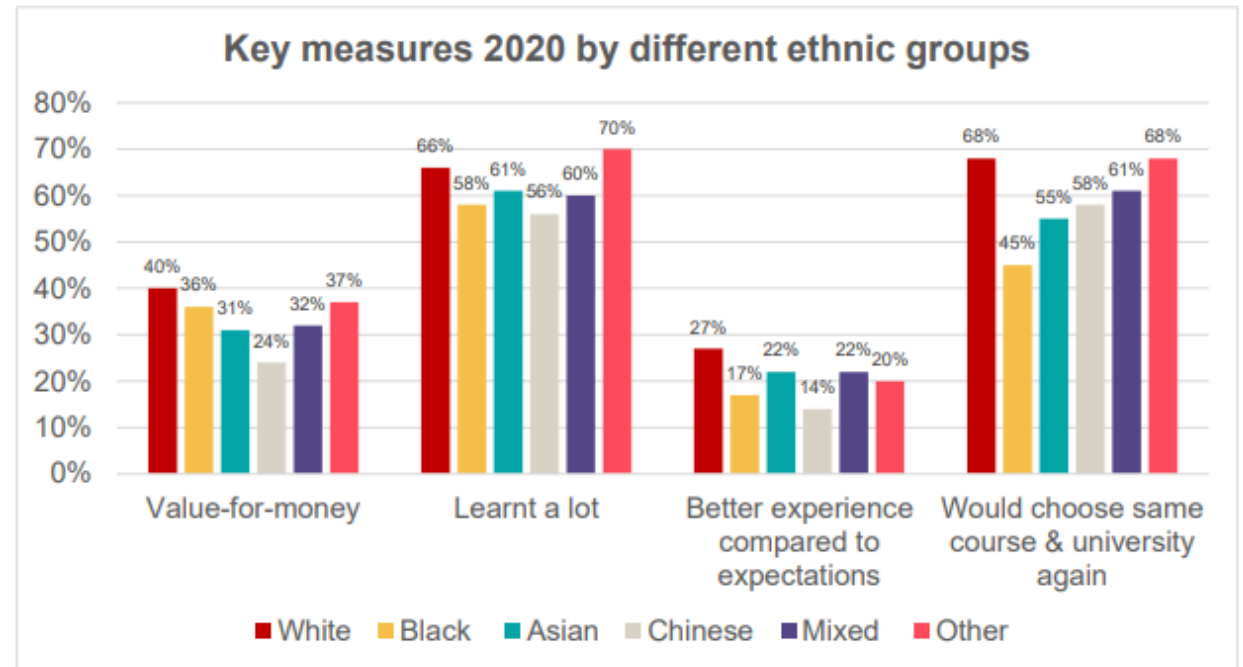


Using Module Evaluation results to explore the BAME student experience gap

Dr Natalie Holland and Dr Elena Zaitseva

The BAME student experience gap

- Not all students have the same experience of HE.
- National awarding gap - 18.3%.
- HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey shows experience gap
- Limited research into why?



Research Questions



- What are the characteristics of BAME student voice, as articulated by the module evaluation comments, and to what extent it is different from white students' voice, if at all?
- Are there any noticeable differences within the BAME group (e.g. when black, Asian or mixed students feedback is analysed separately)?
- How can BAME students' qualitative feedback be used to inform institutional strategy and actions in relation to bridging the gap?

Institutional Context



- Liverpool John Moores University is a civic university situated in the North West of England.
- Almost half of LJMU's UK student population come from the local Liverpool City Region, an area with proportionally less minority ethnic young people.
- UK black students represent only 1.8% of LJMU's UK student population and UK Asian students represent only 5%.
- Narratives of students from minority ethnic groups hidden.



Why Module Evaluation?



- Disparity between top level module evaluation quantitative results and what we know is an experience gap.
- Immediate reaction to students learning experience
- Long history of running Module Evaluations with Explorance Blue used as the survey platform since 2016.
- Survey is very short – core survey has 5 closed questions and 2 free text questions:
 - Please comment on the most interesting aspect of this module:
 - Please comment on how this module could be improved:

Methodology



- SIS student data (demographics) is pre-recorded
- Three years of module evaluations comments (2017-2019) combined for the analysis

