

How to be a survey whisperer: Using cognitive interviewing to co-design a Module Evaluation Questionnaire

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While we wait...



- Read the following questionnaire item from the National Student Survey: **“Marking and assessment has been fair”**.
- Reflecting on your experiences and your own role, **what does the term ‘fair’ mean to you in this context?** What comes to mind?
- Type your response into the chat box

Objectives of the workshop

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Have a basic understanding of what cognitive interviews are
- Have basic knowledge and awareness of the techniques which are used in cognitive interviews
- Have analysed a small amount of data from real-life cognitive interviews undertaken with students

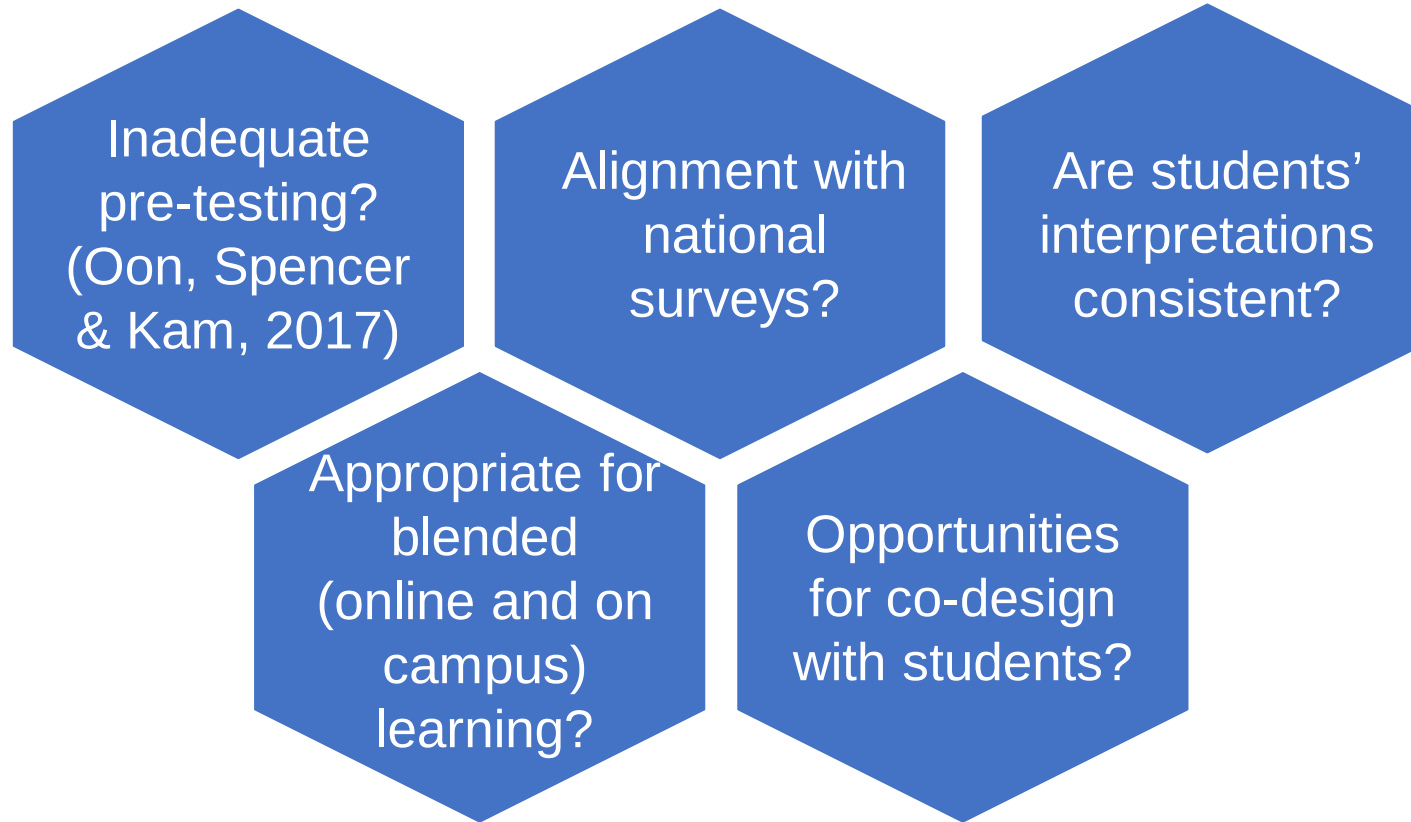


Reviewing our Module Evaluation Questionnaire

- In 2014/15, Sheffield Hallam adopted the module evaluation questionnaire (MEQ) as a way of collecting student feedback on their taught experience at the point of delivery.
- A review of the MEQ was commissioned in 2019/20.
- The first stage involved working in partnership with students to develop a new questionnaire.



