Subject Benchmark Statement

Psychology

September 2023

Contents

About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics on behalf of their subject. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
    - equality, diversity, and inclusion
    - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
    - education for sustainable development
    - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are often used by higher education providers in the design and development of new courses in the relevant subject, as they provide a framework for specifying intended learning outcomes in an academic or vocational discipline. They are also used as a reference point when reviewing or revalidating degree courses. They may be used by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with other higher education providers. They also provide professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for understanding the learning outcomes associated with a course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Psychology
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Psychology
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Psychology graduates.

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ with regard to the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' regulatory framework. However, they are specified as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under Quality Assessment Framework for Wales and in Scotland as part of the Quality Enhancement Framework. Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

Additional sector reference points

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published Advice and Guidance to support the Quality Code for Higher Education which will be helpful when using this Statement - for example, in course design, learning and teaching, external expertise, and monitoring and evaluation.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in QAA's Glossary. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

1   Context and purposes of a Psychology Degree

1.1   Psychology is a scientific and reflective discipline that encompasses a range of empirical approaches and methods of enquiry that aim to understand the mind, brain, experience, behaviour and socio-cultural contexts of human and non-human animals. The antecedents of psychology can be found in philosophy, biology and physics; however, its methods of enquiry have developed not only from these disciplines but also from the humanities and other natural, social and mathematical sciences. Psychology is a theoretical and an applied discipline. The knowledge gained from psychological research continues to make a substantial contribution to society to develop our understanding of human behaviour and the application of this knowledge to real-world issues (for example, education, health behaviour, crisis relief, the criminal legal system, and every aspect of pandemic management). This Subject Benchmark Statement outlines a roadmap for Psychology that is underpinned by a commitment to inclusion, ethical practice and integrity in addressing the questions and challenges facing society, through global psychological literacy and empirical research.

Purposes of a Psychology degree

1.2   The purpose of a Psychology degree is to develop students' understanding of themselves, others and society through scientific investigation. The degree exposes students to the core domains of the discipline - from their historical roots to the present day. Students learn how to use a range of empirical methods of enquiry - critically and ethically - to interpret evidence and to disseminate to a range of different audiences. Courses also emphasise the interconnectedness between the core domains and other disciplines, in covering theoretical perspectives and applied issues. A key aim of a Psychology course is to develop students' psychological literacy, ensuring that they have the capability to use their disciplinary knowledge, theoretical understanding, principles, and insight to respond to opportunities and challenges.

1.3   Psychology graduates are equipped to engage in further study and/or professional training or research in a variety of disciplines and domains in psychology across different work roles. Psychology graduates are valued by employers in all sectors of the economy.

1.4   The British Psychological Society (BPS) accredits undergraduate and postgraduate study and training in psychology and maintains a public Directory and a List of Chartered Members. In order to become a Chartered Psychologist (C.Psychol), students need to complete an accredited programme in order to acquire the Graduate Basis for Chartered Member of the society (GBC), followed by additional postgraduate study and training. For students who have not completed an accredited undergraduate degree, conversion courses are available at master's level. These are also accredited by the BPS. Cyclical reviews and visits are conducted by the BPS to ensure that accredited degrees continue to achieve the necessary standards; any changes to courses that impact the standards are also reviewed to ensure that accreditation is not compromised. This Statement, however, sets out academic standards for all bachelor's degrees with honours, whether these are BPS accredited or not.

1.5   Degree titles are reflective of the content of a course, the level of study and the graduate attributes, so that they are not misleading to potential students or employers and the general public. This excludes the use of degree titles that are identical to those of postgraduate courses that lead to designated titles that are protected by law and regulated by the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) - for example, an undergraduate Psychology degree with Counselling will be appropriately referenced as Psychology with Counselling rather than Counselling Psychology.

1.6   To become a practitioner psychologist - that is, someone who can formally call themselves a practising psychologist - further postgraduate study and supervised training are required. By law (Health Professions Order 2001), anyone using one of the nine protected registered psychologist titles must be registered with the HCPC and have successfully completed an HCPC-approved course of training. The protected titles are: Clinical Psychologist; Counselling Psychologist; Educational Psychologist; Forensic Psychologist; Health Psychologist; Occupational Psychologist; Practitioner Psychologist; Registered Psychologist; Sport and Exercise Psychologist.