68836 comments, 3,278 pages 1.4 million words

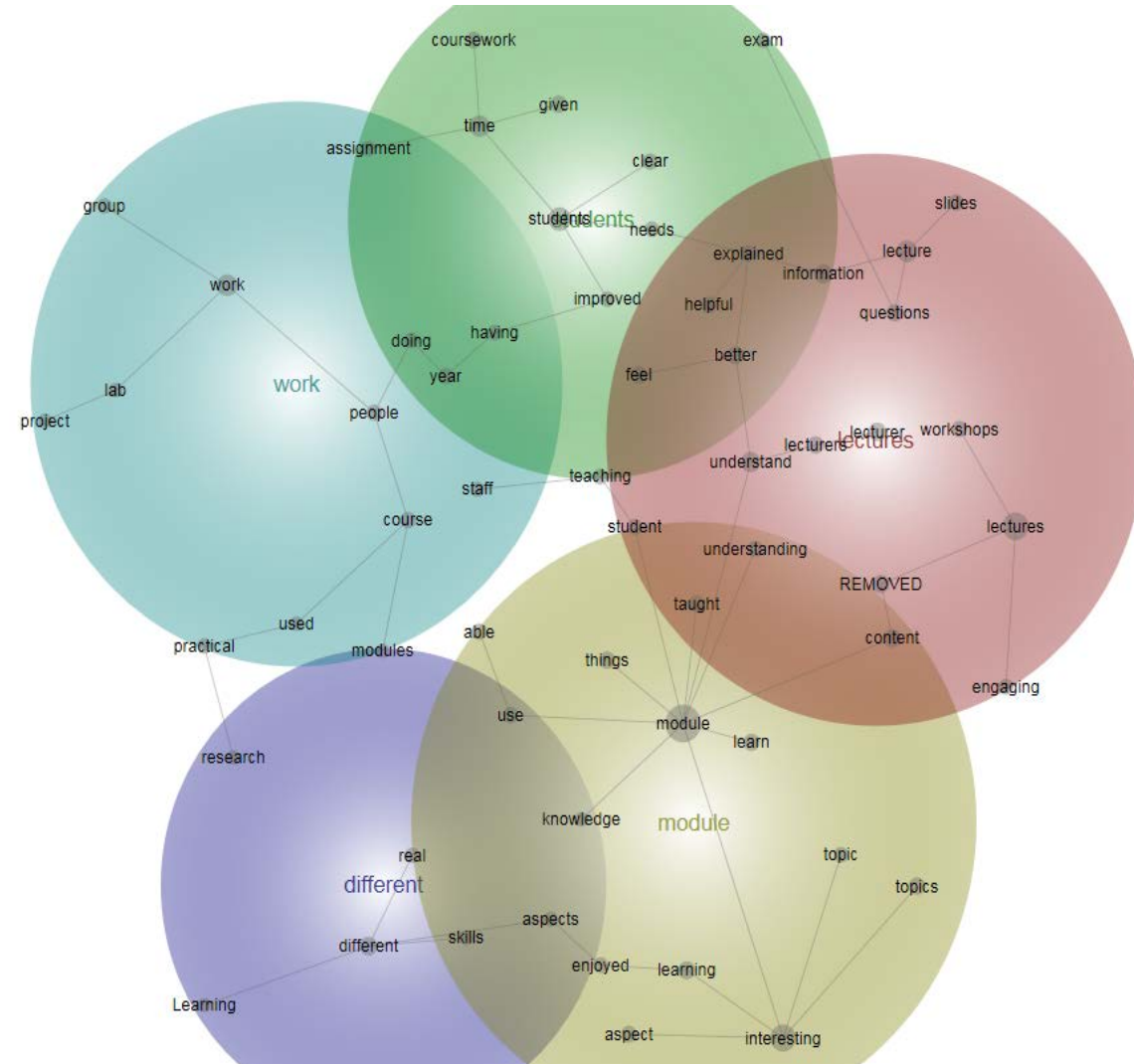
7055 comments (10.25%) provided by BAME students

- An automated semantic analysis tool, Leximancer, was utilised in the analysis.