Reviewing our Module Evaluation Questionnaire

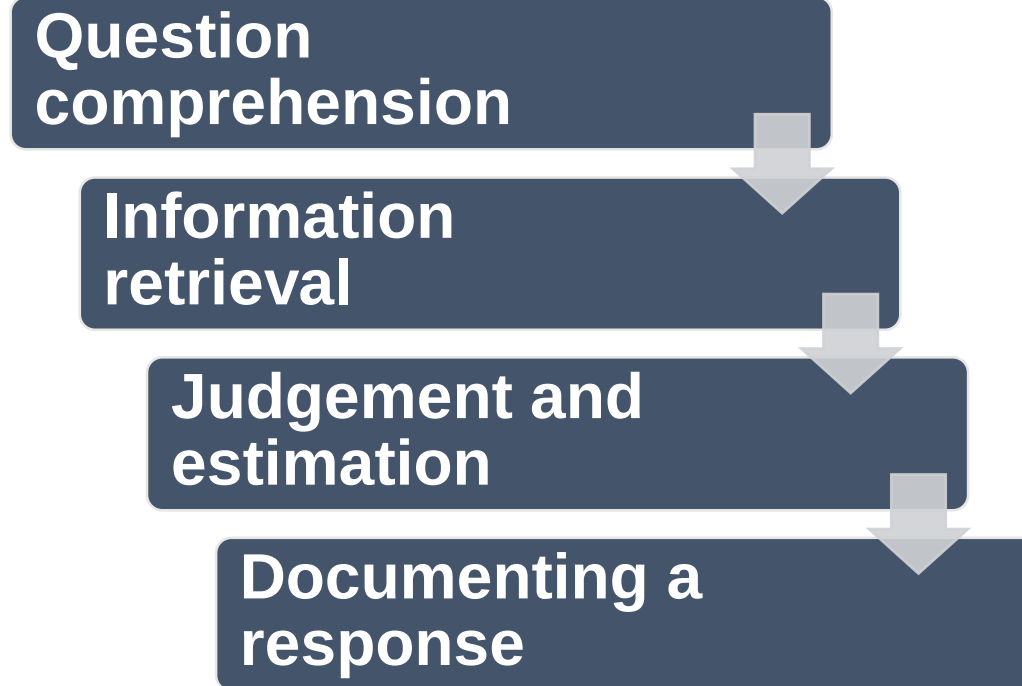


What is cognitive interviewing?

