Teaching and Learning Issues in the Disciplines: Psychology
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The Higher Education Academy supported this project as part of its programme of research with learned societies and professional bodies mapping the current range of disciplinary and subject-specific issues in higher education teaching and learning. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and participants in the research not necessarily those of the HEA.

### Project information

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Learning and teaching issues in Psychology</th>
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### Part one – outcomes of focus groups (Max. word count: 5,000)

An analysis of the results of your focus groups. Use your moderator’s analysis of all focus groups as the basis for this section to provide a question by question summary of the responses provided by academics in your learned society/PSRB to the questions posed by the HEA (see the Moderator’s Guide) and resultant discussion.

Please note the dates, locations and numbers of attendees at each focus group and any particularly noteworthy details (e.g. were all members of one focus group senior managers, or all new to teaching?).

### Methods and focus groups

Table 1 summarises the composition of the four focus groups. Focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes, and were conducted according to the BPS code of ethical conduct. Participants provided informed consent, and all identifying information has been removed from this report.

Detailed notes and audio recordings were captured. A thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Italics and quotation marks signify quotations, and redacted information is represented by an ellipsis (…). Where discussants referred to levels other than the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the FHEQ level is inserted in square brackets.
Table 1: Information regarding focus group timing, location and composition

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of attendees</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 June 2015</td>
<td>London, ENGLAND</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Staff from a range of career stages. All from “new” universities (3 institutions).</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 June 2015</td>
<td>Wrexham, WALES</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Staff from a range of career stages, teaching focused and traditional academic. One post-92 and one “old” university.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 June 2015</td>
<td>Edinburgh, SCOTLAND</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Staff from a range of career stages, teaching focused and traditional academic. Combination of “old” and “new” universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 October 2015</td>
<td>Belfast, NORTHERN IRELAND</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Staff from a range of career stages, traditional academics and postgraduates from an “old” university.</td>
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**Question 1: Key resources**

This question was emailed to participants; nine individuals responded. Some discussion of this question also took place within the focus groups.

All respondents used text books to inform subject knowledge. These varied according to the topic being taught and the level of the students, and were traditional in type. Similar use was made of Psychology journal articles.

Engagement with pedagogical resources was variable. Some individuals engage with university websites, for searching for information on “how to” do something. Pedagogic literature cited included generic journals and subject-specific journals (e.g. Psychology Teaching Review, Psychology Learning and Teaching). Electronic databases of journals were used to access these. Occasional use was made of subject-specific pedagogical books (Upton and Trapp, 2010).

Multimedia resources were useful, particularly YouTube, TED talks and topic-specific websites.

Institutional material was not used to support teaching; respondents reported creating their own materials to be hosted on their virtual learning environment (VLE). Links to external websites and multimedia content were often included here for students’ independent study.

One individual was very engaged with technology-enhanced learning, and used Aropa, Second Life and Xerte Online Toolkits. Other forms of technology, including Peer Wise, Socrative and clickers, and Psychology-specific packages such as E-Prime and SPSS were used by some.

The BPS website was used for careers and ethical information. The *Psychologist* magazine was valued. Psychology-specific HEA resources relating to employability, teaching research methods and psychological literacy were useful. For colleagues teaching Counselling, the British Association for Counselling Psychology (BACP) website was useful. The former HEA journal, Psychology Learning and Teaching (PLAT), was recognised as useful for providing psychology-specific insight into pedagogic research.
A number of events were useful, including the HEA’s postgraduates who teach (PGwT) Psychology workshops, and BPS DART-P’s workshops and symposia. Events and online courses provided by QAA, JISC, ALT and Oxford Brookes University were mentioned.

Psychology-specific resources in general were valued considerably more than generic resources, both with regard to publications and training events:

“There is a step of translation that you don’t have to do when it is psychology, so if you go to a CPD thing and it is someone from Engineering, you have to translate what they are describing about their experience and what they have done and think ‘Well, I’m not assessing that, but I was assessing something else – how can I do that?’, whereas with psychology you go ‘Oh yeah, that’s what I do’, and that step of translation doesn’t have to happen, because that takes effort and time, and it is not always clear what the translation is.”

**Question 2: Learning and teaching challenges in Psychology**

This topic was explored in depth by all four focus groups, and ideas related to eight themes. The themes will be dealt with as follows:

- a) Generic (marketisation) issues impacting upon Psychology;
- b) Teaching methods and innovative pedagogies;
- c) Technology-enhanced learning;
- d) Assessment, skills and knowledge;
- e) Professionalisation, teaching and research;
- f) Diversity of students and transition;
- g) Nature of Psychology;
- h) Nation-specific issues.

**a) Generic issues (marketisation) impacting upon Psychology**

The marketisation of higher education provides important context for the teaching and learning of Psychology in the UK. Psychology is a popular subject, recruits large numbers, and is a useful subject for revenue generation. A consequence of this was very large cohort sizes:

“Our biggest lecture theatre now does not accommodate the number of students.”

“Our numbers have doubled in ten years but then our facilities haven’t. The number of cubicles hasn’t doubled, and the quality of the experience per student can’t be as good.”

“At a 400 class, how do you make it more interactive?”

Solutions included repeating lectures, creating workload for teachers, and using video-linked overflow rooms, negatively impacting on the student experience. PGwT and advanced level undergraduates can support teaching to cope with large numbers, and innovative teaching methods can create interactive experiences. The BPS accreditation requirement for a 20:1 student:staff ratio protects staffing numbers. Physical resources are stretched:

“It has a very strong tradition of learning by practical work…that has implications in terms of resources –
physical resources and also staffing resource in having technicians, and having research spaces that students can go in and use, computer labs, cubicles.”

Workload allocation systems fail to recognise the time taken to teach well:

“At our college we do an hour to prepare a lecture – and all you can do with that is find the core of the subject…the university have no concept of the work involved in really making a well-structured interesting lecture.”

Specialist technical staff with Psychology-specific skills and knowledge were an important resource, and this was threatened in many institutions with increasing centralisation of technical staff.

Consumer behaviour of students was problematic at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Discussants cited challenges of contact hours in Key Information Set (KIS) data, and tension around student engagement. Likewise, participants remarked that the National Student Survey (NSS) increases consumer-focus, emphasising satisfaction over learning:

“I think the thing that is universal is the focus on NSS which is driven by student feedback and comments…It means everyone is terrified of displeasing students, and the customer or the client / provider relationship that is being advertised all the time in documentaries about Universities and other things, has shifted from the focus on delivering a good quality degree that you believe in to satisfying the customer, whatever that means, and that seems to be interpreted as we are having to change to make sure we are giving the students feedback and comments, or that is going to affect our rankings in the Guardian league table, so the emphasis and motivation has become customer satisfaction rather than good quality programmes. It is very difficult to feel that you are not being pushed to whatever it takes to make sure that your scores are good.”

“I always equate myself to a personal trainer. You are going to pay me a hell of a lot an hour, and I am going to make you suffer for it, in the nicest possible way. I am going to make you engage.”

b) Teaching methods and innovative pedagogies

Traditionally, Psychology is taught using lectures, practical classes and seminars:

“We put them in a lecture theatre and expect them to look at something which is effectively fairly boring, one person talking.”

