

# Discovering Stories:

A RAEMS Frontrunners Project to better understand the DMU student experience.

# Why?

- RAEMS group has captured both quantitative and qualitative data about BME student achievement over three years
- A new way of capturing the experience of BME students at DMU was required
- The Frontrunner programme provided an ideal opportunity
  - to use students to speak directly to their peers in order to gather narratives of the student experience
  - to do so without the filter that often occurs when tutors work with students.

# How?

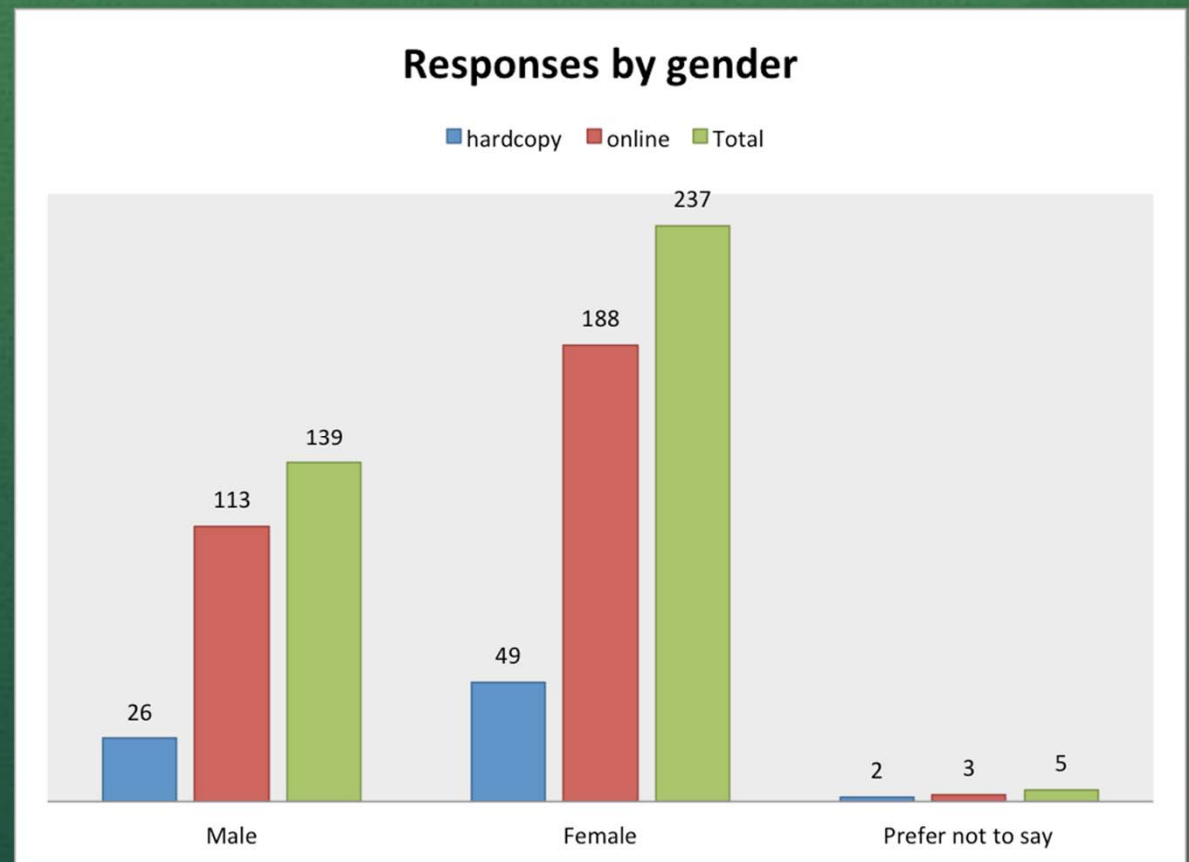
- Three students were eventually recruited, two females and one male.
- The students came from two faculties within the institution and all had some experience of working with groups of people and eliciting responses as part of their programmes of study.
- They were supported by the Chair of the RAEMS group who met with them regularly as a group and individually to check on progress.