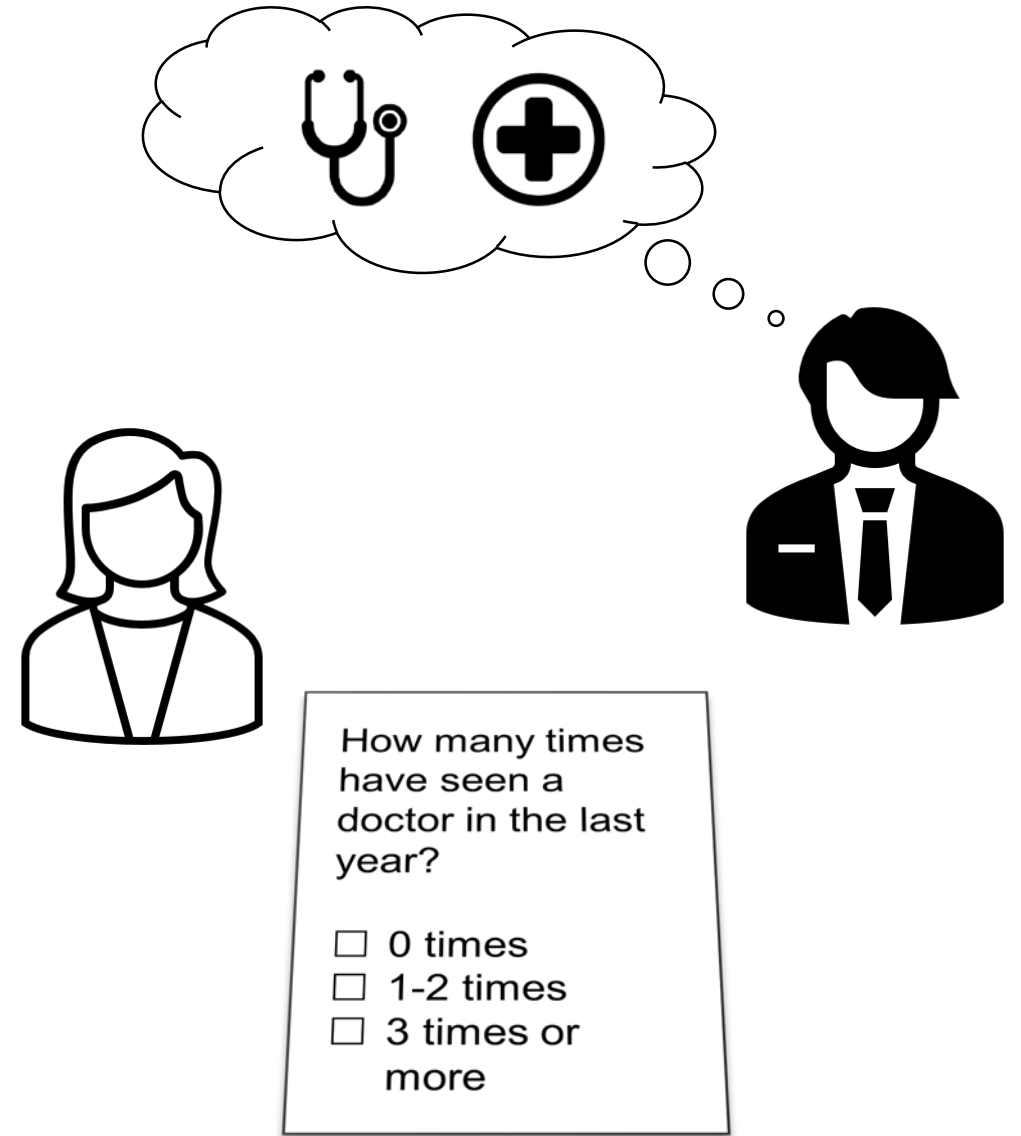
- Cognitive interviewing refers to a set of techniques that enable a researcher to deeply analyse how respondents understand the survey questions they are asked to answer (Tourangeau et al., 2000).
- Used for scale development and providing evidence of validity based on test content.



What is cognitive interviewing?

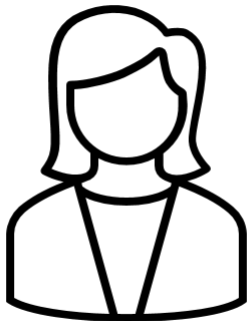


(Tourangeau et al. (2000))



Technique 1: Think-aloud approach

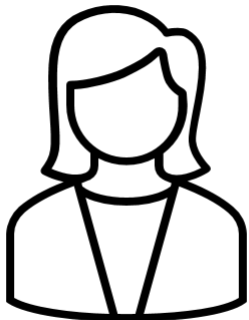
Subjects are instructed to **"think aloud"** as they answer the survey questions (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). The interviewer reads each question to the subject, and then records and notes the processes that the subject uses in arriving at an answer. There is little interjection from the interviewer. This technique begins with a preamble by the interviewer:



I'm going to read you some questions. When you hear them, I want you to tell me whatever comes to mind. This is called 'thinking out loud'...Remember to keep telling me your thoughts.