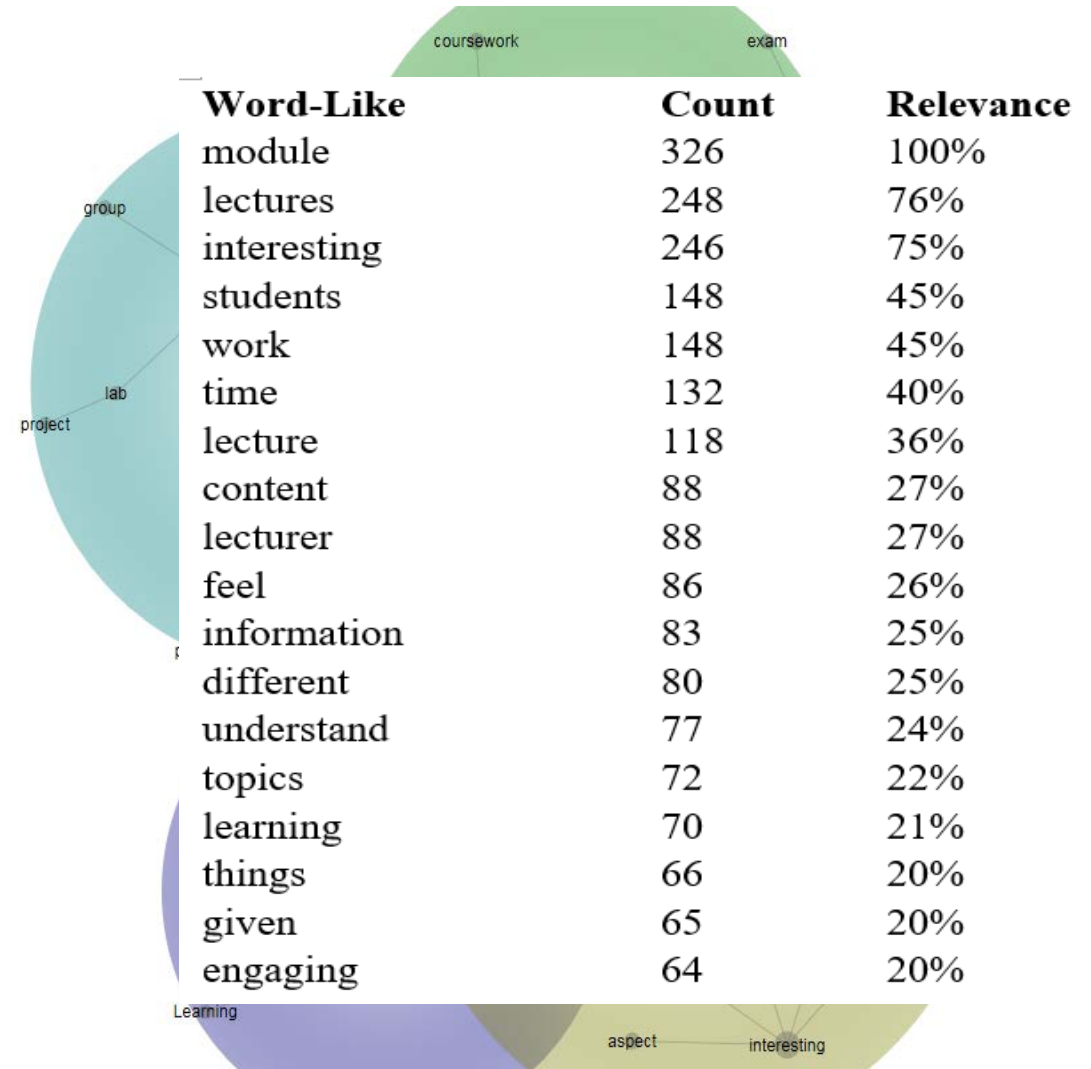
Methodology: Leximancer

- Permits instant interaction with large volumes of data to reveal semantic characteristics of the text and patterns in the data
- Identifies concepts, themes (concept clusters), and connections between them, including their proximity
- Provides numerical indication of relevance (based on frequency of co-occurrence of words in the text)



Methodology: Leximancer

- Permits instant interaction with large volumes of data to reveal semantic characteristics of the text and patterns in the data
- Identifies concepts, themes (concept clusters), and connections between them, including their proximity
- Provides numerical indication of relevance (based on frequency of co-occurrence of words in the text)



Methodology: stages



- **Preparation of the dataset:** separate comments made by students from five ethnic groups: black, Asian, mixed, white, other and all BAME combined.
- **Data analysis and exploration:**
 - automated analysis and comparative exploration of outcomes
 - manual exploration of themes within the key concepts and concept clusters
- **Stage Three:** data interpretation and engagement of students in discussion of findings and implications (ongoing)

Findings: relevance tables

White		Asian		Black		Mixed	
Concept	R	Concept	R	Concept	R	Concept	N
module	100	module	100	module	100	module	100
interesting	71	lectures	73	interesting	47	lectures	76
lectures	62	interesting	67	lectures	44	interesting	75
work	43	students	41	students	35	students	45
time	40	lecture	40	time	31	work	45
students	32	work	40	understand	23	time	40
lecture	32	time	30	work	25	lecture	36

Findings: relevance tables

White		Asian		Black		Mixed	
learning	27	coursework	26	lecturer	21	lecturer	27
enjoyed	22	content	25	learning	17	understand	24
assignment	21	learning	22	practical	15	learning	21
understand	20	understand	22	enjoyed	14	questions	17
lecturer	17	explained	17	coursework	11	coursework	16
coursework	17	lecturer	16	assignment	11	enjoyed	16
research	16	assignment	15	clear	11	support	15
skills	12	skills	13	skills	n/a	skills	n/a

Findings: relevance tables



- Relevance attached to the concepts was indicative of underlying differences in student narratives and what they perceived important for their module level experience.
- Engagement related discourse (enjoyment, interest) was more profoundly articulated by white students than black and Asian students.
- Lecturer (singular) was a particularly relevant concept for black and mixed students.
- Students from mixed backgrounds relevance patterns were similar to white students in some areas and different in others (further research is needed).

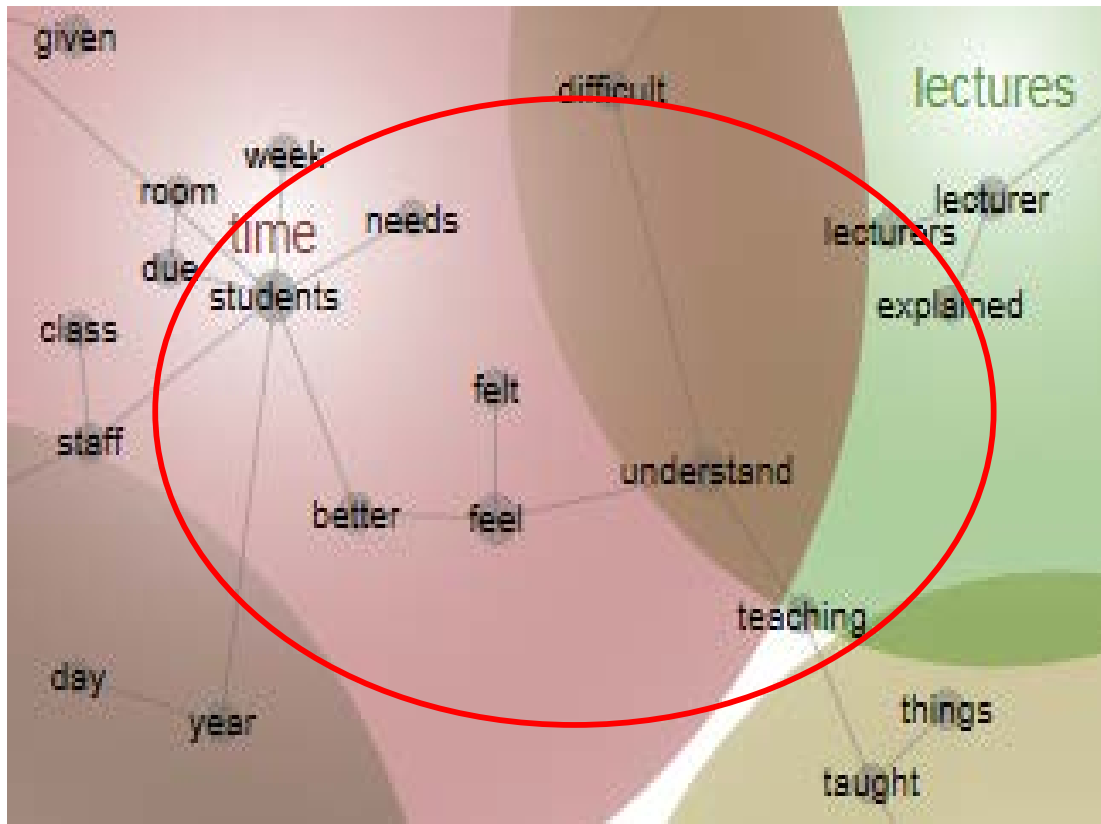
Exploration of concept maps



- Closer examination of the concept maps allows us to pin point where we might want to explore further
- Concept maps were created for 4 ethnic groups: black, Asian, mixed and white
- Comparison of the concept maps identified 3 initial concepts that might highlight differences in experiences if explored further: Able, Feel/ Felt, Needs.