“There was a bunch of people saying that lectures are dead, and flipped classrooms and small group teaching…you are inspired by a lecture.”

Participants suggested that lack of engagement with lectures might be due to exposure to fast-paced media, thus traditional methods of teaching fail to capture attention:

“They are on Facebook, or they are doing things like that, everything is little bite-sized things and lots of stuff going on…they are media saturated!”

“We don’t get great attendance at lectures, students vote with their feet. Why listen to the lecture if I can download something on YouTube that is three minutes long that I know will be the exam question?”

It was suggested that students and academics have different perceptions of lectures:
“For them the lecture is about delivering information…from a lecturer’s point of view is to attempt to inspire and interest students.”

“The lecture is the core experience here…the actual expert in this.”

Some discussants had introduced interaction into lectures. There was a reported shift in the role of the tutor, from “font of all knowledge, to facilitator”.

Small group class sizes varied, with small groups between 12 to 50 students. Larger group sizes make practical and interactive work challenging:

“I suppose with 160 students, it is quite hard to put them in twos and threes and have a kind of role play. It is just going to take forever. We do have quite a lot of innovation at year three modules where the module is smaller where all sorts of interesting things go on, but yes that is with 17 or 20 students, or 10 maybe. [Tutor] also does things in his module with 120 students, and they do unexpected things! Most of the time it is difficult to do things with a larger group, and so in the first year if we wanted to do more interactive things, then we have to factor in how to do this.”

Discussants reported a growing pressure from universities for innovation:

“We are under pressure to move to inverted classrooms where the students prepare beforehand and come to the lecture…they do something engaging.”

Innovation was mostly thought to improve teaching. It enhanced student engagement, helped with hard-to-teach topics, was inclusive, helped with teaching large groups, incorporated technologies, and was rewarding for teachers:

“They are so engaged…it is actually much more motivating for them.”

“The students who don’t normally do very well are given every chance to get a high grade.”

“It is much more interesting for me not going in there and thinking ‘I have to deliver all this material in this amount of time, or I’m not doing my job.’”

Innovative teaching was considered work heavy and resource intensive:

“…trying to get those ingenious ways of teaching, I find it really difficult to get that spare time to sit down…so then to go back and reflect on how we can make research methods more exciting.”

“If you’re writing a module in just a few weeks, you don’t look at the evidence of what works in the Psychology learning and teaching literature”.

Some delegates expressed anxieties about moving away from traditional teaching methods:

“I don’t think I could get through the quantity of stuff that I need to talk about if I don’t do a lecture. And largely a lecture is me standing and talking about it because I know what it is all about. If I ask them, they won’t know! And I don’t trust them to do the work beforehand.”

Several participants used flipped classrooms and other innovations. One reported that Psychology was a “beacon of best practice”; another that Psychology underpins most pedagogy. Some
discussants are active pedagogical researchers, and most use pedagogic literature:

“I feel like Psychology has got a responsibility to become a bit more engaged with how we actually teach students.”

“I think Psychologists are a bit ahead of the game, and it may sound like blowing our own trumpet, but my experience of going along to CPD courses is that they spend a lot of time on quite basic stuff, which as Psychologists we already know about the importance of using visual aids, or the importance of interacting with people in a particular way, and that might be really useful information if that is not your discipline and most of the time you are in a lab or whatever, but for us it seems like we already know that, so give us more information and more innovative stuff.”

A need to balance an evidence base for teaching with potential risks associated with pedagogic research and innovative teaching was recognised by some participants:

“Evidence is key, because you can be told twenty different innovative ways to teach, but we really need to see which one is the most effective in terms of Psychology.”

“It is all risky, really. These students are with you for such a short period of time that if you want to just try something when you are in a module, it doesn’t work – the feedback from the students is terrible, and then you realise you’ve screwed up this year, and you can’t experiment ethically.

“We are an evidence based discipline, and it seems ridiculous that we shouldn’t have an evidence-based teaching approach.”

c) Technology-enhanced learning

There was recognition that technology is important in teaching. Students expect technology based on pre-tertiary experiences:

“The students we are getting now…have had nothing but technology.”

Some discussants felt that their skills were not sufficient to integrate technology into their teaching:

“I don’t like it because I am a bit of a technophobe! I don’t use any kind of social media or anything. Whatever time I have to spend on the computer at work is torture enough for me. Beyond that, I refuse to look at screens, so it doesn’t enthuse me to any extent, but I am not blinkered about the fact that my enthusiasm is irrelevant. It is just something that we have to do.”

The democratisation of knowledge and students’ access to technology has implications for teaching:

“They use technology in a much more sophisticated way in schools…what is the point of lecturing when someone can just stick the search terms into Google...It does make us revisit what we do.”

Distinctions between distance- and face-to-face learning are blurring; techniques used for distance learning benefit students on face-to-face courses. Questions were asked about the extent to which technology-enhanced learning might replace traditional teaching. Lecture recordings were frequently raised:

“I don’t know where it will take us in terms of how virtual, how non-campus our students can potentially go. If we are recording every lecture, then is there a principle that students don’t come into lectures, and
what does that mean for the actual university culture?”

Others were less concerned, and felt that the majority of face-to-face students did not engage with lecture recordings, although they were inclusive:

“Or they just listen to the podcast of the lecture when it suits them.”
“We thought they were doing that, but we have looked at it, and they are not doing that.”

Further concern related to technology-enhanced learning being used alongside traditional teaching methods:

“We are the stage where we effectively have to do an online course and still give lectures.”
“We are maybe moving into taking part away and replacing it with just another version of something else, but we have to be careful not to keep adding one more thing on.”

Some discussants also felt that using technology in lectures could be distracting and disruptive. One participant described observing a colleague initiating a live Twitter chat during a lecture:

“I thought it was really interesting, but at the same time I think here, you would get so put off by it if that many of them were doing it.”
“If you were in a traditional lecture setting, just standing there in a theatre, then I think that is off-putting. I would find it incredibly annoying…that setting is not designed for that kind of interaction or teaching.”

Some discussion focused on whether universities should use MOOCs to help to deliver the online component of courses; these were recognised as being “glossy” but not facilitating delivery of local “flavour” (teaching about research conducted by students’ own lecturers).

Some discussants use online discussion forums; some find they generate interaction while others find them frustrating, with little student engagement. All participants used a VLE, linking to external resources, which engage students and are good for “breaking up” content:

“I like technology. I like the video clips, those sorts of things. I like the forums where you can see something interesting and put it up and then you get the students…they didn’t care about eyesight or colour perception until they saw ‘The Dress’, and then they wanted to know what was happening.”

There was a recognition from some participants that technology could be a pedagogic tool, which academics should work with, to develop it to be useful, but that it should not be the driving force determining how teaching was delivered:

“Instead of resisting it, we should just be creating the tools we want, I think. And if they thought it included reading then we should be giving them the tools to access reading the way we want them to be...We don’t do that, actually – what we do is just go ‘Well, this doesn’t meet our criteria’ and we start complaining that nothing fits what we want, and we never actually decide that we should be empowered enough to go ‘We can actually move this forward’.”