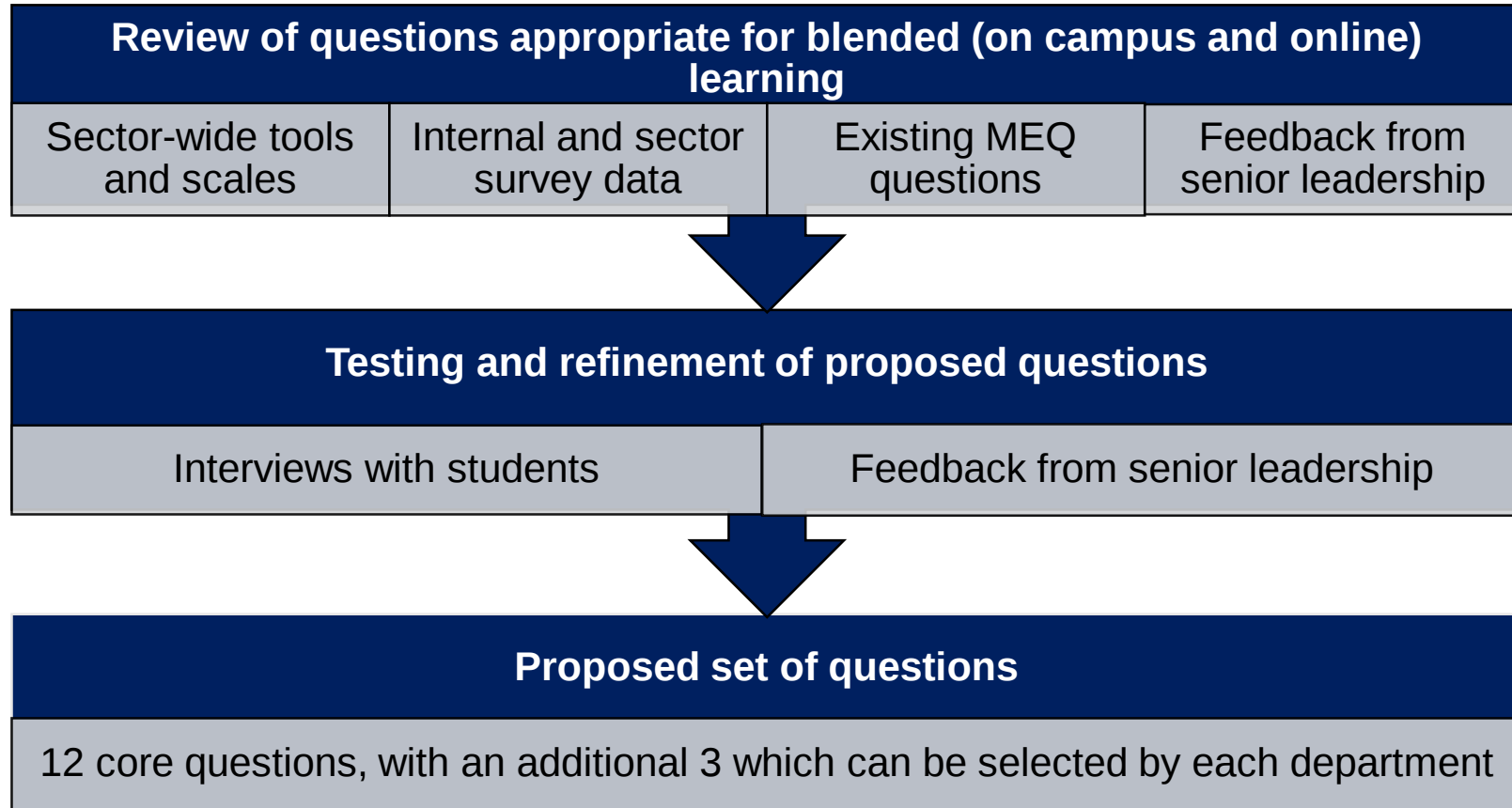
Technique 2: Verbal probing

The interviewer uses **specific probes** to explore respondents' thought processes. After the interviewer asks the survey question, and the subject answers, the interviewer then asks for other specific information relevant to the question. Examples include:



- How did you interpret the term 'doctor' in this context?
- What would you say that question was asking of you?
- What time period were you thinking of?
- How confident were you about your answer?