# How?

- The students decided that they needed to talk directly to students in order to gather their stories
- However in order to find a way of accessing a greater number of students they agreed they needed expressions of interest from the student body; they could not rely on their own social networks alone
- Agreed upon a standard mixed methods approach: hard copy and online questionnaires designed by Frontrunners followed by focus groups run by the Frontrunners

# Questionnaires - data

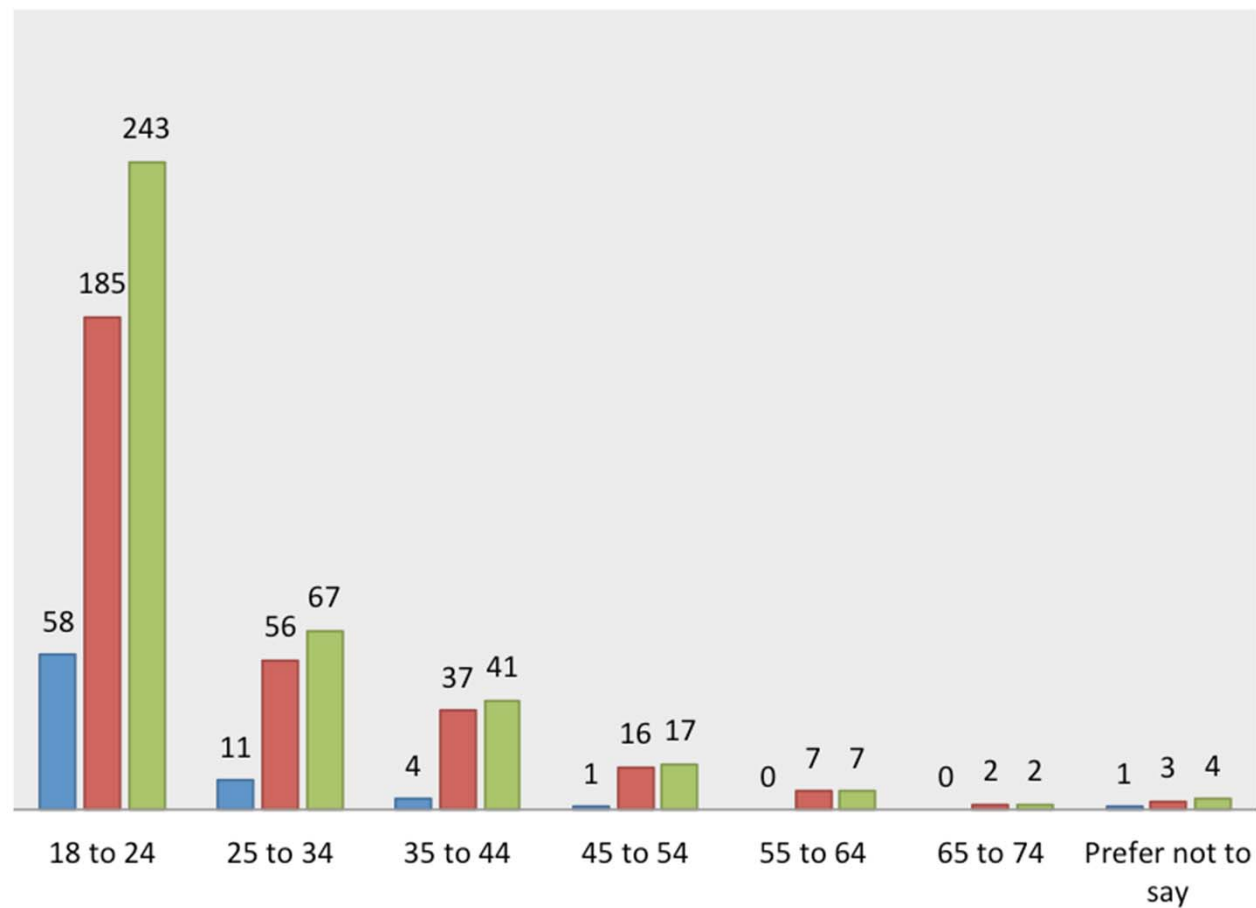
- Data collected using hard copy and online versions from October 2012 – January 2013
- Total of 381 responses:  
75 hardcopy and 306 online