“We are slowly moving towards a trend where we can choose to engage with the students in a way that they like. We can also choose to push them into ways that they are not familiar with and they are not used to, which includes turning up for lectures, and includes doing group work, and those things in ten years’ time will probably be regarded as innovative by the students because they are not familiar with them! But that is the evolution – it is not a model of everything being done through technology. I think it is
a model of us deciding what works as a tool, and that also has some individual element to it.”

Many used Turnitin for online marking, with mixed reception:

“I can’t mark on screen. And for dissertations it doesn’t work, because you get ten pages in and you have to keep scrolling back through.”

“The iPad is great. We use Turnitin. We link it to Blackboard and it is so much faster…We have really good rubrics…we have Quick Marks where you can just drag it …when you have got 300 it is overwhelming to write the same thing again…it is a lot of feedback the student gets…It can be mobile.”

Many students have access to mobile technology, and some institutions provided iPads to their students. Technology facilitates learning for large groups, and is useful for communicating with students, although it could lead to misunderstandings if not used with caution.

Some delegates identified barriers to using technology-enhanced learning:

“There is a definite generation gap with teaching as you have been taught. There is a lot more academic staff who are not sufficiently knowledgeable, or who think they are but are actually out of date…I have to be very cautious here, because I don’t want to look like an old fuddy-duddy by trying to engage with a world that isn’t mine.”

“There is some genuine superstition amongst academic staff that this is not the way to improve educational standards, that this trivialises things…we should be teaching students how to think for themselves, how to engage with the material, not how to engage with technology.”

Cyberpsychology was considered a useful topic for introducing students to the psychology of technology use, but is not taught universally.

d) Assessment, skills and knowledge

Psychology at undergraduate level is typically assessed through essays, exams and laboratory reports; practical and competence-based assessments are introduced at postgraduate level. A shift towards “authentic assessment” methods, applied psychology, and assessing skills alongside knowledge was identified:

“We do a lot more debates and interviews, and there are lots more things they do on a practical level.”

“The kind of assessments that have some kind of validity in the workplace.”

There was some tension around the academic credibility of authentic assessments, whether BPS accreditation processes would recognise them:

“Technically I think people will struggle with this being Psychology content. It is about practice, and dealing with people undertaking an intervention.”

“It is just an appropriate assessment of whatever they are being taught, but there could be lots of different ways of doing that, and it is just that we seem to be constrained in that you have got to have a memory test at some point, and in fact 50% of the course is really a memory test…but how many of us actually have to rely on memory? The fact you are sitting in front of a computer and Google comes up – you get an answer, and if we can teach them how to look through the various answers you can get to work out which
is the most likely to be correct, then I am not sure that the memory test is the right tool. It is a part of it, but not the whole part of it.”

Exams can be made more authentic, and people agreed that a combination of traditional and applied assessments was necessary. Some participants had concerns about over-assessing students. Much discussion recognised a tension between teaching knowledge and teaching skills:

“It is not about content and discipline anymore…It’s about the skills…You can get all the knowledge on Google…We need to teach people how to do things.”

“Teaching skills at the level of student numbers we are talking about is much harder than teaching knowledge.”

However, content was thought to contextualise skill development:

“You don’t teach them how to do a PowerPoint without any content…how to use SPSS without data – so you are always teaching in some context.”

Skills development prepared students for employability and/or preparation for further study. Authentic assessment facilitates employability, while traditional assessment supports postgraduate progression:

“I don’t think as a discipline…that we are quite there yet with really robust psychologists going out into the community knowing their stuff without having to be hand-held.”

“Being more creative within assessments, and is that moving us away from a more academic model? What does that do to the graduates who go out as well?”

A frequent concern was that students are fixated on grades; this limited opportunities for them to “learn by making mistakes”. This was explained by consumerisation and previous schooling:

“The focus of the students is on the grade outcome, not on what I am learning…There is a drive towards satisfying that through the NSS in particular, and through the universities policies to enhance the student experience with better feedback and more feedback, quicker feedback, more frequent feedback…but if you actually say to students you can come and pick up their feedback, they don’t! If they’ve got the grades, they’re quite happy.”

“…When you were talking about allowing them to make mistakes. I think that is really important… go and do it, even if you think you are going to make a right mess of it, that’s fine…they are scared of just going and giving something a bash…and then using that as a learning experience.”

Engagement with research was recognised as important especially for students not progressing into professional areas of Psychology after graduation. The final year project (dissertation) underpins this:

“Research is very important, and the dissertation gives you the entire experience.”

e) Professionalisation, teaching and research

Higher education teaching qualifications were valued, and participants were committed to teaching as a professional activity. However, there is tension between the research/teaching activities of
academic staff:

“There has been a HEA report released today…one of the recommendations…is that students actually expect lecturers to be able to teach rather than so much focus on their research…there is all the preparation for REF making sure you get your publications out, then you have the results from surveys and whatever else, and students want you to be able to teach, and that balance never happens.”

Some participants self-identified as either research or teaching focused, and some institutions have created two career “tracks”:

“Not everybody, but a lot of people who are very very good at research don’t necessarily translate to very good teachers, and there are some very good teachers who don’t have the time to be very good researchers. It is not that they don’t have the ability. So it is difficult to get that balance between researcher and teacher.”

Discussants were concerned teaching-track careers were less valued, and questioned the extent to which it was appropriate to teach students how to do research if they were not engaged in research:

“I understand that our teaching and scholarship staff should teach more, but they are teaching research groups without a lab…no active research and yet they are taking more students to do research.”

Research-focused staff and teaching-focused staff were perceived to have different priorities with regard to skills or knowledge (section 2d):

“I think with the…teaching track, do you want to have these people say well these are the kind of skills you get, but they don’t really know very much, and then with the research people, they know that but you don’t really go to them for a skill – that’s what I’m nervous about.”

Research-informed teaching was discussed at length:

“I think it is important ideally for the student to be taught by someone who is engaged in research as well.”

“The institution I am in…value what I do, they value the research into how we teach…conferences, teacher learning journals, there are some really good teaching of Psychology journals.”

Participants disagreed on whether recruitment of academics driven by the REF had impacted on learning and teaching. They acknowledged recruitment of research-active staff to improve institutional performance, and this sometimes “biased” coverage of Psychology:

“They want to attract someone who can take care of the research profile, typically we don’t change our recruitment because that would be very short-term. You are employing that person forever, and if they are a lousy teacher then they are not making a contribution.”

“The area we appointed in was cognitive neuroscience, for the reason that the impact factors are higher.”

“The pressure is still to appoint the people who are publishing in the biggest journals, impact, articles, and those aren’t the social psychologists by and large.”

The BPS accreditation criteria were appreciated here, ensuring that all elements of the core
Discussants were concerned that researchers should be appropriately developed as teachers, although some skills were shared:

“They were appointed on the basis of their research…there is admin, there is teaching, and everything else. They go along to the PG Cert…They get there, but it takes a lot longer.”

“I would think that effective researchers and effective teachers need to have very good interpersonal skills and personal and professional skills to get on as well as they have got on, so they should have all that.”

The pressures for excellence in teaching and research were particularly strong for early career staff and PGwT:

“There was an article about pressure on ECRs to publish the next thing, but…you are expected to be this all singing, all dancing academic. Not only am I meant to be this expert teacher, and do the PG Cert…but also a good researcher.”

PGwT were thought to offer good support and teaching to students:

“Our PhD students are a very good resource for study skills. There are a few of them where the students don’t even come to us any more – they just go to them because they feel more comfortable with them.”

The need to support and train PGwT for these sorts of roles was discussed:

“They have got to really make sure they protect themselves, otherwise the students would suck them dry almost. They need to manage their time, not answering constant emails, and they can’t be friends.”

“We set it up like a family structure, so completely separate to their PhD supervisor who may have a vested interest. We have our PhD students linked to a member of the teaching team as their advisor.”

There were some concerns about whether fee-paying undergraduates were short-changed if they were taught by PGwT, but generally this was considered acceptable.

f) Diversity of students and transition

Some students entering Psychology degrees were thought ill prepared:

“We’ve got a certain type of student who, well they don’t read well, and they’re not ready for their degree…when they come to us the students are not necessarily prepared for what we expect them to do – go away, read the chapter, read the paper…There has got to be adjustment from both sides.”

Numerous skills were mentioned in this context: reading, independence, academic writing, laboratory report writing, information technology (IT), numeracy, note taking and critical thinking. Students (particularly “non-traditional students” and international students for whom English is not a first language) can require extra support with skills development:

“A lot of our students aren’t young people. There is widening participation, students who come in through Access…their IT skills are very poor.”
“It is not straightforward to teach when a large proportion of the class don’t really have English as a first language… and it is tricky marking an essay where the level of English is not terribly high.”

Students’ preconceptions about the nature of learning and about Psychology can be challenging. These were linked to pre-tertiary education, and whether students studied Psychology before starting their degree:

“Psychology is so broad, it has so many different areas within it, and the students are just not aware of that, they come in with preconceived notions.”

“It is a hard science… that surprises them a lot.”

“I think that a lot of students perhaps either have a preconception of what Psychology is going to include, which does not include everything that we will, or they do not have a preconception but they are still surprised about what is taught or presented.”

Discussants questioned the subject knowledge of pre-tertiary Psychology teachers. This was thought sometimes to influence students’ understanding of Psychology, particularly around its scientific and research content, although good practice was also recognised:

“They didn’t believe Psychology was a science from what they had been taught at A level, because they had been taught by teachers from other disciplines who haven’t got Psychology backgrounds.”

There was a perception that students start degrees and postgraduate qualifications in order to be employable, and are less engaged with the learning process:

“For many of them, it is an enforced transition. They feel they have to go to university to get a degree, and once they get to the end of a degree they realise that it is not making them competitive because everyone has got one… there isn’t that same level of dedication because they didn’t really choose to do this.”

Delegates were aware that students are diverse, and that they tended to make comparisons with themselves as students:

“I have to keep reminding myself that the world is not comprised of me, and that there are all different kinds of people.”

“I think it is also some something of a disjuncture between the sorts of people that the staff are and the sorts of people that the students generally are.”

Different student approaches to learning were also noted:

“You’ve got the top end, the ones that really get it… they are doing all the extra reading and being proper students, and others that you know are trying to fit their dissertation into four weeks.”

Several participants talked about students being strategic, not recognising the value of engagement for the sake of learning:

“A lot of them are very busy and have part-time jobs to support their studies, and so if something doesn’t bear credit, they won’t do it.”

Psychology recruits students who have never studied the subject, as well as high performing pre-
tertiary Psychology students. There is massive heterogeneity amongst pre-tertiary curricula. Thus some students in FHEQ level 4 repeat content while others are new to it:

“We have two groups of students…the students who have perhaps come through Access, the non-traditional student, and then you will have the A level students…how do you manage that?”

Psychology programmes also offer modules to non-Psychology students, which affects learning and assessment tasks:

“There is a Health Psychology module that is taught with Complimentary Medicine students, and they just come from a completely different perspective, so there we do…weaker type of assessments, such as quizzes.”

Another discipline-specific challenge arises within conversion courses intended to facilitate entry to professional Psychology training:

“They could come from basically anywhere, and have a degree in anything…and then try to get them in a nine month period to do all the learning…and a dissertation. It was bonkers!”

g) Nature of Psychology

Psychology content has evolved. There is increased emphasis on neuroscience, driven in part by the REF. However, other parts of the traditional Psychology curriculum are changing. Changes to the BPS accreditation criteria in 2012 enabled more integration of topics, leading some departments to redesign curricula. Participants claimed that this facilitated development of “unique selling points” (USPs) based on available research expertise. They welcomed the protection of core areas:

“I am a social psychologist, and I am quite sure that social psychology would have withered and died if it had not been for the BPS…and I don’t think in the long run that benefits Psychology.”

The ability for departments to offer USPs, and the need to cover less well represented parts of the discipline, arose from discussion of Psychology as a heterogeneous discipline:

“I think the nature of the discipline – I don’t know why they call it a discipline really…what appeals to me about Psychology is that there is something there for everyone, so that you can be the neuroscientist, you can be a social constructionist.”

Research methods and statistics underpin Psychology as a science, and develop student problem-solving skills. Practical work was seen as making Psychology distinctive. Some discussants thought advanced statistics were increasingly important:

“Big data has certainly got more and more important…and students are going to have to become more interested and proficient in statistics. Probably more large factor analysis and regression models rather than traditional ANOVAs.”

There was concern that high-level statistics would reduce the popularity of Psychology and a perceived need for students to understand why they do statistics, not just to know how to do them and use SPSS. Recent events in psychological research led some to believe that statistics were becoming less relevant:
“I think a big shift is happening, and will continue to happen, with displeasure with inferential statistics and looking for alternatives to key values and standard ways of testing…I think the discipline is going to change there. I don’t know whether the teaching will catch up, and I worry about that…Because if some of our students are then going to become researchers…then there is going to have to be a re-tooling going on, and if it is true, and there is a strong argument that the stats that we teach don’t work the way they are built to work, then we are teaching false knowledge. We are teaching this as a standard which doesn’t hold up, and I think this is an issue. Should you be teaching something that when you really look at the nuts and bolts actually doesn’t work?”

“Get rid of hypothesis testing, abandon traditional statistics because they don’t work, and then demonstrate it.”

While much of the discussion about research methods focused on quantitative methods and statistics, it was also recognised that qualitative methods formed an important part of Psychology:

“There are aspects of Psychology which are qualitative…and there is a strong constituency that wants to select students on the basis of having done at school things like maths and physics.”

Concern about research methods reflected a need to prepare students for their final year project:

“If students have to do a final year dissertation still, then there still needs to be some scaffolding on the way there, and a traditional way of writing lab reports.”

Psychology was perceived as intrinsically interesting, because it deals with many real-life issues, hence its popularity.

“There is something magical about Psychology in some way. For me, I love the discipline because there is something in there for everyone.”

The evolution of Psychology may be influenced by the media. Discussants were unimpressed with “popular psychology”, but were responding to student demands for topics like mindfulness. The contrast between these topics and the traditionally scientific content of Psychology was challenging:

“A bit of a split, because you have this very evidence-based neuroscience side of it, but then you also have the more spiritual side of Psychology…it does have that feel of being not the same kind of science as scanning people’s brains.”

Participants reported demand for a more applied focus within the curriculum, incorporating community engagement. This adds a different sort of practical component to Psychology:

“I don’t feel the need for a big investment in lab stuff in our school. I can see for some elements of research and focus and BPS core modules, the way forward is to be looking out of the gate and getting people into the community.”

“Psychology has a role in everything that happens, from us and in the world. There is nothing in the school that is being taught in relation to the big issues, so situations in the Middle East, of hunger, of over population – there is a huge range of these massive global issues that are going on that most fundamentally involve people, and we do not have the ability as yet to try to put Psychology in those situations…while it is important to focus on the individual, it is not really giving us the opportunity to raise
the fact that it is a big influential subject that is important to society as a whole, and that is something that
is just not in the curriculum and…I think that is amiss generally.”

Some programmes are successfully implementing this, while others perceive it as more challenging:

“Engagement with communities, organisations and business has to be a way forward. How Psychology
does that is an interesting one…in mainstream psychology, how do we develop what we are terming civic
engagement…?”

“How you develop modules that can engage 300 into the communities is more of a bigger challenge.”

Participants contextualised this in terms of employability and psychological literacy:

“Psychology is an applied discipline. It is going back to employability…it is about doing research and about
teaching students in a way that they can also develop to be psychologically literate citizens.”

Some argued that applied Psychology enabled the teaching of core topics in an integrated way:

“I said it is the most applied module you could have because it covers everything. It brings in health, social,
cognitive, all of that.”

A further challenge related to the teaching of sensitive topics:

“I would argue that it should be powerful, and that it is either powerful because it is fun and entertaining
and they are really engaged and enjoying it, or it is powerful because it is so emotive.”

This can create challenges around creating an appropriate atmosphere:

“One of the arguments we had when we were doing some PGCE training was that teaching should be
fun…if you are talking about death and dying, or psychopathology or something, you don’t want people
laughing…You don’t make it fun, and you do make them cry, and that is when you know you have done
well.”

Some Psychology students have experienced difficult topics in the curriculum, and thus are
vulnerable. This requires a careful approach from tutors, and caution regarding disclosure of
personal information:

“You talk about alcoholism and you talk about the genetic influence, and then there is somebody whose
father is an alcoholic, and they think ‘Oh, does it mean I’m going to become an alcoholic?’…how do you
respond to it accurately without making them feel worse?”

Participants felt that in some disciplines staff were trained and supported to manage this, but that
this was not the case in Psychology:

“When we touch on PTSD, we will have students come to our offices afterwards…and tell us their life
story – I had four of my students come in…One was pregnant and didn’t want to be, one was suicidal…I
had got nobody to offload to.”

Tutors recognised the need for boundaries, and to refer to central support services, but:

“We don’t offer counselling ourselves, we refer them to the central university counselling services, but it
doesn’t get over the fact that sometimes they just tell you these things.”

“We have had to phone ambulances for students before because there has been no support, and certainly here we do attract some very vulnerable students, but it is scary at times.”

Disclosures may be more frequent in Psychology than other disciplines because students expect the tutor to be an expert in mental health issues:

“If they were doing Computer Science, and their computer went down at home, they would come in…Psychology is particularly problematic because of the emotional element and the psychological element.”

h) Nation-specific issues

(i) Wales

In Wales, concerns related to teaching Psychology in the medium of Welsh. Psychology contains substantial technical terminology, which does not translate easily. A Welsh Psychology dictionary exists, but is dated, and short. There are challenges for graduates working with clients in Welsh, as they lack therapeutic vocabulary.

Participants described a shortage of Welsh-language resources, and issues around bi-lingualism:

“We have got a lot of students where Welsh is their first language and English is their second language. They can’t access the same resources…you have students who for example will come from an English-speaking family, they have been educated in a Welsh-language school, and then come into higher education, so they don’t feel their Welsh is strong enough to study in Welsh, but then struggle to study in English as well as they haven’t got the vocabulary…”

“I think they really struggle. Where they really enjoy the use of Welsh is in seminar and discussion groups…we have students who choose to do that through the medium of Welsh, but when it comes to assessments they choose to submit them through the medium of English...And we have lecturers who are the same, and can do colloquial chatting in Welsh but actually aren’t confident with their Welsh enough to be able to deliver a lecture or a formal teaching environment.”

Linking curriculum to the Welsh context was discussed; it was difficult to identify nation-specific examples of Psychology to include in teaching.

The ongoing review of higher education in North Wales was impacting upon student recruitment, student confidence in the sector, and staff morale.

(ii) Scotland

Scotland-specific issues oriented around the four-year degree. The first two years of the degree (“pre-Honours”) [FHEQ levels 3 and 4] are studied by some students who do not intend to continue their studies in Psychology. This has consequences for their understanding of the nature of the subject and their ability to deal with some topics, particularly elements of the curriculum relating to “hard science”, research methods and statistics. Some institutions have adapted the curriculum, so that these components are not studied in depth until FHEQ levels 5 and 6, which is not ideal for students who continue in Psychology, and leaves exiting students with an incomplete picture of Psychology:
"We’ve got scanners now in the back garden...yet we don’t teach much neuroscience until they hit level 3 [FHEQ level 5] and they are like ‘Wow, where did this come from?’"

A further problem arises in FHEQ levels 4 and 5, when students join the course with advanced standing, from diverse prior learning experiences. Tutors are teaching students with different knowledge and skills, and discipline-specific support is required:

“Students who come in from HE sometimes to level two or level three [FHEQ levels 4 and 5] Psychology programmes, so the skills side of things...we have to provide a lot of support...we have now got discipline-specific centres, which work really well.”

(iii) Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, differences in educational policy were seen to have restricted the number of A level subjects that were usually studied by students prior to entering university. This meant that the majority of students had only three A levels. For students who had been educated within Northern Ireland, this almost never included A level Psychology, because the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment does not cover Psychology. This had implications with regard to transitions, as described under question 2 (f) above, in that a majority of students were studying Psychology with no experience of the subject from their pre-tertiary schooling, and misconceptions about the nature of the discipline were extremely common. There were also some suggestions that students in Northern Ireland were more likely to progress to a Psychology degree from humanities subjects, rather than sciences, than was thought to be the case in the other UK nations, which had implications for students’ preparation for university study in the discipline:

“Well, I think we probably get a lot, I don’t know the actual numbers, but I suspect we get a larger proportion of students apply who have RE for example as an A Level than you would get.”

