

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2014– 2015

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

Faculty / School of:	School of Healthcare
Subject(s):	Psychotherapy and Counselling
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Psychotherapy and Counselling
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	Master of Arts

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

No areas require urgent attention.

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?

I was provided with the previous External Examiner's final report and the School's response.

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

Not applicable

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 programme aims and the associated learning outcomes are commensurate with a Masters level programme. The standards and competencies embedded in the MA represent good quality, rigorous practitioner training. Across three key domains – learning about key therapy theories, translating theory into practice through managed placements, and personal-relational development – students are exposed to a course structure and content that aims to equip them as 'fully fledged practitioners'.

From my meeting with students from the programme, it was evident that their experiences and perceptions of the course equips them well as new practitioners and provides them with an excellent grounding in therapeutic work. Key to the programme is the emphasis upon 'relational' and the centrality of the practitioner's relational competence – this is core to ethical and professional practice.

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 programme aims and learning outcomes are comparable with the QAA benchmarks for counselling and psychotherapy. They also compare well to similar programmes offered at other HE institutions offering M-level practitioner training.

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 programme utilises a range of assessment methods that are appropriate to M-level learning and teaching on a practitioner education and training programme. The teaching team have conceptualised and put into place, a comprehensive assessment approach that tests different aspects of practitioner competence. Student performance on the programme indicates that an effective learning community is created by the tutor team and student body. From the work that I have seen to date, I have been impressed by students' achievements. Assessments are academically rigorous and consistent with comparable accredited programmes in other HEIs.

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 academic standards evident across the cohort indicate a competent group of students who strive to produce work of quality, depth and breadth. Standards compare favourably with similar programmes in the counselling and psychotherapy training sector. What is evident is a commitment to graduating practitioners who are skilful, competent and 'fit to practice'.

In relation to 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' there is evidence that students develop their competence and confidence through the course and its assignment ('strengths') and equally, there are clear signs that students can assess limitations to their knowledge and practice. Rather than perceiving this as 'weakness', it actually is a crucial component and marker of a student's capacity for critical reflexivity as a practitioner.

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

Practice placements provide a central theme for the students. The application of theory into practice within a placement context provides students with rich learning. This learning is assessed in the programme through practice portfolios which appropriately assess different components of the placement experience (including the supervisory process and content, with comment from the student's supervisor; critical reflection upon practice; video/audio recording of sessional work). Essentially, the comprehensive process and experience of being in a placement provides the student with a medium through which to bring all elements of their learning on the MA into being. Assessment of this process includes video and audio recordings, enabling students to demonstrate their learning and progression across a range of practice components. Tutor feedback on practice components relates to the learning outcomes and provides 'feed forward' comments as appropriate, to support students with ongoing practice development.

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.

Following subject review, the tutor team have engaged in programme developments, including preparing for larger cohort sizes. Additionally, modules are being adapted to enhance the programme and manage assessment. For example, changes to the assessment for HECS 5185M reduces the assessment burden upon students, but continues to test their knowledge and skills

development against module learning outcomes. The capacity for reflexivity and reasoned self-appraisal (fundamental practitioner skills) will continue to be elicited in the proposed assessment.

During the subject review process, feedback from a meeting with students indicated a level of anxiety related to the review process. Students clearly valued and respected the teaching team and the MA programme and were concerned about the future of practitioner training at the University. Despite this environment, students performed well in their assessments and the student-tutor body has positively maintained a quality learning and teaching environment.

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 tutor team are research active and publish outcomes from both a subject specific and pedagogical perspective. In a profession characterised by lack of evidence based training (as in teaching), the team are generating important contributions to the development of evidence based learning and teaching for the counselling professions.

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

NOT APPLICABLE

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

NOT APPLICABLE

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.

The tutor team have been proactive in ensuring I have the required information (including module handbooks/assessment rubrics). Access to the Leeds VLE has been invaluable and enabled me to moderate and scrutinise work across the module I examine.

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.

All appropriate documentation has been provided to me.

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?

All assessment arrangements are clear and appropriate to assessed components on the MA.

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?

Most work – aside from practice recordings – has been made available to me on the Leeds VLE. This is very helpful, enabling flexible moderation and examination processes.

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

Students produced subjects of value and interest to the psychotherapy and counselling field. Consistent with similar training programmes in other HEIs, students produce qualitative project reports for assessment. There is a need in the UK counselling and psychotherapy field to generate high quality quantitative research, with published outcomes and the Leeds team are well positioned to do this.

There is potential to develop research programmes that embed both qualitative and quantitative projects and which include cross-Institutional and interdisciplinary research.

- 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?**

I will attend Boards wherever possible – provided they do not compete with those in my own University. I would value forward dates for Board meetings being circulated early in the academic session.

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

Mitigating circumstances are appropriately managed.

Other comments

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

The MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling is an excellent programme, led by a talented tutor team – a team who are highly competent academic-practitioner-researchers, balancing the complexities of these roles creatively and competently. I have enjoyed my engagement with the team – and with the student cohort I met – and look forward to future work.

Both the tutor team and the administrators have been appropriately supportive across my period of examining the MA. I have particularly appreciated tutor and administrator follow up on MAB form submission – as well as their understanding of common challenges for external examiners across our respective institutions.

School of Healthcare

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UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Direct line: 0113

E-mail:

26 November 2015

Dear

Re External Examiner's Report 2014-2015 – MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling

I should like, on behalf of the team, to thank you for your very thorough and supportive external examiner's report. The team is encouraged by your comments, especially by the perception that 'student performance on the programme indicates that an effective learning community is created by the tutor team and student body'. This is a key aspiration which has been discussed several times in community meetings with the student groups, and is in the team's view the on-going responsibility of all involved. The team also appreciates your perception that students' ability to assess their own limitations represents a strength, both for practitioners and for the professional education process.

You noted the developmental changes introduced into the programme this year in preparation for larger cohort sizes and to enhance the assessment of certain modules, and the team is pleased that you consider that these changes will continue to test students' knowledge, skills and reflexivity appropriately against learning outcomes, while increasing the manageability and efficiency of the programme. Students communicated their anxiety about the recent School of Healthcare review directly to you during your meeting with them, and it is very gratifying that, as you note, they have performed well in assessments in spite of this uncertainty.

The team is pleased that you view the team's research contributions as 'important contributions the development of evidence-based learning and teaching' in counselling and psychotherapy. The team hopes to continue and develop further this activity over the coming year.

In this connection, the team agrees with your view that the counselling and psychotherapy field in the UK needs 'to generate high quality quantitative research' as well as qualitative, and that the potential to contribute to this development should include interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research programmes. The team is very interested in developing such programmes in collaboration with partners and hopes to be able to take this forward in the near future.

The team would like to thank you again for your active support and engagement with the development of the MA Psychotherapy and Counselling programme, and looks forward to continuing to work with you over the next few years.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely