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Redesigning PRES and PTES – using cognitive interviews for survey revision

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Workshop outline

1. Introduction
2. Cognitive testing: rationale and approaches
3. PRES cognitive interviewing project: method and key results
4. Discussion: Cognitive testing and approaches to redesigning PTES
5. Wrap-up and next steps
Introduction

Redesigning PRES and PTES

• HEA’s postgraduate experience surveys first launched in 2007 (PRES) and 2009 (PTES)

• Value to sector evidenced by:
  - increasing participation
  - feedback from institutions
  - PTES Review 2012
  - Vitae research on use of PRES for enhancement

• BUT
  - concerns over length of surveys
  - new developments in PG education since 2007 (e.g. RDF)
  - interest in how students respond to items
Redesign of PRES 2012-13

• Mainly focused on ‘experience’ scales
• Reduction in length and removal of redundancy
• Standardisation of question format
• More (and more focused) free-text questions
• Greater emphasis on research and professional development skills – and opportunities for acquiring them
• Refinement of existing and new questions to ensure interpreted consistently and as intended
### Professional Development

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about professional development?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Mostly disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Mostly agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. My ability to manage projects has developed during my programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my programme</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. I have developed contacts or professional networks during my programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. I have increasingly managed my own professional development during my programme</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. If you have any additional comments about professional development, please write them in here:
## Trends in PRES participation

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEIs</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>10,544</td>
<td>16,524</td>
<td>18,644</td>
<td>31,202</td>
<td>~47,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>~41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**

Trends in PRES participation
Introduction

What we did...

• Quantitative analysis of PRES datasets, examining for duplication

• Vitae survey, summer 2012

• Consultation with institutions, sector bodies and PRES Advisory Group in autumn 2012

• Commissioned cognitive testing to ensure face validity of existing and new questions:
  - led by University of Glasgow
  - undertaken by and with PGR students at multiple institutions
  - covering multiple subject areas and student groups
Redesigning PTES

• Focusing on the design of the PTES questionnaire in advance of PTES 2014
• Planning to consult widely with institutions
• We have just commissioned a programme of cognitive testing with PGT students...
Cognitive testing of survey items

- Semi-structured one-to-one interviewing
- Use survey items as prompts
- Participants think-aloud as they answer
- Also use follow-up probes
- Explores question interpretation, validity, and alternative wordings
Why “cognitive”? 

- Prompted by interviewer
- Understanding of question
- Think aloud
- Retrieval of information
- Reporting their answer
- Formation of answer
You have a go...

In pairs, please ask the other to think aloud whilst considering the following question...

“On a scale of 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. As a result of my current employment, I have become more confident at tackling unfamiliar problems”

what did ‘unfamiliar problems’ mean for you?
Interpretation and understanding

Knowledge & skills development
- Assignments
- Learn ways of approaching problems

Diversity of challenges
- Tutor or mentor support
- Confidence
- Practical content
- Placement

Tutor or mentor support
- Situations demanding Pro-active communication
- Situations demanding Independence

As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.
• Timeline: Sept 2012 - Jan 2013!
• 21 PGR interviewers, 146 Interviews in 10wks (~150 hrs)
• Interviews took place at 16 institutions (14 with multiple rounds) across the UK, covering all mission groups
• Produced university selection criteria; advertised by PRES officers and student unions & selected via 3 person panel
• Each interviewer conducted 3-4 rounds of interviews using different questions
• There is more than one aspect to the question being asked leading to respondents being unsure on how to answer the question

“Effectively planning (1), managing (2) and delivering work (3) in good time”

• An aspect of a question is placed after a more easily understood term leading to the question being answered mainly on this term

“My understanding of research practices that are respectful of the intellectual and personal rights of others has developed during my programme”

• An aspect of the question has many interpretations leading to non consistent answers

“The research environment in my department or faculty stimulates my work”
KEY RESULTS

• The key aspect of a question proves difficult to understand

“I am active in my department's research community”

• The question was not relevant to the majority of respondents

“My ability to work with others and influence teamwork has developed during my programme”

• A part of the question is seen as redundant as it is covered by a previous part

“I have adequate access to the specialist resources and facilities necessary for my research”
Discussion

• What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of cognitive testing?
• Could cognitive testing help you in using the results to inform enhancement?
• Are there particular aspects of PTES where we should focus testing?
• What does PTES not cover now that we should look at including for 2014?