“Or...broadly speaking Humanities-type subjects...I don’t know the actual figure, but certainly when you look at the Institute record for PSR, it looks like a lot of what we are taking in is non-Science subjects, and that may explain why Perception, Neuroscience, Statistics and so on are off-putting just because of the familiarity with these things.”

“Also, a lot of schools here don’t offer Psychology. My school didn’t offer Psychology.”

There was also a perception that funding per student was less in Northern Ireland than in the other UK nations, and that this was a challenging context within which to develop good teaching.

“We are under-funded compared to all other areas of the UK, and that is not just in relation to the fact that Scotland has no fees, but the government makes up the rest of the fee, and here they don’t, so we are £1,000 or £2,000 down on the money each student brings in to the University compared to the rest of the UK, which is a real problem for us.”

Question 3: Evolution of Psychology teaching

To a large extent, coverage of this topic was addressed under question 2. In terms of curriculum, there is increased emphasis on neuroscience, and on applications of Psychology, particularly with the expansion of new topics such as mindfulness.

Employability is a growing concern:
“I think the global push for education for jobs rather than education for life is going to have a huge impact in Psychology, because Psychology isn’t the kind of degree that automatically gets you into a job at the end of it.”

In addition, employment for graduates is changing:

“What do psychologists do? That may very well change over time, particularly with the new moves towards psychological therapies as the NHS can’t cope, and we start seeing a lot more CBT, mindfulness…we need to reflect that in our teaching.”

To some extent, it was recognised that the Psychology curriculum itself could be applied better to enhancing student employability:

“I am still surprised how little they see the relevance of Psychology to non-Psychology vocations. Psychology means you acquire skills like data managing stuff, presentation, and we do lots of different transferrable skills, and obviously the content of Psychology is about understanding people and behaviour and different types of groups and so on, and we have to spend a lot of time trying to convince them that they can sell these skills to employers and market themselves that way, because they don’t see that aspect of it. It is a shame, because they really could be selling Psychology as a unique selling point.”

Psychology is also moving towards more a focus on community work, and developing assessment for these sorts of projects with large cohorts was needed.

Further challenges were anticipated with imminent changes to the pre-tertiary curricula (Highers and A levels), about which participants felt under-informed.

**Questions 4, 5 and 6: Gaps and possible support required**

Several key areas were raised as areas for support required for Psychology teaching.

A major issue was around training for staff to develop technical skills for technology-enhanced learning. Some staff were very confident with this, but others felt that they did not have the requisite skills or knowledge, or the time to develop them.

Likewise, time was needed for engagement with evidence-based teaching, and for developing and evaluating innovative teaching. Reflective practice is valued, but is challenging to fit around other workload commitments. Support was especially needed for developing innovative assessments, and some participants requested support for the development of authentic assessment, especially with regard to community engagement and applied Psychology. It was felt that use could be made of exemplar case studies of teaching practices and of assessments.

Some participants felt that there was a need for training for teaching research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and especially for advanced statistics and meta-analysis, where there may be gaps in staff expertise due to the relative newness of the topics in Psychology. Some participants suggested that a forum for discussing advanced methods teaching would be helpful. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods teaching would benefit from support to make them more engaging through continuing professional development (CPD) and resources.
There is an urgent need to address staff training and support with regard to teaching sensitive topics in Psychology. Participants would also value opportunities to improve their knowledge regarding employability in Psychology. Related to this, a further development need for participants focused on the new emphasis on developing student skills; some discussants noted that the academic role was now merging with that of a coach, and would value CPD to enhance their skills for working with students around personal development and skills improvement.

In Wales, support is required to develop Psychology teaching resources and Welsh-language support for higher education teachers, with a focus on psychological and therapeutic terminology. In Scotland, there may be a need for consideration of curriculum design, to address issues surrounding large cohorts and entrance with advanced standing. In Northern Ireland, issues relating to student transitions and particularly their understanding of the nature of Psychology are important, and thought could be given around how to address this.

Participants felt that they needed discipline-specific CPD and resources in the above areas, as this made it easier to apply examples within their own practice.

Good practice in other disciplines was discussed, and participants felt that they could usefully benefit from networking and conferencing opportunities to share practice.

Participants stressed that CPD needs to be affordable and accessible to enable them to engage.

A further issue related to the value placed upon teaching by the sector, where research was seen to be much more important, and the pressures upon staff to be excellent researchers as well as excellent teachers. There is scope for a redress of this balance within the sector, in all disciplines.

Part two — learned society / PSRB reflection and commentary (Max. word count: 3,000)

Please use the box below to respond to the following prompts:
Reflecting on the results contained in Part one, how does the learned society / PSRB respond? What particular feedback do you want to give to the HEA? Are your members’ views a surprise, if so in what ways? Or were the responses predicted and in line with previous experience? Are there particular contexts that help explain your focus group outcomes, perhaps particular restraints or requirements in your discipline that need explaining to a wider audience?

Context

Psychology in the UK is rarely taught within the compulsory education system, except where it appears within other subjects (such as Health and Social Care, Child Development). As such, most students have little exposure to the discipline until post-16.

Within the context of post-compulsory education, it is one of the most popular subjects studied at A level, where it is offered by four examination boards, with five different specifications. It can also be studied within the Scottish Highers qualifications, within Access to Higher Education Courses, and in the International Baccalaureate. The diversity of pre-tertiary curricula is broad, with different topics covered in different specifications. As such, entrance to undergraduate Psychology does not usually require study of Psychology at FHEQ level 3. Approximately 59% of Psychology
undergraduates have studied the subject prior to commencing their degree programme; the remainder have not. The number of students who have not studied Psychology at pre-tertiary level prior to starting a Psychology degree is higher in Northern Ireland.

At undergraduate level, the majority of UK Psychology departments offer programmes that are accredited by the BPS. Students studying an accredited undergraduate qualification must study the core areas of social psychology, developmental psychology, individual differences, biological psychology and cognitive psychology. They are also required to engage with Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology. In addition, they must engage with substantive research methods training (quantitative and qualitative), and in all curriculum areas they must demonstrate breadth, depth and progression. Students complete a substantive and independent piece of research in their final year. Subject to achieving a second class honours degree (2,2 or above) and passing their final year project, they are eligible for the Graduate Basis for Chartership (GBC). GBC is the Society’s recognition of students’ suitability for postgraduate training in professional Psychology, and is required by the majority of training providers. It is also possible to obtain GBC by taking an accredited conversion course.

The accreditation criteria that must be met by institutions, in addition to curriculum requirements, require providers to demonstrate that they are adequately resourced to provide a quality student learning experience within the discipline. This includes maintaining a student:staff ratio of 20:1, providing adequate, specialised teaching and learning spaces, and other resources. The accreditation criteria were extensively revised in 2012, to reflect an ‘accreditation through partnership’ approach. Resourcing requirements were not revised, but curriculum requirements were altered to allow more flexibility in the curriculum, including accrediting FHEQ level 4 delivery, removing a previous requirement for all the core areas to be independently and separately assessed (thus encouraging integration of different topics), and to encourage providers to develop employability, internationalisation and psychological literacy within the curriculum. Authentic assessment and applications of Psychology are also encouraged by the new criteria.

