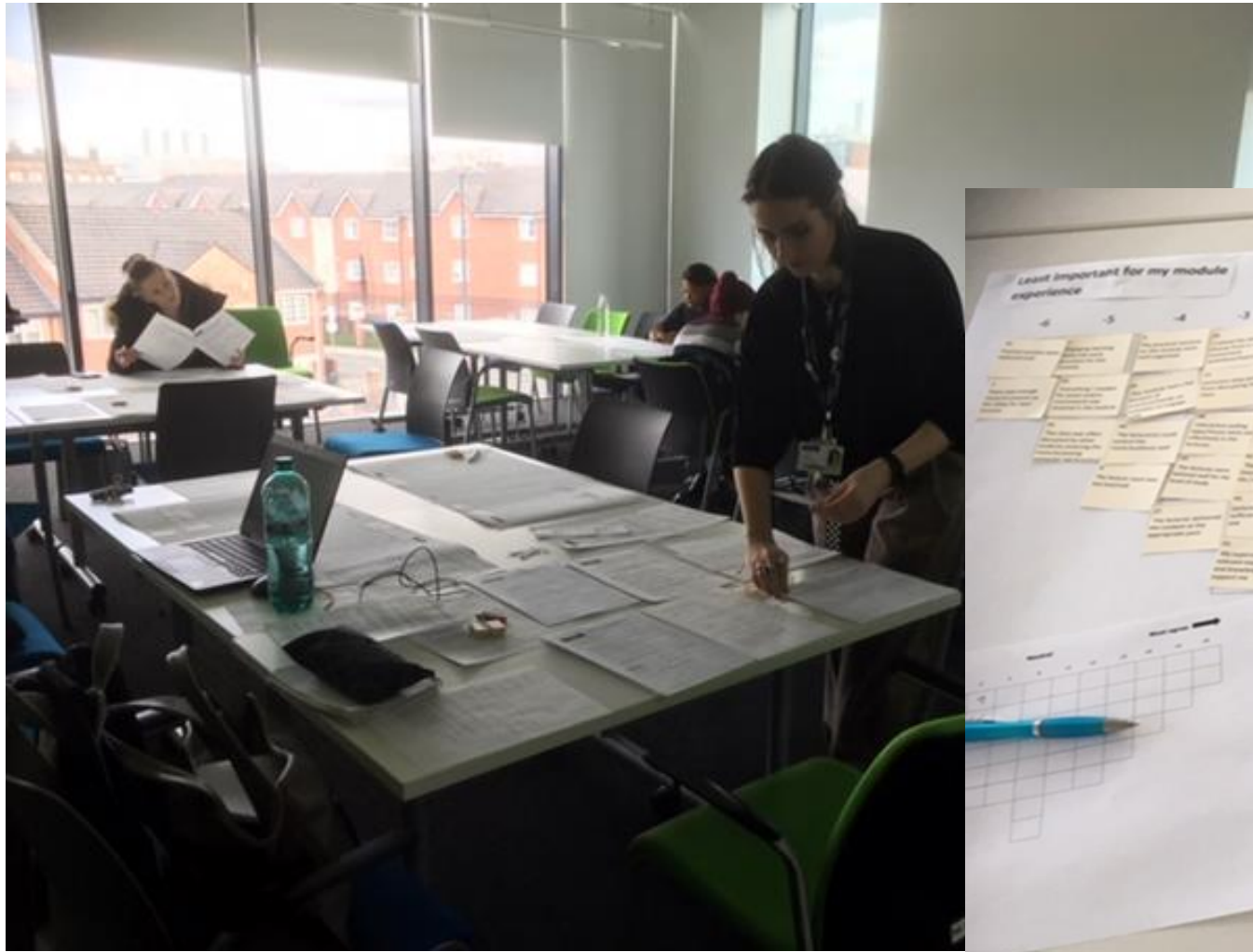
Outcome: a q-set of items/statements (60) that students would want to include in module evaluation.

