



the british
psychological society
promoting excellence in psychology

GUIDANCE

Guidance for BPS accredited MSc Stage One programmes (across domains of psychology) in relation to the Covid-19 outbreak

INTRODUCTION

In such unprecedented and challenging times the British Psychological Society recognises the need to remain agile and flexible to support both individuals and our education partners in continuing to safeguard accreditation for programmes disrupted by the current crisis. This document is intended to serve as a guide for such programmes which have been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. The advice and guidance it contains is intended to cover a six month period commencing 30 March 2020. During this time the situation will be regularly reviewed and further recommendations or extensions to this guidance may be made.

- We expect that programmes will follow current UK government guidance, the UK Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code, and their guidance, also their regulatory and professional bodies' guidance e.g. Health Psychology – NHS and their own university's regulations, policies and advice on teaching and learning at distance, and assessment.
- This document offers guidance on how programmes can enable their students to develop and demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes as defined in the accreditation standards for **Stage One Programmes** with a flexibility that recognises the current public health emergency; to maintain continuity as far as possible, and is intended to advise on interim measures while the public health emergency continues.
- The flexibility being proposed relates to how programme content is assessed, and how learning outcomes are met in line with the required standards, rather than a dilution or removal of these. Similarly, students are still expected to gain the range of experience outlined in the standards, but assessment methods may vary on what would traditionally have been the case. In all it is essential that students are prepared for stage two training in terms of coverage and depth and breadth of the specific domain in psychology.

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- This document is based on the expectation that duty of care and safeguarding students is paramount, and that any flexibility employed as a temporary measure is within what is deemed reasonable and fair. We are not reducing or changing any of our standards. Therefore notification to the Partnership and Accreditation Team at the BPS of modifications to programmes in terms of assessment will not be required. Any reasonable adjustments employed should be logged and recorded at university programme level.
- We expect that programmes and services will continue to support students' wellbeing in the circumstances. It is recognised that all of our accredited programmes across the four nations will be experiencing the impact of the outbreak and specific issues will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, in collaboration with specific stakeholders within particular national contexts.
- This document should also be read in conjunction with the recent specific QAA guidance <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/support-and-guidance-covid-19>.

Accreditation through Partnership is the process by which the British Psychological Society works with education providers to ensure quality standards in education and training are met by all programmes on an ongoing basis. Our approach to accreditation is based on partnership rather than policing and we stress that accreditation remains an important and integral part of a student's development as a psychologist, and is the stepping stone for further professional development at Stage Two.

Our standards are organised around eight overarching standards, in the spirit of that partnership we have worked with our Training committees (made up from representatives from universities across the UK) to provide permissible reasonable adjustments for specific domains of psychology (please see the relevant domain below) where these are now required:

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| <p>Standards for the domains of psychology with Stage One Programmes:</p> | <p>All Domains with Stage One programmes. Important note: Whilst all domains of psychology will have eight programme standards, each domain may have different programme standard content and requirements and this will be reflected in any guidance set out in this table.</p> |
| <p>Programme Standard 1: Credits and level of award (applicable to all domains)</p> | <p>Guidance</p> |
| <p>A number of universities are applying a no detriment policy nationally for assessment in the current circumstances (also known as safety-net)</p> | <p>In the spirit of the no detriment policy, programmes should continue to endeavour to minimise the impact of necessary changes on individual assessment and progression wherever possible. That said, exceptions cannot be made to the requirements of professional regulation or course accreditation.</p> <p>We have sought as a professional body to offer flexibility and support to programmes and students, accommodating changes to assessment and teaching and learning approaches.</p> <p>We accept that some of the assessments may not be in the usual format, for example examinations may be substituted in favour of written Q&A assessments, essays, online presentations, comprehensive scenario multiple choice questions, mini vivas etc., without the need for formal programme modifications. All students are still expected to gain the range of experience outlined in the standards for their domain of psychology and cover and be assessed upon all learning outcomes. In all it is essential that students are prepared for stage two training in terms of coverage and depth and breadth of the specific domain in psychology.</p> |

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| Domain of psychology | Division of Health Psychology Training Committee |
| Programme standard 2: Programme content (learning, research and practice) | Guidance: |
| <p>2.1 Core skills In the light of the unprecedented situation, for Stage One programmes, we have to allow some flexibility given the current circumstance in which we find ourselves regarding the flexibility around dissertations/empirical projects and data collection.</p> | <p>Health psychology has a large research component and it needs to reflect this in the skills our students leave with. This includes an independent piece of research – which could be done remotely, using online surveys, hosted by Qualtrics or Survey Monkey</p> <p>Focus groups and interviews could be carried out using technology to facilitate this such as Skype or virtual classrooms, online courses do this all the time.</p> <p>Alternatively, we would also accept secondary data analysis where the student must develop their own research question and ethical protocol for their study. There are a number of existing data sets that can be accessed via: https://www.hdruk.ac.uk/about to facilitate this.</p> <p>With regard to extended systematic reviews – mini systematic reviews are undertaken as part of the core curriculum, therefore extended systematic reviews are not appropriate as an alternative.</p> <p>Meta-analysis is also inappropriate.</p> |
| Domain of psychology | Division of Forensic Psychology Training Committee |
| Programme standard 2: Programme content (learning, research and practice) | Guidance: |
| <p>2.1 Core skills In the light of the unprecedented situation, for Stage One programmes, we have to allow some flexibility given the current circumstance in which we find ourselves regarding the flexibility around dissertations/empirical projects and data collection.</p> | <p>Forensic Psychology has a large research component and it needs to reflect this in the skills our students leave with. This includes an independent piece of research – which could be done remotely, such as, online surveys, interviews and focus groups using technology to facilitate this (e.g. Skype or virtual classrooms) – online courses do this all the time.</p> <p>Alternatively, we would also accept secondary data analysis where the student has to develop their own research question and ethical protocol for their study.</p> <p>With regard to extended systematic reviews – mini systematic reviews may be undertaken as part of the core curriculum. Therefore, in these instances, extended systematic reviews are not appropriate as an alternative. In any event, systematic reviews are inappropriate as an alternative.</p> <p>Meta-analysis is also inappropriate.</p> |

| Domain/s of psychology | Division of Occupational Psychology Training Committee |
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| Programme standard 2: Programme content (learning, research and practice) | Guidance: |
| 2.1 Core skills | <p>With our understanding of the practical challenges and following principles of ensuring student safety and no detriment to students, we would suggest the following.</p> <p>If possible, a research design piece be submitted so that students can show in enough detail how they would have designed and executed their research if they were collecting primary data. We think this is important as ‘just’ accessing secondary data would not allow important learning outcomes to be met.</p> <p>Skype and online surveys remain possible – using online questionnaires and online interviews to data collect – participants may welcome such a distraction at this time but there is also a risk they find it an extra burden / worry. So this is a difficult one to call. We also need to take care not to overburden students who are doubtless feeling the worry and anxiety that we are all experiencing to some extent at the moment. Securing data is often the main pinch point and stressor for MSc students.</p> <p>Alternatively, we would also accept secondary data analysis where the student has to develop their own research question and ethical protocol for their study – this would need to have a considered structure for the analysis.</p> <p>Students could use an existing data set to show that they are able to analyse and report findings – there are quite a few of these relevant to occupational psychology that can be accessed by registering with organisations such as the data archive see below (https://www.data-archive.ac.uk). Some more, perhaps, are available from collaborating organisations (although ethics would need to be carefully managed i.e. data provided anonymised and on participants provided the data on understanding it could be used for further research). Listed below are some of the publicly available ‘big data’ sets below (from IWP lists).</p> <p>Other alternatives include asking researchers direct for access to anonymised data sets, transcripts etc. (all with GDPR and ethics in mind and carefully managed).</p> <p>Useful contacts include: Office of National Statistics (ONS) data ESRC Data Archive UK Data Service Millennium Cohort National Child Development Study Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) ‘Taking Part’ ONS data set about engagement of sport and culture + some work + demographic data (does not use validated scales – one item measures)</p> |

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| | <p>Union-based datasets? Add Health ESENER (EU data, 27 countries, risk management) EUROFOUND (e.g. Quality of Life Survey, European Working Conditions Survey)</p> <p>Note: For projects not collecting primary data, it could be worth considering asking that students additionally provide a 'methods' chapter for an intended follow up research project in an organisation. This would show their ability to design an investigation and the considerations that would be required in an applied setting.</p> <p>A systematic review may not be enough and could leave students under-prepared for Stage 2 and/or work – but these are unique circumstances. So in cases where there is no alternative, a content analysis of textual data or meta-analysis done well is an excellent addition to knowledge and could be considered.</p> |
| Domain/s of psychology | Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Training Committee |
| Programme standard 2: Programme content (learning, research and practice) | Guidance: |
| <p>2.1 Core skills With our understanding of the practical challenges and following principles of ensuring student safety and no detriment to students, we would suggest the following with regard to Dissertations and Major Independent Projects:</p> | <p>1. If possible, a research design piece be submitted so that students can show in sufficient detail how they would have designed and executed their research if they were collecting primary data. We think this is important, as accessing secondary data may not allow important learning outcomes to be met.</p> <p>Skype and online surveys remain possible for some experimental designs/ methodologies – using online questionnaires and online interviews to collect data. Participants may even welcome such methods as a beneficial distraction and/or opportunity to connect with others during this challenging time. However, there is also a risk that students may find this process an extra burden/worry, especially if they need to seek additional/ supplementary ethical approval for conducting such research methods. Consequently, this is a difficult one to call; we need to take care not to overburden students who are doubtless feeling the worry and anxiety that we are all experiencing to some extent at the moment. Securing data is often the main pinch point and stressor for MSc students.</p> <p>2. Analysis of secondary data is also helpful – though this would need to have a considered structure for the analysis. Students could be given/find an existing dataset to show that they are able to analyse and report findings in line with their original research question – some datasets can be found in the public domain, meaning that the existing ethical approval in place for the study should be sufficient. Other datasets may be available from collaborating organisations (although ethics would need to be carefully managed, such as ensuring that data were anonymised and that the original participants consented to the data being used for future research).</p> <p>3. Systematic Literature Reviews – we would be very comfortable in allowing these as an option for the major research component of Stage One programmes for the following reasons:</p> |

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| Domain/s of psychology | Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology Training Committee |
| Programme standard 2: Programme content (learning, research and practice) | Guidance: |
| 2.1 Core skills (continued) | <p>Most (if not all) Stage One programmes representing DSEP have some form of empirical research component within the programme that is formally conducted and summatively assessed (e.g. primary or secondary data collection, analysis and interpretation). Even if the major research project were to take an alternative form in these unprecedented circumstances, we as a Training Committee are confident that students would be able to clearly demonstrate that they meet the appropriate programme standards and/or would be sufficiently prepared for Stage Two QSEP.</p> <p>Following on from the above point, systematic reviews are an option for Key Role 3 (research component) of Stage Two QSEP, which makes this format for Stage One research projects something that more than adequately prepares graduates for our professional training route.</p> <p>Provided the systematic review is done well and in accordance with appropriate/established guidelines (e.g. Cochrane), then it represents a high-quality piece of research that still involves similarly robust research processes to those undertaken in primary/secondary experimental designs (e.g. broad reading and appropriate searching of literature; interpreting and synthesising results; developing critical analysis skills). In fact, systematic reviews and meta-analyses could be argued to be something we need to push more within our Stage One programmes given their potential to impact on both research and applied practice (as noted in the REF 2014).</p> |
| All domains of psychology with Stage One programmes | |
| Programme standards 2, 5 and 6 (applicable to all domains) | Guidance: |
| Other considerations: | |
| Remote teaching and learning | This should be flexible enough to allow students with other commitments to access learning materials in a flexible way to increase their chances of making good their learning. Therefore, recorded lectures are encouraged as lectures set at fixed times might prove problematic for some students due to other commitments at this time (some may be carers or parents). The accessibility of learning materials and resources should also be thought through to help maximise student exposure to these. |
| Support for students | Technical and administrative support should be widely available as should both academic and study support. We expect that programmes and services will continue to support students' wellbeing and have put in place specific adjustments for this during the lockdown period. It is also vital that the wellbeing of students is at the forefront of any reasonable adjustments for assessments that are put in place. No student should be left in isolation and regular contact with students must be maintained. |

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| <p>All domains of psychology with Stage One programmes</p> | |
| <p>Programme standards 2, 5 and 6 (applicable to all domains)</p> | <p>Guidance:</p> |
| <p>Other considerations (continued):</p> <p>Work experience/placements – Practical skills</p> <p>Although programmes are encouraged to offer students opportunities to develop some practical skills, it is emphasised that learning in this should cover knowledge and understanding and not supervised practice. Thus the clear distinction must be made between stage one learning and stage two which incorporates supervised practice.</p> <p>Absences</p> | <p>In situations where direct observation from work experience or placements have been incorporated into module learning outcomes for knowledge and understanding (not practice) due to the measures put in place for social distancing, alternative observational material should be sourced. This might be through other previously recorded sessions or virtual/video technology that students have access to. Care should be taken to ensure that the learning outcomes assessed and that standards are mapped against the new assessments.</p> <p>Consideration should be given, and arrangements made by programmes as to how they will manage student absence due to illness and self-isolation or caring or work responsibilities in line with standard university regulations, placement contracts and policies.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to the fact that many students will not be used to working at distance at a time when they will no doubt face many other pressures and demands.</p> <p>Where students are unwell and unable to proceed with their studies, the standard protocols for managing absence should be met. For those self-isolating, the reasonable adjustments suggested within this document should allow almost all to continue with their progression in a meaningful manner.</p> <p>Where possible, interruptions during this time should not be used unless the standard criteria for this are met. At this point we would suggest that having to self-isolate does not form a basis for interruption and programmes should explore ways to restructure their teaching if necessary, to provide opportunities for students to continue to work towards completion. This is in recognition that interruptions have implications for the end date for qualification.</p> <p>In the scenario that students do require extensions beyond their end date, providers should commit to supporting this.</p> |

Please be assured that The Society and The Training Committees continue to work on further guidance as required. As the situation progresses we will work with our accredited providers in partnership to find solutions that support progression whilst maintaining standards and quality.



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