

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013– 2014

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

<i>Faculty / School of:</i>	Institute of Psychological Sciences
<i>Subject(s):</i>	Psychology – see modules below.
<i>Programme(s) / Module(s):</i>	Programme: MSc/PGDip Psychological Approaches to Health. Modules: PSYC 5310M; PSYC 5320M; PSYC 5600M; PSYC 5611M; PSYC 5620M; PSYC5632M; PSYC 5642M; PSYC 5651M; PSYC 5670M
<i>Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):</i>	MSc/PGDip Psychological Approaches to Health.

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**Completed report**

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

none

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

n/a

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

n/a

Standards**1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award**

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

The ILO's are appropriate. The students are presented with a broad range of topics from experts in the field. The content and standard of the work is appropriate.

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The level of work presented is equivalent to other national M level programmes in Psychology and Health. However the structure of the programme is relatively unique as it is not a BPS stage I accredited MSc in health psychology where the course content is more tightly prescribed.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

The course includes a wide range of relevant assessments including a poster presentation, critique, qualitative and quantitative research analyses, systematic reviewing, essays, problem based learning, exams and a research dissertation. The teaching appears to be of a high quality and the expectations of the assignments are in line with this.

The programme has responded to feedback from my 2013/2014 report that the second marking and agreed marking processes were not always clear. Almost all the assessments this year included a clear description of this process.

PSYCH 5670 M

The key exception to this was the process of agreed marks for the research projects (PSYCH 5670M). These projects are always double marked rather than moderated. At times there was a reasonable discrepancy between the markers so it would be good to ascertain how these two markers agreed a mark. I realise that average marks cannot be awarded because of the spread of marks assessors have to adhere to but why the lower or higher mark was agreed should be justified.

With regards the marking criteria for these projects, I wondered if it was worth adding in a clear criterion for critical thinking under the ratings for the introduction. I felt many projects could have done a better job of critically supporting what their study adds to the literature and a specified criterion in this regard may help. There was also a large variability in the formatting of references and tables in research projects. Including APA format in the marking guide may provide greater uniformity and professionalism in this regard. Finally, a number of students failed to include reference to ethical approvals in their methods sections. This should be standard practice.

The award classifications were commensurate with the level of the students' work.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

The broad range of assignments gave the students the opportunity to learn a wide range of new process skills as well as assess their critical thinking skills and knowledge of the subject areas.

The performance of the students was equivalent to similar courses offered at Russell group Universities. However, there is a greater spread of marks towards the lower end than some other top level courses. This may reflect the slightly lower entry criteria.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

I did not observe any new enhancements but am satisfied that the course is well run and more than adequately assessed.

Particularly good examples of the assessment process are (1) the problem based learning exercise (PSYC 5651M) where guidelines for marking and presentations are very clear and (2) the systematic review (PSYC 5320M) which includes a clear ranking rating system for each section which lets students know their strength and weaknesses in key areas such a critical reflection.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

The curriculum is clearly research led. The lectures are research active and use their knowledge of the empirical literature to inform the content of their modules. Students also undertake research in the form of a research dissertation. The dissertations cover a wide range of topics which reflect the research expertise of the team of lecturers. The dissertations are of a high quality and students are given an impressive handbook to guide them through the research process.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

I received sufficient information. My questions were always answered promptly. The course administrator, <>, is to be commended on all <> hard work in this regard.

11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

Yes – as above

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

I was provided with all draft examination papers. The level of the questions was appropriate.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes to all

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

There was a wide and interesting selection of research topics and methodologies relevant to the discipline of psychology. However, I did note that some projects did not include a health component. This seems a little out of line with a degree course entitled Psychological Approaches to Health.

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

Yes to all

16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes.

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

Overall, I was happy with the standard of the work presented and congratulate the staff on running a well organised and interesting MSc degree.



26 January 2015

Dear

MSc Psychological Approaches to Health – External Examiner’s Report – 2013/2014

First, I must apologise for the delay in sending this response to you. In fact, we were ready to send the response on 19th November last year but I failed to pass the final version on to [redacted] which, I think, disrupted the normal flow of events. Anyway, many thanks for taking the time to come to Leeds on 5th November and for acting as our External Examiner once again. Thank you also for the constructive feedback you have given us on the course, assessments and procedures. We will take all of this on board and ensure we implement any improvements as we move forward.

We are pleased that, overall, you are happy with the organisation/administration, standards of teaching and the wide range of assessment on this Masters course. We are also pleased to read that you are happy with our response to your feedback, on second marking and agreed marking processes, provided in your 2012/13 external examiner’s report. We note, however, that although you found this process clearly described for almost all assessments, this was not always the case regarding the marking of the research projects (PSYC 5670M). In response to this we have now revised our project marking sheets to bring them in line with those used at undergraduate level. These include a text box for the first and second markers to document how they have agreed the final mark (i.e. in cases where there is a discrepancy between their marks). In addition, in line with your recommendation, we have also added a criterion for ‘critical thinking’ under the marker ratings for the research project introduction.

We were concerned to note that you found there to be a large variability in the formatting of references and tables within the research projects and that some students failed to include reference to ethical approval in their methods sections. This is surprising given the comprehensive course and research project handbooks that our students receive which provide clear guidance on these aspects of the write-up. However, we will flag up this issue with PATH research project supervisors and [redacted] will emphasise these important points to our current cohort of students who will be starting their research projects shortly.

We are pleased that you found the performance of our Masters students to be equivalent to that of students on similar courses offered at Russell Group Universities. However, we note that you have highlighted a greater spread of marks towards the lower end of the marking scale than perhaps might be expected on a top level course. As you suggest, this may well reflect our slightly lower entry criteria, which we are currently reviewing to bring PATH entry requirements in line with those of our new MPsync course by 2017.

Thanks once again for your time and feedback. It was great to see you in Leeds. You are a great asset to our Exam Board, and your input is invaluable in maintaining our standards with Masters teaching.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

Head of School