At postgraduate level, students may pursue professional training. Professional training is accredited by the BPS, which confers the status of Chartered Psychologist, and regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council, which leads to registration as a professional psychologist. Professional psychologists typically work in the fields of Clinical, Forensic, Educational, Sports and Exercise, Organisational or Occupational, or Counselling Psychology. Approximately 15% of Psychology graduates from undergraduate programmes follow this route, which is highly competitive.

Other Psychology graduates may enter employment directly, or progress to academic qualifications at Masters or Doctoral level, potentially leading into academic careers in Psychology (usually not accredited or regulated), or to a diverse range of careers outside the Psychology profession.

Psychology graduates are frequently employed within the health and social care sector, community projects, charities, education, prison service, human resources, and marketing, amongst others. Psychology equips graduates with a highly sought after and unique skill set, which includes skills typically found amongst science graduates (such as data analysis, scientific literacy, numeracy, IT, problem solving) alongside those more typically found in social sciences and humanities graduates (communication, interpersonal skills, diversity awareness, critical thinking). It also develops citizenship and ethical awareness.
Issues raised in focus groups

The majority of issues raised in the focus groups were consistent with our expectations.

Considerable work was done by the HEA regarding student transitions in Psychology (Hulme and De Wilde, 2015), and this topic has also been reported in the pedagogical literature (e.g. Kitching and Hulme, 2013; Rowley et al., 2008). Indeed, transition has been a frequent theme within the BPS publication, Psychology Teaching Review, for several years, and the focus group findings are largely consistent with this literature. The issue of the diversity of student entrance qualifications to undergraduate level is especially well recognised.

Likewise, the issues surrounding learning and teaching of statistics are well known, and have also been the subject of useful research by the HEA (Hodgen et al, 2014; Field, 2014). With regard to the teaching of qualitative research methods, this was previously addressed by the HEA (Teaching Qualitative Research Methods at Undergraduate Level special interest group, which became Teaching Qualitative Psychology in 2011). We understand that the resources and events hosted under this banner are no longer available. The BPS does have a Qualitative Methods in Psychology (QMiP) section, although this group has tended to focus on research, rather than educational practice.

Issues to do with curriculum and content of Psychology degrees are frequently picked up through our accreditation visits, which occur on a five year cycle for each accredited provider; we have recognised a move towards applied Psychology and neuroscience.

We have recently introduced an award for innovative programmes, and intend to disseminate the good practice captured through the application process through our website.

The need to develop skills as part of Psychology education falls neatly under the banner of psychological literacy (and the related concept, psychologically literate citizenship; Hulme, 2014), which have been at the forefront of the BPS agenda for Psychology education since the publication of a joint BPS/HEA/AHPD report on the Future of Undergraduate Psychology Education in the UK (Trapp et al., 2011). This report encouraged Psychology providers to diversify their curricula, placing increased emphasis on applications of Psychology to the real world, employing authentic assessment methods, embedding employability within the Psychology curriculum, and supporting internationalisation and the development of global citizenship. The more recent work of the HEA on psychological literacy (Mair et al. 2013; Watt, 2013) has provided a useful set of introductory resources for academics wishing to develop these aspects of their curriculum. Additions to these resources, including case studies, would be valuable. The BPS has also been supportive of these areas, having held a symposium on psychological literacy at our recent annual conference (shortly to be published, Hulme et al., in preparation), and we are looking forward to a forthcoming special issue of Psychology Teaching Review on this topic in the Autumn of 2015. Specifically with regard to employability in Psychology, the HEA guides on this topic have proven popular (Lantz, 2011; Reddy et al., 2013).

Teaching sensitive topics has always been problematic in Psychology, in part because a relatively high proportion (compared to other disciplines) of students are suffering from recognised disabilities and/or mental health problems (Craig and Zinkiewicz, 2010). In Counselling and Counselling Psychology training, tutors engage with personal development and counselling sessions to maintain their fitness to practice and help them to deal with sensitive issues raised by students. This is not the tradition within mainstream Psychology, where there has typically been more
emphasis on scientific, rather than personal, content, but this may be an issue that calls for further consideration given the recent changes to the nature of the discipline.

The BPS is keen to promote the integration of academic practice, incorporating both research and teaching, and indeed has a member network, the Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology (DART-P) devoted to supporting members in academic and teaching careers. DART-P also produce the BPS publication, Psychology Teaching Review, a twice-annual publication reporting pedagogical research in Psychology. DART-P also hold an annual CPD event for their members. In 2014, this focused on transitions and employability within Psychology; in 2015 the theme is research-informed teaching; and in 2016 the theme will be teaching research methods and statistics in Psychology. This demonstrates the Society’s commitment to supporting staff with key issues in learning and teaching, and indicates an awareness of the key themes that have arisen from the focus groups reported here.

It was perhaps a little surprising that some participants were not aware of the revised accreditation criteria (for example, there were references to the need to independently and separately assess core content, which is not longer expected), and we will consider ways of raising awareness of this in the coming months.

With regard to Psychology education in the four nations of the UK, developing policy on this is a priority of the BPS, and we are currently working on our policies for pre-tertiary education. The findings of the current report regarding higher education, relating specifically to Welsh language issues, are of interest and will be raised with the BPS Wales branch. We note the issues raised by the Scottish focus group. We expected that more discussion from Scotland might have focused on Curriculum for Excellence and its implications for transition into higher education Psychology programmes, and were surprised that this did not feature more largely. We will explore these matters with the BPS Scotland branch. The issues raised in Northern Ireland related largely to transitional issues, which are of general interest within Psychology; the additional challenges faced in Northern Ireland will be raised with the BPS Northern Ireland branch.

Part three – solutions and desirable outcomes (Max. word count: 2,000)

Please use the box below to respond to the following prompts:

Given the results of the focus groups, and in particular the gaps, challenges and future developments noted by the participants, what responses by your own body and / or the Higher Education Academy would best address the needs of your members and the discipline in an HE context?

Note where interventions have already been tried and may have not succeeded, or be work in progress. Also note where, in your opinion, the learned society / PSRB could take the lead in any desired action, where the HEA could take the lead, or where a joint solution is preferred, and why?

We recognise the HEA as the main influencer within the UK with regard to professionalisation of teaching in higher education, and as such, would like to request that the HEA could consider ways to enhance the esteem of teaching and pedagogical research/evidence-informed teaching within the sector. The HEA is well placed to support the sector generally, across disciplines and institution types, to re-evaluate the place of teaching in higher education, and to facilitate a culture shift towards improving its esteem.

As the HEA works across discipline areas, it would also be useful if consideration could be given to affordable, accessible interdisciplinary events and networking opportunities, to facilitate sharing
with regard to innovative teaching, technology-enhanced learning, and other key issues facing the sector more widely. HEA events would be particularly welcome if they were regional, provided support with topical themes, such as student engagement and innovative pedagogies, and encouraged cross-institutional sharing. (It is worth noting that JISC and QAA events were also appreciated in these contexts).