Feel/ felt – White students

Feel/ felt is used to soften the tone of discourse, to emphasise own opinion, to have a particular impression or belief (used to express emotional sentiments)



Feel/ felt is directly linked to **better** and **understand**

Closely positioned to **lecturer/s**, **time**, **students**, **needs** and **teaching**.

- Comments referred to how students feel about a lecture, lecture topic or their lecturer.

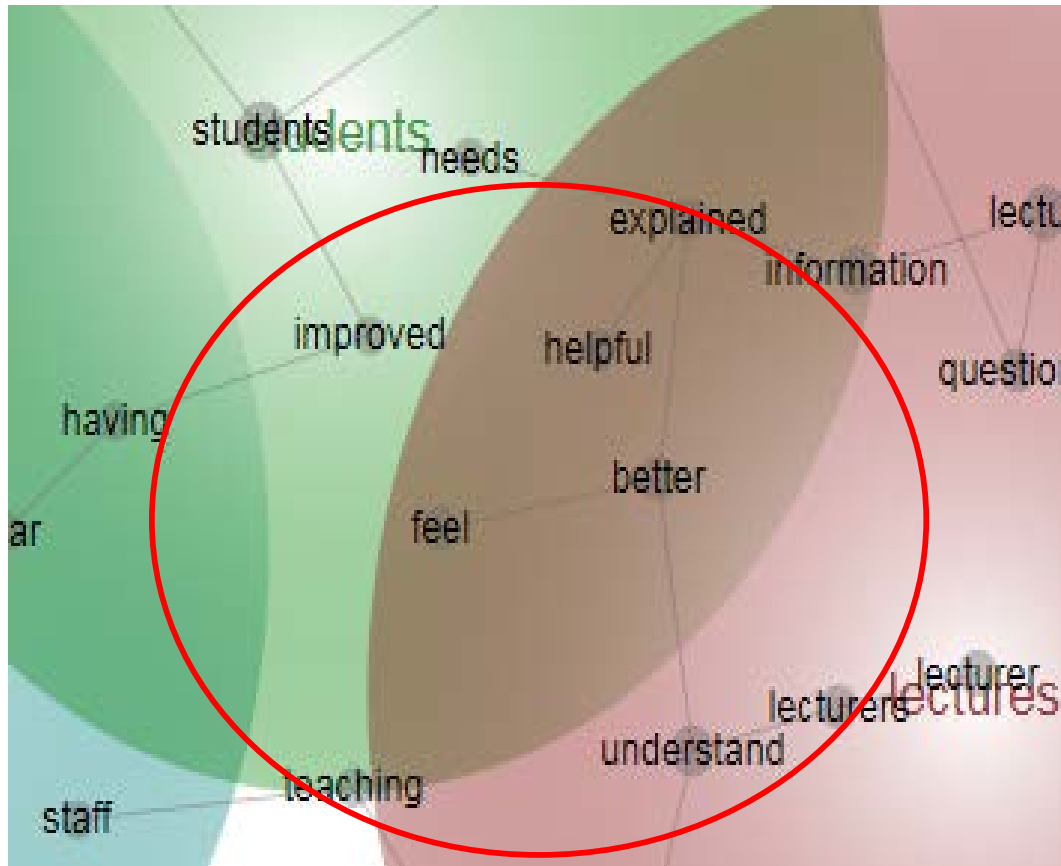
The discussion pieces have been appreciated as I feel these make the seminars enjoyable

I do feel however, that . . . we could have longer for A&P rather than the rules and regulations.

my tutor helped me to get more of a feel of what I want to do in the future

Feel/ Felt – BAME students

Feel/ felt as a concept was not present for individual ethnic groups due to small numbers



Feel is linked to **better** and is closely positioned to **helpful, understand, improved, explained** and **teaching**.

- Comments focused on how comfortable student feel about accessing support on the module and how they felt about a topic or in a lecture.

Students shouldn't be made to feel like they can't ask for help.