1.7   HCPC is the regulator set up to protect the public. Other, wider, psychological workforce roles are registered by the Professional Standards Authority. This includes, for example, the role of psychological wellbeing practitioner, which is to deliver low-intensity cognitive behavioural therapy to people with problems such as mild to moderate symptoms of depression, anxiety and low mood.

1.8   Many Psychology graduates will pursue careers where their psychological literacy, knowledge and skills are valued even though their role may not be labelled 'psychologist'. For example, in the public sector, Psychology graduates pursue careers in health and education settings, including teaching, community and social support, policing and defence, and careers advice. In the private sector, many Psychology graduates will go into careers in marketing and advertising or human resources, as well as becoming involved in conducting entrepreneurial work within creative industries and driving forward innovation through interdisciplinary collaboration. In the third sector, many charities and campaigning and advocacy organisations will employ psychologists to help develop and run promotional and fund-raising campaigns.

1.9   Psychology graduates are valued for their research skills, and many will go on to research careers - for instance, in the academic, public and private sectors - but not limited to clinical sciences, data science, market research, research and administration. For those wishing to pursue an academic research career, the usual route is to study for a PhD; this can lead to careers in both academia and industry. Examples of growing research areas for which Psychology graduates are well prepared, include mental health, obesity, online behaviours, neuroscience and education.

1.10   Although this Statement is a UK reference point for academic standards in Psychology, it recognises the significance and validity of international standards and relevant developments in this area.

Characteristics of a Psychology Degree

1.11   Students studying Psychology develop a breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of topics and methods of enquiry across the core areas of the discipline. Psychology degrees support the development of a range of skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, data analysis, ethical awareness, reflective skills, social and personal responsibility, communication and teamwork. Curricula often focus on developing students' interpersonal skills, such as empathy, active listening and effective communication, which are essential for building and maintaining relationships with clients, patients and colleagues. These skills are highly valued in many professions and can be applied to a wide range of career paths. Valuing and respecting the perspectives of others is an important aspect of being inclusive and critical in the discipline and supports the holistic development of students.

1.12   Psychology programmes encourage students to think critically about issues such as social justice, diversity and inclusion, and how these factors influence human behaviour. This helps students develop a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the world

around them. Students studying Psychology develop knowledge and understanding, alongside attributes and skills critical to addressing challenges and opportunities - locally, nationally and globally - as set out in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

1.13 At undergraduate level, Psychology may be offered as a single honours course, or in combination with another subject or area of study - as a joint honours course, where both subjects carry equal weight, or as a combined joint or major/minor honours degree.

1.14 Duration of studies can be full-time or part-time, with variation in the minimum and maximum duration of study as determined by individual providers. Students may also have opportunities to study abroad and participate in credit-bearing placement activities or global classrooms.

1.15 Higher education providers may locate Psychology in a variety of different schools or faculties, aligning it with biological sciences, medicine technology, engineering or mathematics. Psychology can also be aligned with social sciences, such as business, health or education. This may lead to different emphases while still delivering the core areas required for accreditation by the professional body.

1.16 Graduates from any other discipline can study Psychology as a conversion degree at master's level. Successful completion of accredited conversion courses is a direct route to GBC membership of the UK professional body. This Subject Benchmark Statement applies to conversion level as well as undergraduate courses.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

1.17 Under the *Equality Act 2010*, education providers have a duty to embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into all learning opportunities. Historically, the discipline has amplified the experiences of some, while marginalising, misunderstanding and mischaracterising others. It is essential that the discipline adopts a more socially just position which advances inclusivity for all, including those with protected characteristics that have often been excluded.

1.18 Equality can be achieved by designing and creating learning, teaching and assessment experiences that promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination, across all stages of the student journey. It can also be achieved by challenging inappropriate and inaccurate narratives about the 'psychological' world that continue to be reproduced. In achieving this it is expected that future graduates of Psychology will value and incorporate equality, diversity and inclusivity into their personal and professional lives, contributing to a socially just society.

1.19 Many Psychology courses have historically been based on research and theory from homogenous white, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic countries and have not represented diverse voices and contributions to the discipline. Consequently, existing curricula may privilege a narrow range of voices and exclude or marginalise others. This practice fails to represent the diversity of human psychology, and hence provides a narrow understanding of the discipline. We recognise that Psychology curricula have far-reaching consequences and the knowledge produced within higher education providers inform subsequent policy and practice. It is essential that course design, curricula and the wider student experience is underpinned by a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

1.20 Psychology degree programmes create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that encourages openness and values diversity - for example, regarding differing cultural backgrounds. Course content emphasises critical thinking, ethics, evidence-based decision making, and collaboration across interdisciplinary fields. Programme objectives foster self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and communicative

effectiveness, ultimately preparing individuals to become informed citizens who engage thoughtfully with society at large.

1.21 Contemporary Psychology courses encourage students to be critical of the dominant systems of thought that shape our language, perceptions and actions. They recognise that these systems are often intertwined with power and privilege, and that they can marginalise and oppress certain groups of people. Instead, Psychology students are committed to social justice, which is based on the principles of equity, agency and dignity for all people. They think critically about different realities and form their own judgements, taking into account the concepts of equality, diversity and inclusion.

1.22 It is important that the discipline represents and embraces the diversity of human experience and drives positive social change. Examples of positive change led by psychological experts include policy and practice in the fields of clinical and health psychology that promotes engagement which enhance people's physical and mental wellbeing.

1.23 For Psychology and related disciplines, discussions of mental health and wellbeing necessitate extending our thinking about equality and inclusion in a manner that embraces and values diversity and belonging. It also requires us to critically reflect on the language and terminology used within the discipline and make challenges where necessary. This commitment to EDI emphasises not only the need to diversify curricula and improve representation, but to interrogate and challenge historical and dominant narratives about the 'psychological' world that continues to be reproduced.

Accessibility

1.24 The *Equality Act 2010* places a legal duty on education providers to adopt a proactive rather than reactive approach, where issues of accessibility of teaching, learning, assessment and the wider student experience are anticipated for disabled students. Consideration of accessibility must be considered in course design as well as planning the wider student experience.

1.25 The Equality Act compels all providers to make anticipatory reasonable adjustments to teaching, learning and assessment - be it on campus, online or part of a work placement programme - to enable all students to develop and demonstrate module and course learning outcomes.

1.26 Providers can adopt a flexible approach and discuss the specific nature of reasonable adjustments with individual students to ensure they are appropriate to them as an individual. This is likely to involve modified or alternative forms of assessment that allow students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes.

1.27 It is also acknowledged that structural inequalities have a negative impact on students' educational experiences and that adopting a flexible approach is likely to improve accessibility and promote equity and inclusivity for groups of students. Good practice includes flexible approaches to create the conditions to support all students to achieve.

Sustainability

1.28 Psychology contributes to addressing the questions and challenges experienced locally, nationally and globally through analysing and explaining experience, behaviour and social environments. Psychology degrees develop psychologically literate graduates who are able to purposefully apply psychological knowledge, values and understanding, as well as practical and transferable skills. The goal is to develop Psychology graduates as global

citizens who have the motivation and ability to work towards environmental integrity (cognisant of limited, finite resources), social justice (equality, fairness, sharing), economic prosperity (constrained by economic integrity and social justice) and the factors that affect their inter-relationships.

1.29 Sustainable development addresses the connections between human, economic, social and environmental factors impacting the pursuit of a better world as envisioned in the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With an understanding of the human experience, behaviour and social environments, psychology has a clear role in responding to the challenges and opportunities expressed in the SDGs, all of which have relevance - not only to its own discipline, but also to other subject interests in sustainable development. This includes the role of psychology in contributing to interdisciplinary research teams, for example, where behaviour change may be involved when climate action is a priority. Psychology graduates with relevant competencies will also be especially well placed to contribute discipline knowledge to SDGs 3-5 (Health, Education, Gender Equality), 8 (Work and Economy), 11 (Sustainable Cities), and 16 (Peace and Justice).