The process and practicalities



- 19 interviews with student reps on Zoom (link to guidance in references)
- Cognitive testing questions
- Questions about students' views about the MEQ process and engagement

Discussion of activity

NSS Cognitive Interviewing (McGee et al., 2015): “Assessment and marking has been fair”



- “The requirements should be clarified in advance of the work being delivered.”
- “Marking should be clearly explained and justified, so that the recipient can understand why a particular mark has been given. “
- “It should be consistent.”
- “Some students commented on the subjective nature of the question.”
- “Students were able to answer the question, thinking about their own experience and impression of how their work had been marked.”

Breakout rooms activity (15 minutes)

You will be placed into small groups in breakout rooms. You will be given a scenario, which will contain an MEQ item that was tested using cognitive interviewing. As a group:

1. Reflect on the students' responses and discuss whether you think there are any problems with the questionnaire item
2. If you think there are any problems, identify a solution to address them. Does the questionnaire item need amending in any way?

Scenario 1: https://padlet.com/a_donnelly/cogint1

Scenario 2: https://padlet.com/a_donnelly/cogint2



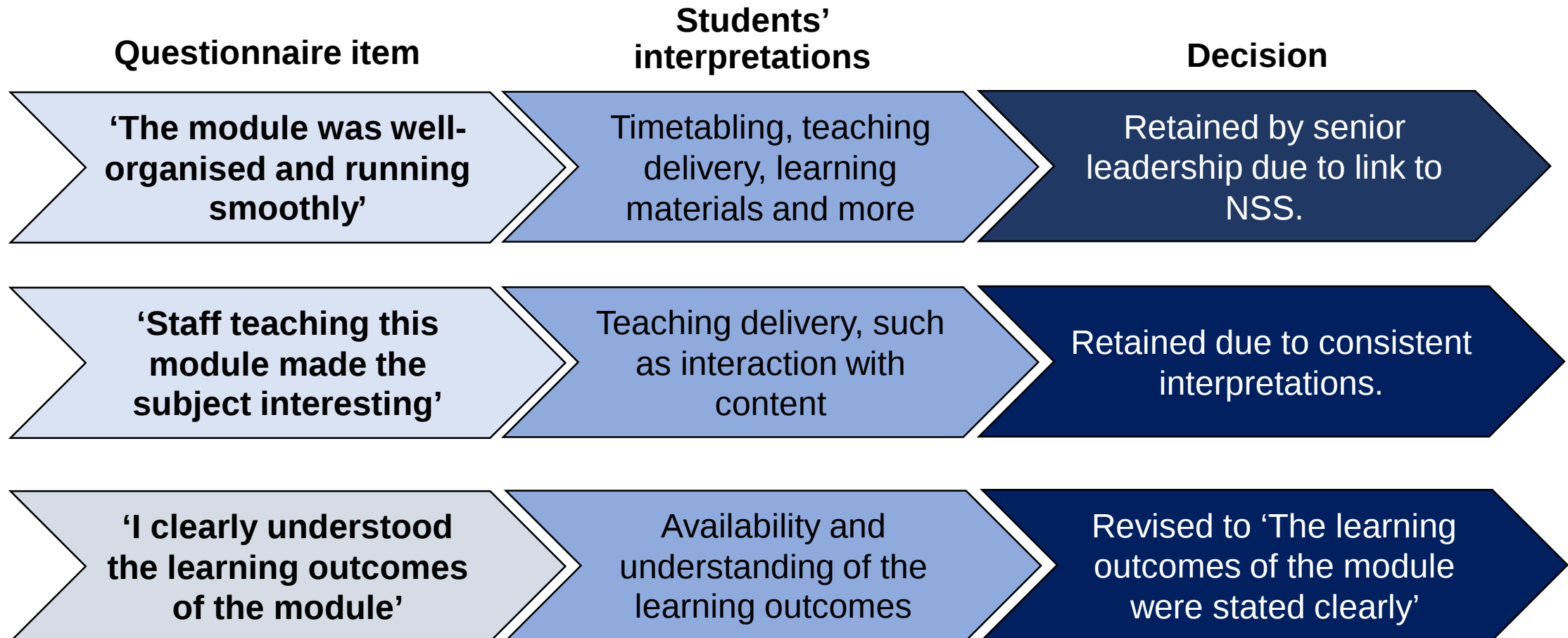
Breakout rooms activity discussion

Please can one group volunteer to tell us:

1. What questionnaire item they were given
2. As a group, whether you thought there were any problems with the questionnaire item? If so, what were they?
3. Did you recommend amending the questionnaire item in any way? Why did you want to make this change?