By being silenced made us feel uncomfortable

seminars feel like being back at school

feel deceived as I thought the culture elements would be more general

Subjects are broad so you don't feel restricted

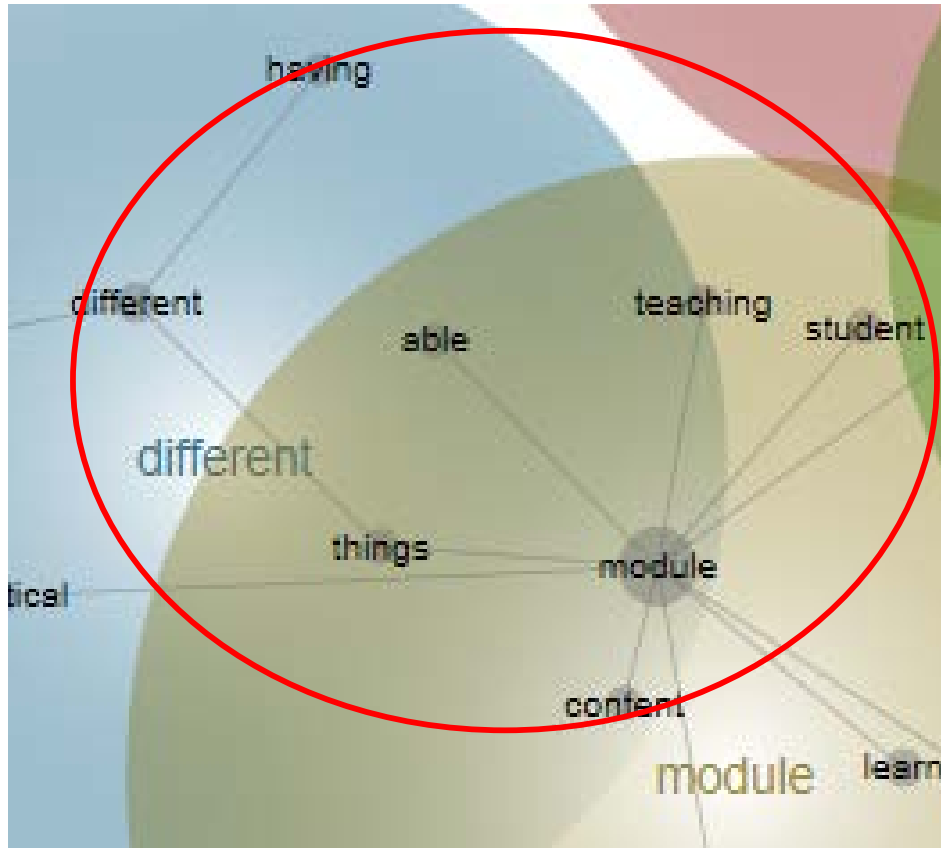
Feel/Felt – Initial findings



- There are clear differences in how Feel/ felt comments are expressed by BAME students in comparison to white students.
- BAME student comments were more emotive detailing how a lecture or topic made them feel or how they felt within a lecture.
- White student comments were less personal and reflective of their feelings and more focused on how they felt about a lecturer or a topic rather how that topic made them feel.

Able: Black students

Able is a foundation concept, used when students do or don't feel empowered, qualified or authorized



Able is linked to **module**, **teaching**, **content**, **student** and things.

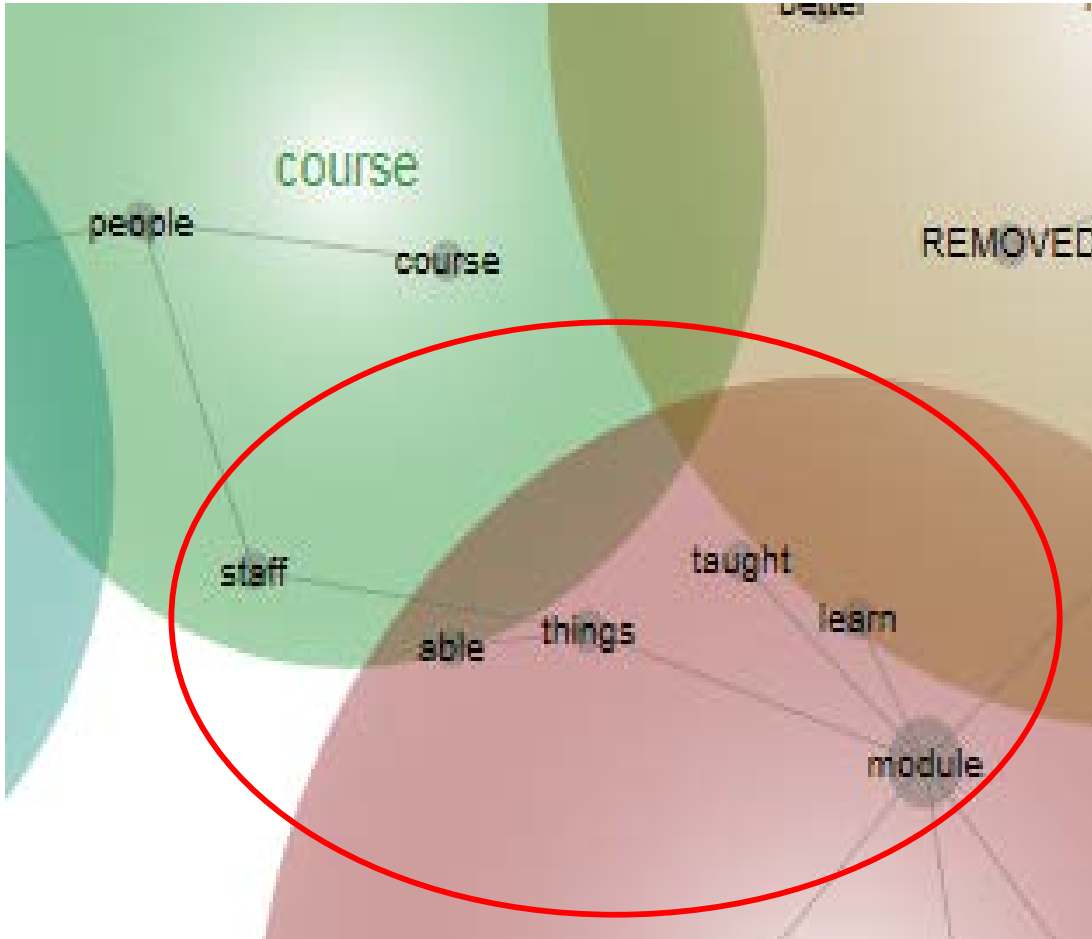
Positioned closely to **having** and **different**.