Stage 2: sorting exercise (Q-sort)

4 workshops with a different set of students, sorting the statements along a continuum of preference and providing comments on the statements (post-sort-interviews)

Stage 3: data input and selection of 'most relevant' questions for inclusion in SQB

Stage 4: research (a dedicated Q software package is used to identify factors that can represent shared forms of understandings among participants)



Main themes raised by students

- 1. Teaching delivery** (pace of delivery, usability of PowerPoint slides, pitched at the right level, ability to motivate, suitability of material for all students in multi-programme modules, logical progression of content etc.)
- 2. Organisation and communication** (clear/detailed module guide, consistent communication of information and advice from staff, teaching/learning materials up to date and easy to find, organisation of practical sessions, interaction outside of taught sessions)
- 3. Learning Environment** (disruptions, sufficient breaks, groups size, length of lectures, staff being able to control the audience).
- 4. Student support and feeling valued and respected** (approachable lecturers, student opinions being valued)

Less frequent themes: **assessment, learning resources, group work, attendance**

No discourse related to **skills development** and **feedback on student work** (e.g., quality of feedback, ability to use it to improve, etc.).

Student Question Bank

1. I felt I could approach my lecturer(s) and ask for help if I didn't understand something
60. Everything I needed for exam and/or coursework was covered in the module
32. My supervisor had the relevant experience and knowledge to support me
48. I was able to meet with my supervisor when I needed to
20. The lectures were tailored well for my level of study
30. All relevant resources were available to me for this module
41. The module helped me to develop interest for the subject area
45. The lecturer(s) show genuine enthusiasm in their teaching and are passionate about their subject
26. Assessments were in an appropriate format to assess knowledge on this module
23. Module team/leader communicated well with students via Canvas/email
50. Lecturer(s) made appropriate time available for questions (during or after the lecture)
21. My supervisor responded to emails within a reasonable time
58. I was able to access computers with a specific software when I needed to
55. Information was easy to find on the Canvas site
40. Current/up to date research was discussed at the lectures
33. I can see relevance of this module to my future
2. There was enough material present on the slides for later revision
51. There was a good balance between seminars and lectures/lectures and practical sessions
42. Practical sessions were explained well
44. Lecturer(s) are open to discussion in class
38. Lecture slides were informative and engaging
14. The assessments were weighted appropriately for the module
47. I believe I would benefit from recording of the lectures
16. Student opinions are valued and engaged with
22. The module content had a logical progression

Usage of the SQB

303 module leaders out of 1193 used QP in their module evaluation (25% of all staff)

Out of 303, 87% used questions from the SQB

Overall, student questions were used across 814 different modules

Most frequently used questions:

Question	N of modu
1. I felt I could approach my lecturer(s) and ask for help if I didn't understand something	133
13. The lecturer(s) show genuine enthusiasm in their teaching and are passionate about their subject	105
11. The module helped me to develop interest for the subject area	65
9. I can see relevance of this module to my future	53
5. Module team/leader communicated well with students via Canvas/email	48
15. Information was easy to find on the Canvas site	43
17. Everything I needed for exam and/or coursework was covered in the module	32
24. Lecturer(s) are open to discussion in class	32
4. Student opinions are valued and engaged with	30
14. Lecturer(s) made appropriate time available for questions (during or after the lecture)	30

Evaluation of staff perceptions: Survey

- Survey sent to all module leaders who chose at least one question from the SQB
 - 39 respondents
- Modules spread equally across undergraduate years 1-3, fewer postgraduate
- 87% had personalized their surveys with additional items previously
 - But 56% were unaware that the answers would not count to overall module score
- 74% found the feedback from the student-generated items useful (10% unsure)
 - But only 26% intended to make module changes based on the feedback (26% unsure)

Evaluation of staff perceptions: Interview

- Interviews with 6 members of staff who used SQB
 - Highly motivated to use feedback, positive about SQB, but acknowledged barriers for colleagues