Discussion of findings from our research



Discussion of findings from our research

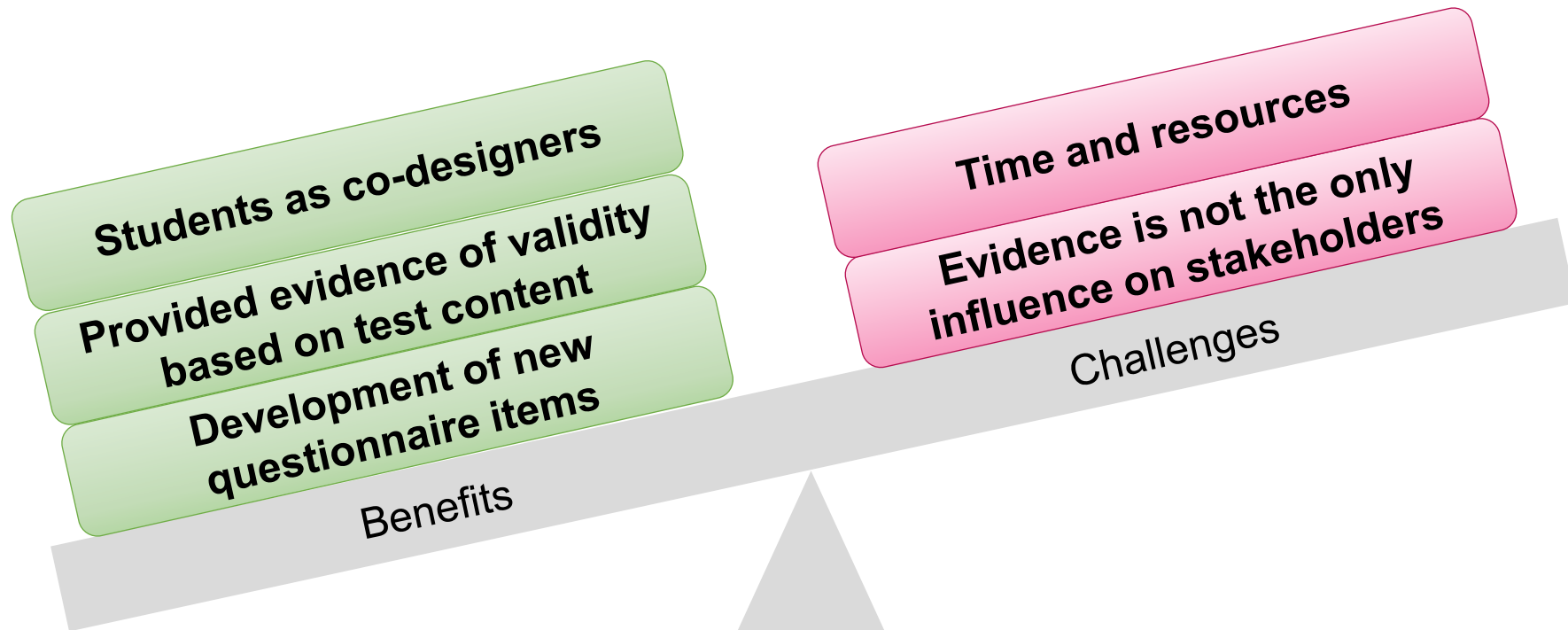
Some students valued and were motivated to provide feedback at a module-level. For others, barriers to engagement with the MEQ were identified, primarily in relation to:

- the survey length;
- perceptions that their feedback was neither valued nor acted upon by the module team;
- the method of deployment
- and the relevance of the design of the previous MEQ.