- Comments focused on teaching or module practices and being able to do or achieve something.

He is very passionate about how we understand what he is saying and makes it very amiable to be able to ask him questions

I have been able to understand how population grows and declines and how to engage with communities and the impact of not listening to people.

Able: Asian students



Able is linked to **things** and closely positioned to **staff**, **taught**, **learn** and **module**.

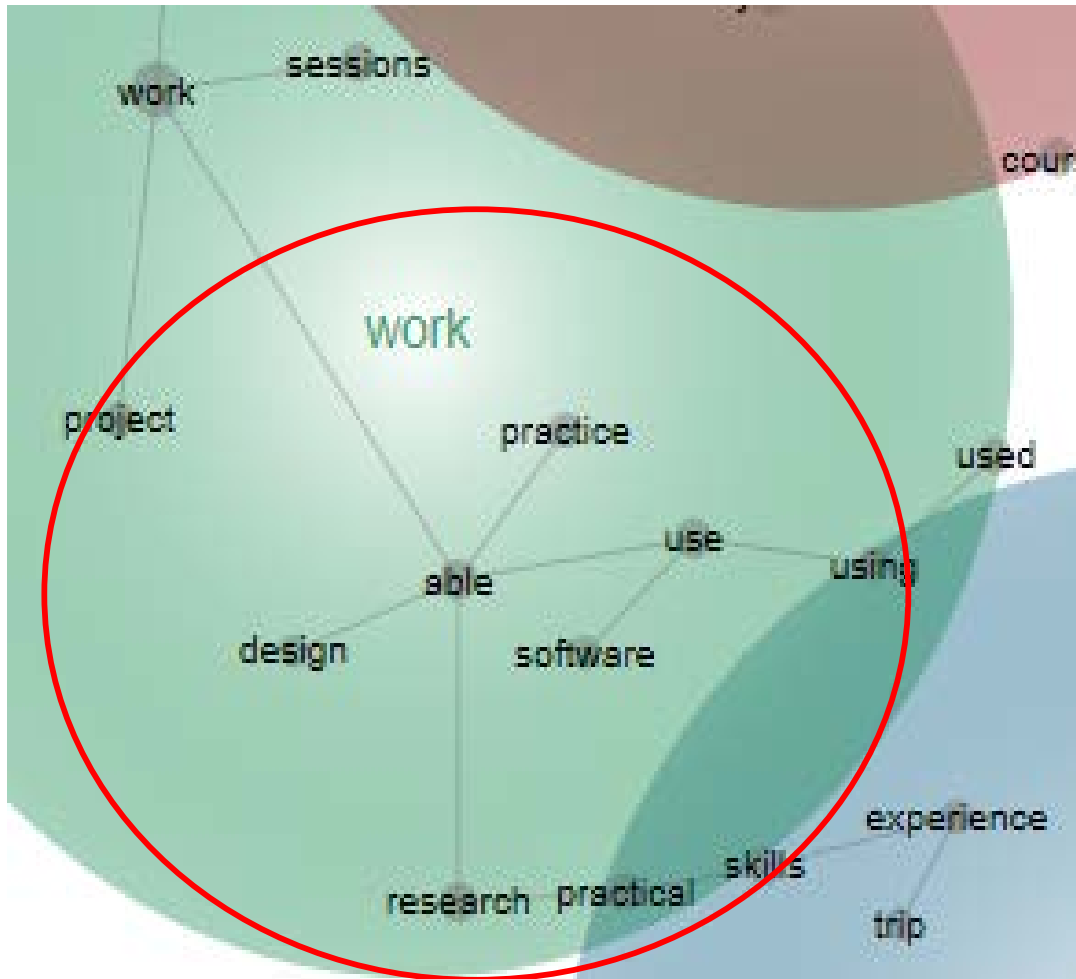
- Comments focused almost exclusively on 'being able' learn something new by taking part in the module.

Being able to study about primary schools holistically.

Being able to recognise factors to health choices and practice providing health promotion

Being able to identify the key aspects of water to land transformations of organisms.

Able: White students



Able is linked to **work, practice, design, research, use.**

Positioned closely to **software, skills** and **project.**

- Comments emphasised self-improvement as individuals and the development of independence and skills.

Being able to notice the transition from college/school to university.

Being able to create our own business.