“I think the student question bank should continue and it should be part of module evaluation. But I think the students themselves need to have their own form of evaluation, and that they should also be evaluating their own performance as anyone does in the workplace.” – Participant 6

“Staff may have to be quite brave to select some of the student questions {from question bank} as they may be quite threatening to them.” – Participant 5

“I consider it is very successful in in terms of the data that it generates and the ability to give you a bit more insight into elements of the module that you potentially see as not the best” - Participant 4

“And what we’ve tried to do is to debrief it, look where its poor, try to improve things.” – Participant 3

Q Methodology research outcomes

- The Q-sort results were analysed using PQMethod software
- Principal component analysis and varimax rotation, followed by classification of participants by the number of load factors. 3 Factors were identified/analysed.

Partial table of Factor Scores for Factor 1

No.	Statement	Z-SCORES
60	Everything I needed for exam and/or coursework was covered...	2.262
42	Practical sessions were explained well	1.907
1	I could approach my lecturer and ask for help if I didn't understand....	1.720
58	I was able to access computers with a specific software when	1.379

Q Methodology: research outcomes

Partial Factor Matrix with an X Indicating a Defining Sort Loadings

Q SORT	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1. Participant 20	0.5131X -	-0.3898	0.0825
2. Participant 28	0.5291X	0.2402	-0.2314
3. Participant 30	0.0998	0.5839X	0.0903
4. Participant 39	0.2715	0.2704	-0.1674
5. Participant 18	0.3382X	0.1469	0.2985
6. Participant 25	0.6896X	-0.1287	0.2964
.....			

Factor 1: Structured and guided module experience

Eigenvalue is 4.3; explains 14% of the study variance.

22 distinguishing statements loaded on this factor (significance at $p < 0.01$.)

11 students were significantly associated with this factor (predominantly Level 4 and 5 students, Humanities & Social Sciences and Engineering and Technology, approx. equal gender split)

- Young/traditional students, who are trying to develop interest in the subject area
- Value structured content (directly liked to exams) and well-defined learning experience
- Tend to rely on resources/guidance provided
- Approachability of staff and support provided are appreciated
- More concerned with fairness of assessment and teamwork contribution than other groups - indicators of lacking confidence/feeling unsecure?
- Show signs of extrinsic motivation

Factor 2: Maximising learning experience

Eigenvalue is 2.7; 9% of the study variance explained (26 distinguishing statements)

6 students are associated with this Factor (predominantly Level 6, Humanities & Social Sciences, Health, Business, equal gender split)

- Motivated and highly engaged students; well developed interest in the subject area
- Value interaction with staff (in class and outside) and clear communication; engaging delivery is also appreciated.
- They appreciate ability to choose from a range of assessments
- Want to have access to slides prior to the lecture and to recordings afterwards, and have all necessary resources provided on Canvas
- Not particularly concerned about group work (e.g. unequal workload) and fairness of assessment
- Confident learners demonstrating cognitive effort and strategic approach, aiming to maximise learning experience.

Factor 3: Settling into a culture of research and scholarship

Eigenvalue is 2.4; 8% of the study variance explained (23 distinguishing statements)

8 Students associated with this factor (mainly level 7 and 6, few level 5, Engineering and Technology, Science and Health, 5 female, 3 male)

This group of students spans various levels of study, but main trends are:

- This group is concerned with successful completion of dissertation/final year project (want their supervisor being an expert in the subject area and their queries to be answered promptly)
- Being motivated from the start of the module is more important for this group than for others
- They appreciate when relevance of what they learn is explained/reinforced
- Importance of material being tailored to their level of study and logical progression of the material
For these students feeling respected by their lecturers is also imperative.
- Value the contribution of guest lecturers, current up to date research being discussed

Next Steps

- Engage in wider promotion of the SQB, for both staff and students
- Complete and disseminate study findings:
 - Internally at the Teaching and Learning conference and at the Research and Practice Seminar
 - Externally through research publications and next Bluenotes Global??

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