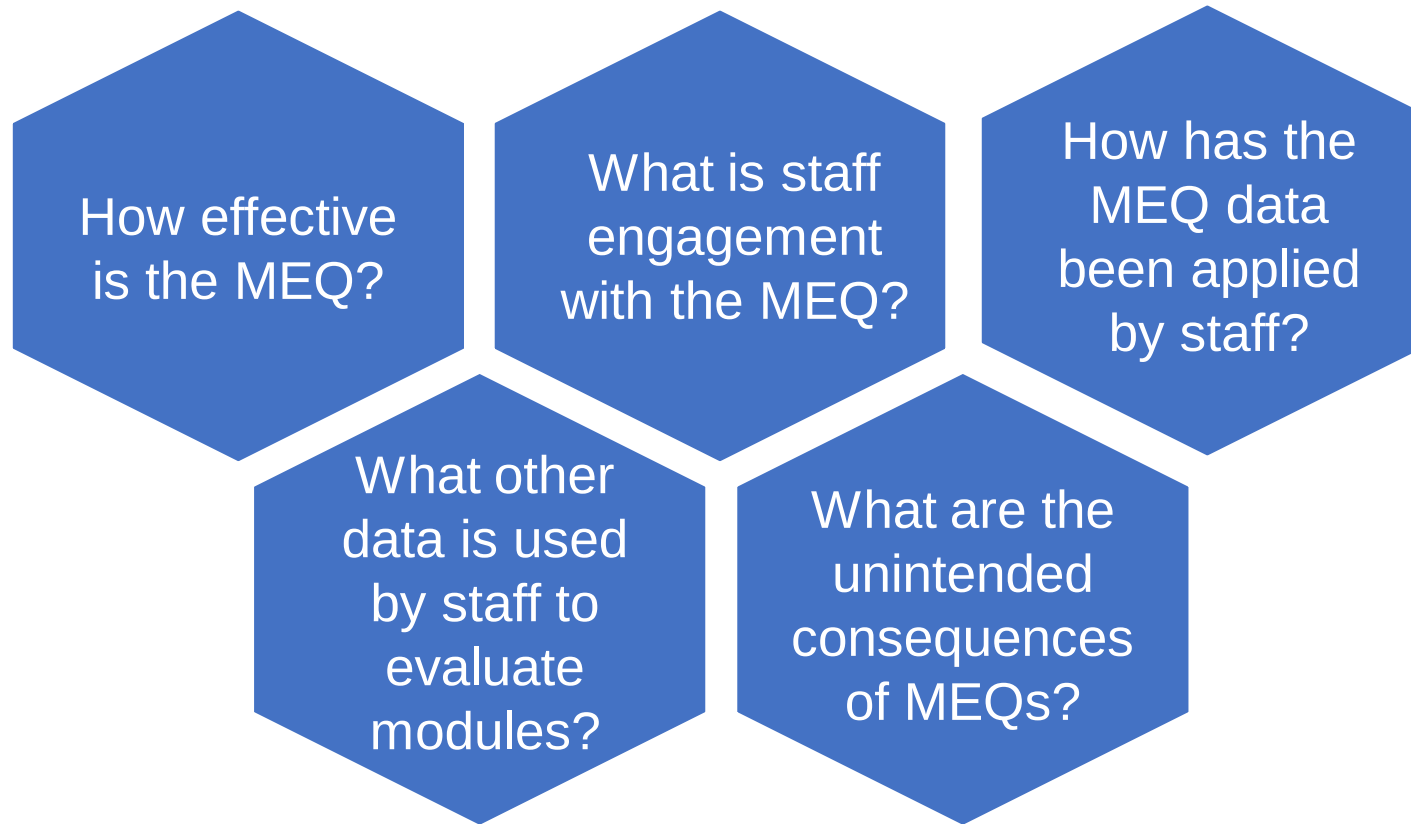
Immediate changes were made to how the university collects feedback at a module-level, including:

- the length of the survey was significantly reduced;
- some questions that were interpreted inconsistently were removed;
- a new set of questions were tested with students;
- and departments were able to select their own questions from a pre-determined list alongside a set of core questions.

The application of cognitive interviewing in this context



What next? The second stage of the review



Q&A and Discussion

How useful do you think cognitive interviewing is for developing questionnaires?

Any other comments?

[@SHU_StEER](http://www.blogs.shu.ac.uk/steer)



References and Resources

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