Being able to make our own short film

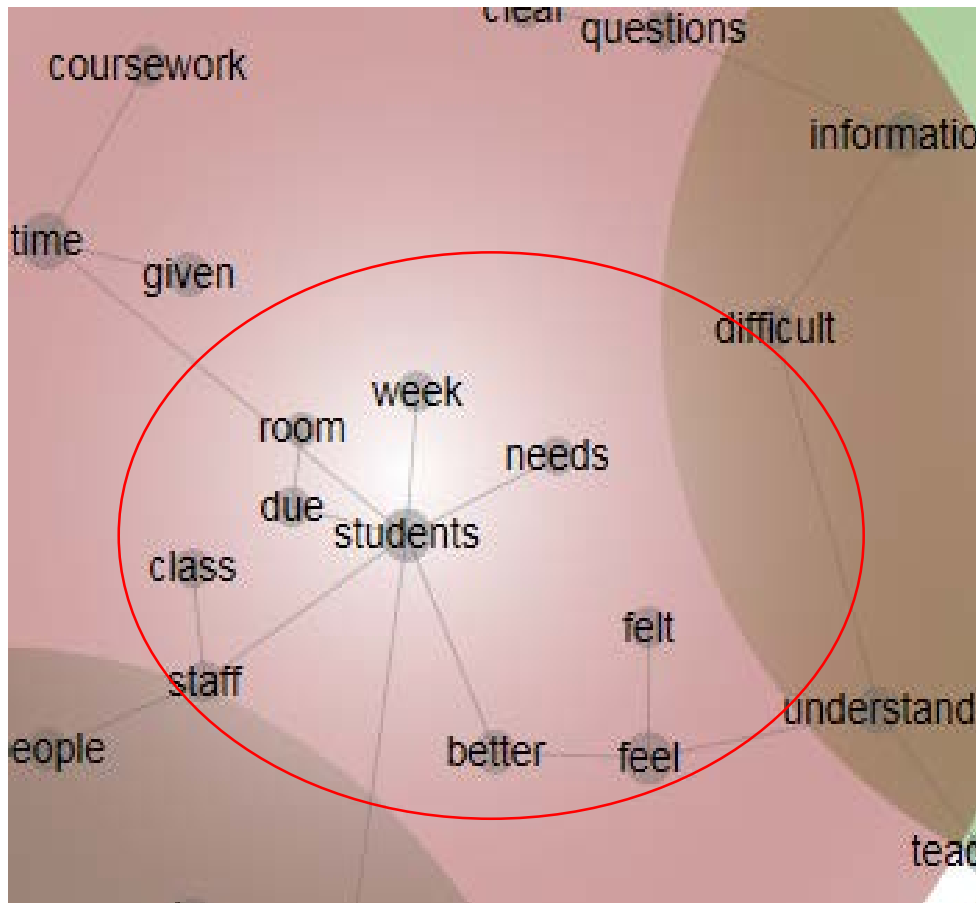
Being able to carry something through from concept to design.

Able – initial findings

- Whilst there are similarities in the themes that emerged, there are difference in the focus of students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Black students focused on how the pedagogical practices and teaching within the module ‘enabled’ them.
- Asian students were more focused on how the module increased their understanding and learning of the subject topic.
- White students showed an interesting emphasis on their own self-improvement as individuals.

Needs: White students

Needs is important indicator of what is essential or very important to students rather than just desirable.



Needs are linked to **students, staff, better, week**

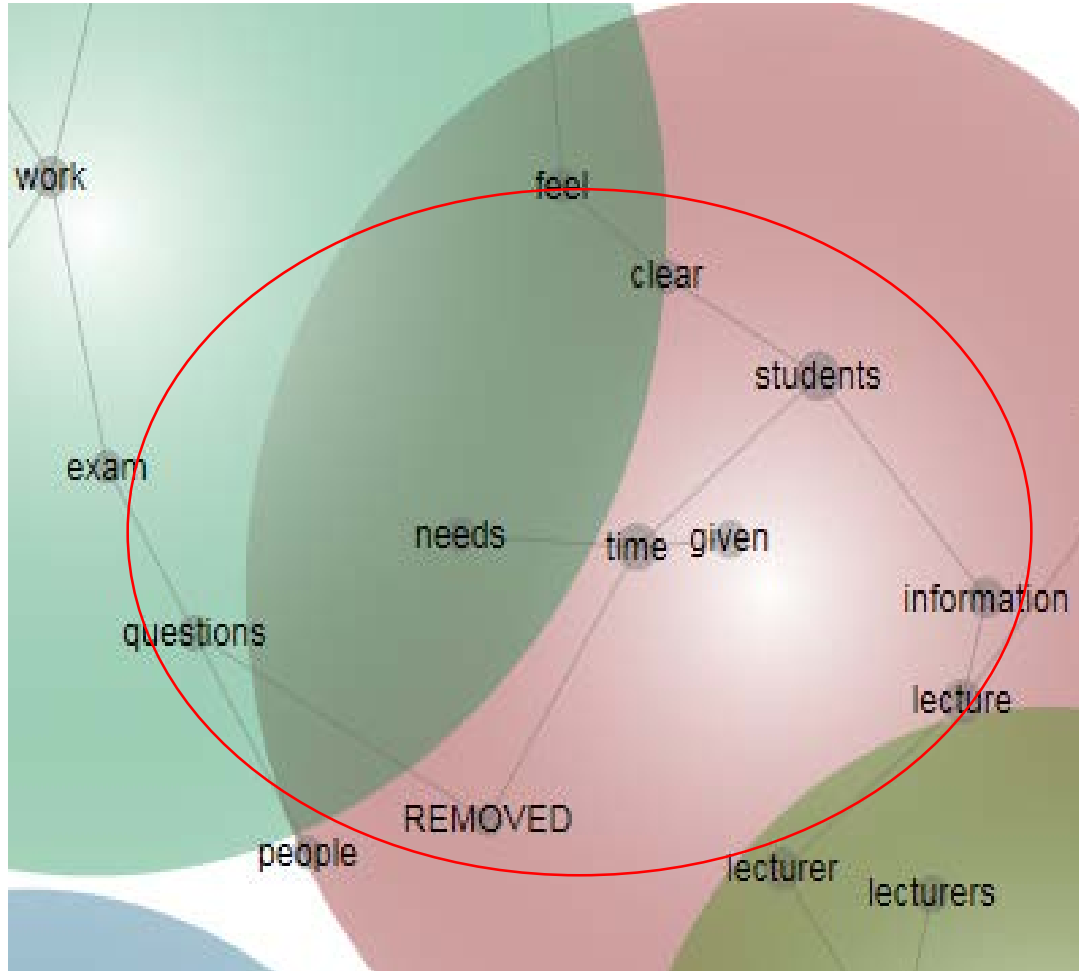
- A variety of topics covered within the concept
- The comments often referred to needs of not only the person who responded, but needs of other students as well

More needs to be made to improve help and guidance available to students

Feedback needs to be more accurate. Some students received lower marks because they hadn't included stuff ...