Several participants mentioned high quality resources that had been beneficial to their learning and teaching practice that were previously hosted on the HEA website, but seem not to be retrievable. Such resources included teaching qualitative Psychology, Psychology practical work, and embedding emotional intelligence and resilience into the Psychology curriculum (which could help to address the issue relating to teaching sensitive topics). It would be useful if those resources could be made accessible to the Psychology community via the HEA website.

Some participants expressed disappointment with regard to reduced discipline-specific support from the HEA. Previous HEA events relating to teaching qualitative Psychology and also PGwT were identified as having been valuable. We recognise the altered circumstances of the HEA since 2014, and acknowledge that re-instating discipline-specific CPD and events may not be feasible, but wished to highlight their perceived value based on the focus group discussions.

With regard to joint working between the HEA and the BPS, we are involved in discussions relating to possible dual-badging of our teaching route to CPsychol with FHEA, which, if progressed, will provide appropriate recognition of the value of Psychology teaching in the higher education sector. We are grateful to the HEA for providing additional funding to support an additional focus group in Northern Ireland, to explore Psychology-specific issues that may exist within that nation.

The BPS is committed to continuing to support academics, researchers and teachers in Psychology through the activities of DART-P, which works through provision of CPD events, symposia at the BPS annual conference, and the publication, Psychology Teaching Review. DART-P operates by committee, working on a voluntary basis, with a relatively small budget; there is relatively little scope for expansion of their activities, but there is no doubt that there ongoing work in these areas will continue to provide support for individuals who are involved in teaching Psychology within higher education. DART-P CPD events are open to both members and non-members of the Society, although members receive a discounted rate; the HEA might consider disseminating information about these events to the wider Psychology community. We would welcome any further ideas about how the HEA might support these activities.

Discussants suggested that the BPS could disseminate examples from accreditation visits, and this is something that we have discussed previously within the Society. There is a need for co-operation with accredited course teams, and any sharing will need to be with permission. The possibility of doing this can be explored further within the Society over the coming months.

A frequent suggestion from participants in the focus groups was the idea of a curated online repository of resources. At the moment, the BPS does not have the capacity to support this idea, and we are uncertain of whether it is feasible to progress this idea, although we do recognise its potential value.

With regard to issues raised by the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish focus groups, the BPS have branches in each of the devolved nations, and we will ensure that they are informed of the priorities identified by participants. Again, these branches work on a voluntary basis, so capacity to respond is finite; as such, if the HEA has further ideas on ways to support this work, we would
welcome them.

The urgent need for support with teaching sensitive topics is acknowledged, and this would seem to be an appropriate area for the BPS to progress. It may be possible to co-operate with the BACP on this matter, to obtain insights from Counselling. The BPS Division of Counselling Psychology may also have views on appropriate offers of CPD on this issue. There are possibilities for sharing practice across disciplines, which could be facilitated by the HEA.

Likewise, with regard to the academic perception of a potential need for development of coaching and mentoring skills, in response to the changing role of the academic, it is possible that the BPS Division of Coaching Psychology may be able to inform possible CPD strategies. Again, there are possibilities for sharing practice across disciplines, which could be facilitated by the HEA.

Psychology employability has been a concern for some years, and the HEA resources on this topic have been much appreciated. Lantz (2011) is perhaps in need of an update, particularly to reflect the opportunities arising due to NHS policies on Increased Access to Psychological Therapies; Reddy et al is a relatively recent publication. More generally, the HEA could do more to promote these resources to Psychology academics who are in need of support to develop their students’ employability.

The BPS was recognised as having an important role in promoting subject-specific CPD, and this is generally provided through our Learning Centre. Much of the CPD offered through the Learning Centre focuses on psychological practice, rather than education, and there may be scope to encourage additional offers around learning and teaching practice and also around developing content such as mindfulness.

Some participants wondered whether there should be a minimum requirement for academics in CPD engagement, as is seen in some other disciplines. It was felt that this would encourage institutional support for CPD, as well as facilitating engagement with both subject-specific and pedagogical up-dating and up-skilling. It should however be noted that not all Psychology academics are BPS members, and it is unlikely that imposing CPD quotas on academic members would be well received. We note however that the HEA is currently working on ‘remaining in good standing’, and this work may address participants’ intentions.

We noted from the focus groups that there are some aspects of confusion relating to our accreditation criteria (for example, some participants mentioned a need for independent and separate assessment of core areas). The BPS could communicate with members to raise awareness of the changes, and their implications for enhanced flexibility in the curriculum. However, since all accredited programmes will have either been reviewed since 2012, or will be so in the next three years, it is also likely that this issue will be resolved with the passing of time.
References


The Questions

The following information was provided to the BPS by the HEA, to guide the design and management of the focus groups. The semi-structured schedule as laid out here was followed, with the addition of a single question, at the end of the session: ‘Can you tell us about any nation-specific issues that you face relating to learning and teaching in psychology?’

The following questions should be used in each focus group.

Question 1 is to be used in the form of a pre-task for the focus group members. It should be sent, along with a form for collecting the responses, to the focus group participants at least a week before the focus group, by the PSRB / learned society. Responses should be collected by the moderator at the start of the focus group and should be the starting point for the discussion.

1 What are the key resources you use in your own teaching?
   • For subject knowledge/skills/pedagogy
   • Include books, text books, journals, websites, databases, other
   • Your institution’s own material
   • Information from sector-owned or based organisations such as Learned Society/PSRB/subject association, Higher Education Academy, other organisation
   • Events and services (conferences, seminars, webinars) online courses, databases, networks

   For the foregoing, please identify, which are free and which paid for, and be specific and detailed where possible, indicating titles of books, journal articles etc. Why are these the key resources? You may want to assess what each resource brings to the teaching of the subject? What are the key strengths of the resource? Are there any limitations within the resource? Can you think of possible improvements?

2 What are the learning and teaching challenges you face in your subject area/discipline?
   • Highlighting in particular those challenges that are particularly relevant to this discipline context.

   Why do you say that? Why do you see these as a challenge to the subject? You may want to assess how these could be overcome?

3 How do you think the teaching in your subject area is likely to evolve over the next few years?
   • As above, highlighting the particular challenges expected in the discipline or exploring how more generic challenges may differentially impact within the discipline.

   Why do you say that? Why do you see the teaching in the subject going in this direction? Is this positive or negative? Why do you say that? What is driving this change/evolution in teaching?

4 What gaps can you identify in the current coverage of teaching and learning resources for your subject discipline?

   List the gaps.

4B How might your PSRB/Learned Society or the HEA best address the identified gaps?

   Why do you say that?
Thinking back to question 2, what gaps might emerge in the near future, given the projected evolution of teaching and learning in your subject?

Why do you say that? How can these be overcome?

Can you think of any other ways in which your PSRB, learned society or the HEA could support and advance learning and teaching in your subject-based practice?