

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 28/09/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Psychology

Subject(s):

Psychology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

AI Psychology UG Programmes and Modules

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BSc

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Points of innovation and/or good practice

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.
As always, I am impressed with the range and quality of the educational opportunities available for students at Leeds. Staff are clearly passionate about their subjects and offer a wide range of innovative assessment methods.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.
I hadn't noticed before that feedback is offered to students on exam performance.

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

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y / N
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y / N
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y / N

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

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y
<p><i>Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>The programme is structured with a mix of module credits so that students are able to experience a wide range of topics and assessment types, that appropriately test the intended learning outcomes. The topics taught are broad in their range, but are clearly focused on the research strengths of the lecturers in the School. The course clearly fulfils the requirements for BPS accreditation in terms of the topics taught</p>		
13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
<p><i>Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)</i></p> <p>Modules, particularly at Levels 2 and 3, are clearly research-led. The students undertake independent research in their third year, and the quality of these research projects is very high.</p>		
14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i></p>		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<p><i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i></p>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i></p> <p>The programme is accredited by the British Psychological Society. In terms of the topics taught, the programme clearly meets the accreditation criteria.</p>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: 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.</i></p>		

The module outlines make explicit the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment. They are appropriately aligned		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
<p><i>Please comment on 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:</i></p> <p>The academic standard demonstrated by students is high. They demonstrate abilities in a number of forms of assessment. I noted performance in essays to be poorer than in other forms of assessment – it seems that in some cases knowledge (assessed mostly by MCQ) is rewarded over critical evaluation and argument (assessed by essay).</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p>		

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments?	Y
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y
29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p>		

Other comments

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

This was my third year as external examiner at Leeds. Again, the organisation of the programme and assessment by the School is exemplary. Marking and feedback is appropriate, and the range of assessment formats is varied and interesting. Particular good practice is in developing challenging MCQ and SAQ formats that assess understanding as well as knowledge. I encourage these practices to be shared widely in the School.

I concentrated this year more on the School's practices and perceived consistency of feedback and fairness of marking. It seemed to me that there were some obvious low-cost gains to be had for the School in terms of student satisfaction. While the School has a fair and clear general marking rubric for staff, it's not always clear that it is being used consistently, being adapted for all assessment types, or is always consistent with the student handbook.

On exam feedback – it seems the module leader provides an opportunity for students to see markers' feedback on their exam scripts. While I have some doubts over the administrative time required for this, and the pedagogical gains for the students, it is something School has decided to do. However the comments on exam scripts seem to serve a different purpose in the minds of the markers, and that is to justify the mark to the moderator and external examiner. Therefore the comments seem not to be particularly helpful for students in that they don't often relate directly to the marking criteria. One suggestion would be to have student-facing feedback on exams more closely aligned to the marking criteria. Students could then have a clearer idea of why they achieved one mark and not another.

On coursework - there is a need to make the student handbook consistent with the marking rubric used by markers. This is clear low hanging fruit in relation to the NSS question 'Marking criteria were clear in advance', and the School could also then advertise the change and respond to 'It is clear how feedback has been acted on'. However, the marking criteria are clearly aimed at traditional forms of assessment such as essays and practical reports. More innovative forms of assessment, such as blogs, intervention plans, SEQs, do not appear to have clear criteria expressed either in the student handbook or marking rubric. In one module, Cognitive Neuroscience, for JH students, there is an additional 500 word assignment that I could not place as either an essay or a short answer. If I were a student I would wonder what kind of answer is being asked for. So, there is a danger that students will take from this that some forms of assessment are module-specific, or worse, lecturer-specific. The same is true of presentations. Individual lecturers sometimes develop specific marking criteria for presentations, which gives the impression that different lecturers are assessing different things – again, a danger for perceived consistency. This is something I raised last year as well.

Some forms of assessment seem less able to differentiate among abilities. Presentations are one such case – it's probably a good thing that they tend not to account for a large proportion of marks on a given module, but I wouldn't discourage their use. Exam essays are often awarded much lower marks than MCQs in the same module. Evolution and Human Behaviour is one such case. In this, 119 from 228 students achieved a first class mark in MCQs, but only 15 achieved the same grade for the essay component. It raises the question of what MCQs are supposed to achieve. They seem to have the consequence of buffering poorer performance in aspects of assessment that are fairly crucial, namely critical evaluation and the formulation of a clear and compelling argument. This is not always the case – in the Spatial World, MCQ and essays performance were broadly aligned. While assessment practice might be shared more widely, it does raise the question of whether students perceive the marking is fair – another question on NSS.