It needs to be interactive... Challenge students to participate and engage!

Needs: Black students



Needs are directly linked to **time** and **given**

Closely positioned **to students, clear, exam, questions, lecture** and **information**

... more time needs to spent on getting the student to practice this...

....this module needs to improve as I don't feel supported when asking questions about assignments. I am not given a clear answer leaving me confused ...

This module needs to be more clear

nothing needs to be improved...

Needs: Asian students

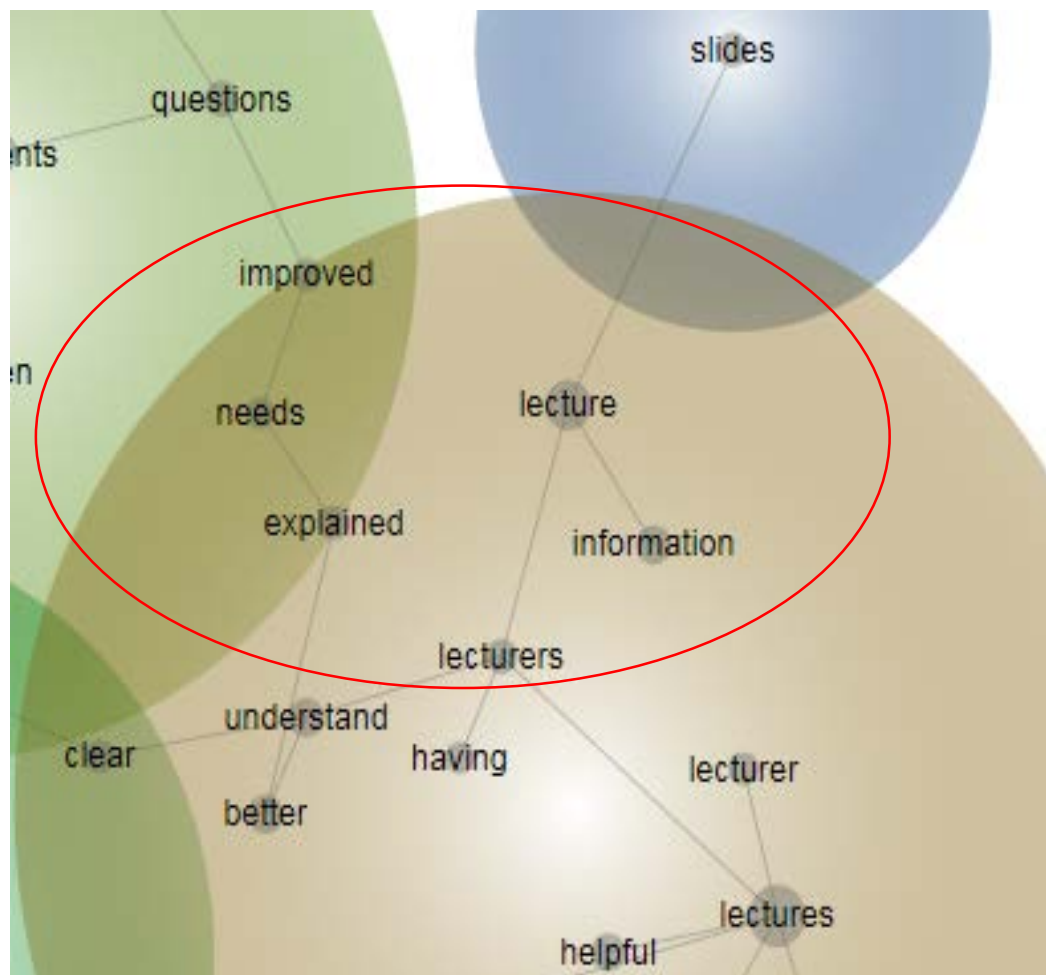
Needs are linked to **improved** and **explained**

Understand, better, improved, lecture and **lectures** are in close proximity

The exam criteria needs to be explained properly...

Feedback should also be more direct, clear and concise towards the individual who needs to work on what sort of thing.

[Name] needs to be more supportive when it comes to the exam and needs to explain how he gets answers for the question in more detail ...



Needs – initial findings

- Despite similarity in themes related to needs raised, there are some distinctive differences in how students from different ethnic background talk about their needs
- White students demonstrate good awareness of what is happening and often refer to experience of other students (spatial, personal and affective discourses are present)
- Temporal dimension of black student experience was very prominent (further research in how students are adapting to the temporal structures of the university?)
- Asian students articulate their needs in a more direct way, providing 'actionable' suggestions and feedback

Involvement of Student Union in the interpretation of findings



- Discussion of findings with members of the Student Union who are themselves from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Essential to give researchers an authentic understanding of the findings without imprinting our own implicit bias onto the analysis.
- Students recognised the findings and were able to offer examples of cultural differences in how students approach their education:
 - Students from minority ethnic often suffer from imposter syndrome.
 - Minority ethnic students often do not complain
 - Gratitude –for what you have and opportunities made available to you but also extends to how you present yourself.

Concluding thoughts

- Initial analysis suggests that there are a lot of similarities in the concepts and topics raised by students from all ethnic backgrounds.
- However, there are clear differences in how students express their feedback and the importance placed on concepts.
- The language used by BAME students within comments is often more emotive and reflective.
- Asian students seem to be more direct in their feedback and comments focus more on their learning and understanding.
- Comments from students from a mixed background offer an area for future exploration. Data patterns are similar to those of white students but with clear differences in some areas.

Future implications

- Vast dataset which has been is underused – lots of opportunities for future analysis.
- Potential for analysis with focus on different angles - applied linguistics/ critical race theory.
- More work to be done in collaboration with students to unpick and understand the messages behind the data.