# Questionnaires - data

## Responses by age

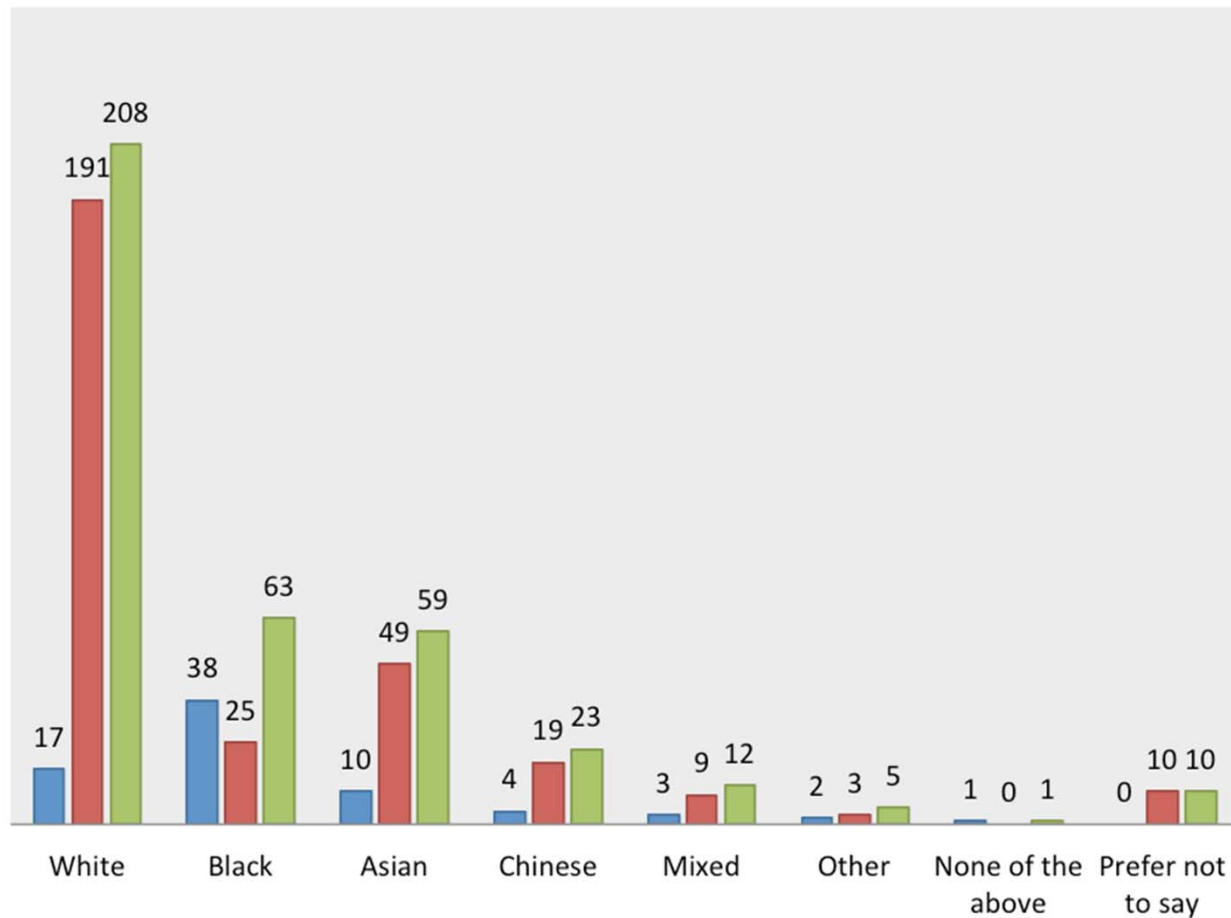
■ hardcopy ■ online ■ Total



# Questionnaires - data

## Responses by ethnicity

■ hardcopy ■ online ■ Total



# Questionnaires - comments

## Q7 - overall satisfaction with DMU

“I do not regret choosing De Montfort University as my first choice of study, and if I repeated the process, the only thing I would change is making DMU my only application.”

“A lot was advertised in the prospectus the year before I arrived here. What has actually been offered has been about 50% of what was in there”

“I am disappointed with the overall standard of teaching. On line resources are of poor quality, contain errors and are lazy- often referring to other people's on line resources!”

“I'm very unhappy, wish I had gone to a different university. but I'm stuck here for the year and cant drop out because I would be in a lot of financial shite.”



# Questionnaires - comments

## Q8 - matching up to expectations

“In terms of studies, DMU has far exceeded my expectations. The course combines academic rigour with practical application; exactly what I was looking for.”

“The university has a lot to offer! Sports teams, societies - all run impeccably well and varsity is brilliant. A Vice Chancellor who is involved with the university! An internship scheme (Frontrunners) to help people become more employable! Also in terms of the learning environment and teaching, it definitely suits my style of learning.”

“After attending DMU for 6 weeks I honestly feel like I made the wrong choice. The lecturers do not know how to teach and this applies to most of them. The courses are so varied and unfocused causing an unnecessary burden on students.”

“Expected organisation to be better and for the lectures to be better organised and planned”

# Questionnaires - comments

## Q9 - help with settling in

“All staff and tutors make sure you know when/where they are available and how to get in contact. Student services and Placement teams are always around when you need them. Life at DMU is like a great big community where everyone can have their say and express their beliefs however they choose.”