That said, I do believe marking is fair, and as in previous years, I was very impressed with a lot of student work. Coursework essays are often outstanding, as are project reports. Perhaps the School ought to review the purpose of including MCQs at third year, given the discussion above. Is it really necessary to assess a breadth of knowledge across the curriculum at level 3? Perhaps the students weight this component very highly, and concentrate their revision there, to the detriment of their critical evaluation of topics, which is assessed in the essays? If it is clear that depth of understanding is valued over knowledge then performance on those aspects of assessment will improve.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Psychology

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BSc Psychology
BSc Psychology (International)
BSc Psychology (Industrial)

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Head of School

Faculty / School of:

Faculty of Medicine and Health, School of Psychology

Address for communication:

School of Psychology
University of Leeds

Email:

Telephone:

*If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.

Completing the School response

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at qat@leeds.ac.uk. External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

Thank you for the positive comments particularly about the range of different assessment methods that we have introduced.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Thank you for this observation. This is, as you say, something that we have been doing for a while, and we believe that students find this to be a positive experience, although not all of them take advantage of the opportunity.

Response to Matters for Urgent Attention

If any areas have been identified for urgent attention before the programme is offered again please provide a specific response to them here:

N/A

Response to questions 1-7 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Standards**Response to questions 8 to 16 (and related comments)**

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

Thank you for these positive comments across the board, particularly relating to the way in which the research strengths of our staff are reflected in the programme.

Assessment and Feedback

Response to questions 17 to 19 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

We have noted your comments identifying a possible over-emphasis on assessing knowledge rather than critical evaluation and argument. This is something that we are happy to review in the modules that use these types of assessment. As you raise this in more detail in the Comments section, we will respond in more detail there.

The Progression and Awards Process

Response to questions 20-35 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Other comments

Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report

Thank you very much for your detailed, useful and well-considered observations. We are extremely grateful for this feedback which has helped us to make improvements. Taking your points in turn:

The School has developed specific marking criteria for all methods of assessment this year including blogs, critical evaluations, clinical formulations, presentations, research proposals etc.,. Importantly, the marking criteria are on the coursework feedback sheets and students are awarded a grade for each of the marking criteria, ensuring clear alignment with the marking criteria that are now published in the student handbook and are available for staff on SharePoint.

The feedback provided on exam scripts attempt to serve both functions mentioned. We were asked by previous external examiners to provide some justification of the marks awarded and we took this opportunity to also provide some feedback to students. Although the feedback provided on exams scripts is not as extensive as that on coursework, due to time limitations, the students have the opportunity to read the feedback in the presence of the exam markers and are encouraged to speak to the markers if further clarification or explanation of the feedback is required to help them improve in the future. In the future we can remind staff to align the brief comments on exams with the relevant marking criteria.

All methods of assessment now have coursework feedback sheets that directly relate to the relevant marking criteria as published in the student handbook. Students are directed to the relevant marking criteria when assessments are set.

In level 3 there are several modules that used presentations as a form of assessment, and these are typically group presentations for which all members of the group receive the same mark. It is perhaps not surprising that this form of assessment is less able to discriminate among abilities since the work is a team effort within which there may be a range of abilities. As you suggest, we also believe it is important to include such group assessments to help students develop employability skills including team-working and oral communication skills. However, these assessments usually contribute a small amount to the module mark (typically 5-20%) in recognition that these marks do not represent individual student achievement.

In October 2018 we provided a staff training session related to the development of high-level MCQs, led by (module leader of the Spatial World module) to support staff in developing assessments. We believe that our choice of assessment methods is aligned to the learning outcomes of each module and the programme, and that in many cases it is important to ensure that both breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding are assessed particularly in the core areas of psychology noted in the BPS accreditation standards. These standards are primarily mapped to our level 2 modules in which this combination of MCQ and essay assessments are used. However, we are aware of a number of level 3 modules that also use this combination of assessments and we are monitoring the marks carefully. Some of these modules base the MCQs on specific journal articles (e.g., PSYC3502 – The Biopsychology of Human Appetite) and other are using high-level MCQs that assess students understanding rather than factual knowledge which is more appropriate at level 3 (PSYC3505 - The Spatial world; PSYC3536 - Applications of Learning Theory to Psychological Disorders).