“...very little thought was given to students who had moved away from home”

“You are very much left to it, with no checking that you are coping, understanding, meeting learning outcomes on an ongoing basis”

“I think it would of been better to try and arrange for students at home to be more involved in fresher's week so they can feel involved in the university as I didn't have a clue what was happening and it was quite a lonely experience.”

# Questionnaires - comments

## Q10 - support with learning difficulty

“Student Services did a brilliant job in setting up the extra support required. They co-ordinated with me before I started at the university to ensure that when I arrived I could just start with my studies like any other student.”

“I have had to go out and get the support from DMU, follow it up, and chase it up from staff. It was not made easy to have that support come to me in the first place from DMU. You are more like a number at DMU not an individual. “

“I was assessed in the first year but was only offered support in my final year when I did not need it anymore.”

# Questionnaires - comments

## Q11 - accessing other types of support

“I have been able to participate in so many different careers sessions, offered by the Library and the Placement Unit. I have received good, constructive feedback on improving CVs and Cover Letters, and now feel more confident about applying for jobs.”

“...the careers guidance especially has been excellent. Since I am currently looking for a placement, I have a lot of dealings with the placement team and they are brilliant.

“Personal tutor is useless, 2 meeting arranged and (they have) failed to turn up. This week 40-50 students waiting again a no show. Week 6 and still not met (them), not just me (they have) let down meeting others in the group. Left feeling overwhelmed and not sure where to go for help.”

# Questionnaires - comments

## Q15 - views of course overall

“Teaching varies, the majority - I would say 80% are brilliant...as I say I couldn't ask for anything more from the majority of tutors and lecturers.”

“...some of my teachers act as though they have no idea what they are doing and it's down to us as the students to figure it out.”

“Too much information is on Blackboard. I'm always being told "it's on Blackboard" which frankly isn't good enough when paying £9,000 a year to study.”

“Support is there if you hunt it down and keep on and on after it, it could and should be made easier to get and above all know about.”

# Focus groups

- 3 Frontrunners separately ran 5 focus groups
  - Student as chair + student as note taker/support
- Total of 32 students spoken to across all of the meetings
- All 4 faculties represented, all students undergraduate but from across all levels.
- No data captured on age, gender, ethnicity of participants deliberately to avoid recognition.

# Focus groups - headlines

- Overall satisfaction with student experience; even better than expected for some;
- Students generally well supported especially academically;
- Some inconsistencies in
  - standards of teaching,
  - speed of return for work,
  - standard of facilities,
  - staff attitudes towards lateness and attendance,
  - tutor understanding/allowance for prior knowledge and experience

# Focus groups - comments

- DMU investments help students feel they receive “value for money” but...
  - Some students still had to pay additional costs for course-specific materials
  - Some disquiet over reduced contact time especially in final year of study
- Students considered university experience generally supportive, but...
  - Inconsistencies dependent upon course
  - Less satisfaction with non-academic support



# Focus groups - comments

- Lack of positive role models for BME students...
  - Some lack of understanding by staff of issues for students attending HE as first in their family:
  - Not wanting to “bother” tutors
  - Little understanding of prior experiences and current learning
  - Little awareness of BME students operating within a different dominant culture
- Some BME students feel they are “suffering in silence”

# Focus groups - comments

- To improve overall student experience for all...
  - Clear, consistent approach to lateness and attendance
  - Greater understanding of demands in balancing study and other demands – especially for mature students
  - Greater access to more buildings more of the time
  - More placements, internships, volunteer opportunities
  - More exchanges with HEIs abroad
  - Clubs and societies more inclusive
  - More spaces to socialise so less need to use study spaces

# Conclusions and recommendations

- Many issues already known – student voice adds a level of credibility?
  - Awareness that *personal* narratives cannot generalise
- Need to keep our promises, especially with increasing consumer-like behaviour
- Consistency AND personalisation – a paradox?
  - Need to agree what should be consistent, what should be personalised
- BME students especially looking for more +ve role models

# Conclusions and recommendations

- Support for students is crucial
  - Many good examples, some need to be more efficient
- Role of personal tutor also crucial
  - Need to allocate right people, give them the necessary resources and empower them.

**Overall students feel they have a good experience at DMU, but the drive to maintain and improve the student experience is both economic and ethical.**

# Comments and questions?

Contact the RAEMS group via

[nallsopp@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:nallsopp@dmu.ac.uk)

Ext. 8417