1.30 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) focuses on developing the knowledge, skills and values learners need to be able to be active and committed participants in shaping a sustainable present and future. UNESCO has identified a set of key competencies that are essential for addressing the SDGs and pedagogies to achieve these. These key competencies cover ways of thinking (systems, future, critical), ways of practising (strategically, collaboratively, integrated) and ways of being (self-awareness, normative, reflective). These competencies are core to the Psychology curriculum. In particular, the strong emphasis in Psychology degrees on qualitative and quantitative research skills gives graduates a firm foundation for evidence-based policymaking and interventions.

1.31 Effective pedagogical approaches for ESD are designed to be transformative and focus on learning processes rather than products, transcending performative tendencies, building confidence and enabling action in addressing sustainable development. Transformative, learner-centred and active learning pedagogies are therefore evident in course and module design. This may include, for example, collaborative learning, enquiry-based learning and problem-based learning. Assessments facilitate attainment and authentic demonstration of the key competencies.

1.32   Central to the UN's Agenda of Sustainable Development is the core commitment to inclusion while ensuring that 'no-one is left behind'. This commitment is reflected in the emphasis on ethical considerations within the discipline, course and module design, the student experience and curriculum content. The contributions of psychology are critical to addressing the challenges of sustainable development, including urgent climate action, and represent an opportunity for learners and graduates to apply their psychological literacy to the problems experienced in local communities - nationally and globally.

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education

1.33   Traditionally, the subject area of Psychology has not always engaged actively with entrepreneurship and enterprise education, although the skills embedded in a Psychology education are often directly relevant to these activities. Further, enterprise and entrepreneurship education supports the development of behaviours, attributes and skills that together comprise a mindset for enabling students to add social, cultural and economic value to society.

1.34   Providing students with opportunities to develop and apply enterprise behaviours, attributes and skills - individually or collaboratively - is likely to have a significant impact on the successful career trajectories of students. It enhances students' employability and prepares them for changing environments (with other examples of employability skills covered in section 4). It may also lead to venture creation that has a commercial (for example, profit or development of intellectual property) and/or social (for example, social enterprise or charity work) impact.

1.35   Enterprise and entrepreneurship education takes different forms and may be embedded in the core domains of the discipline, in work placements and through activities that strengthen links between academic institutions and external organisations.

2   Distinctive features of a Psychology degree

Design

2.1   Psychology can be studied as a Bachelor's degree in Science (BSc) or Arts (BA), or an equivalent postgraduate conversion course, as well as at a more advanced level - for example, as a Master of Science (MSc or MSci) or Arts (MA). Across all degree options, the emphasis is on providing a scientific understanding of the mind, brain and behaviour as well as the experiences and contexts of humans and non-human animals. Courses also develop in students, a range of research skills and methods of enquiry for investigating cognitions and behaviour from a range of perspectives. There is flexibility for courses to be designed in order to draw upon providers' areas of expertise, culture and ways of working while retaining the broad base of the discipline. There is also design flexibility in terms of how Psychology interfaces with research and practice in other disciplines.

2.2   Courses are designed to provide an understanding of both historical and contemporary psychological theories and research, and to prepare students for the application of psychological knowledge and skills to future issues. Historical and contemporary viewpoints will be integrated throughout the design of a course and represent culturally diverse perspectives.

2.3   Courses provide an opportunity to equip students with a broad range of subject-specific and transferable skills, preparing graduates for employment in a diverse range of careers. Subject-specific skills are those that relate closely to the subject knowledge and/or are an integral part of any Psychology degree, and transferable skills are less tied to the subject matter of Psychology (see section 3).

2.4   Psychology courses which draw on research literature and professional practice help to guide the psychological literacy of graduates who develop confidence in addressing their personal, professional and community goals. The possession and application of such skill and knowledge are much sought after by future employers and society, locally and globally. In addition, an understanding of psychological literacy is of great value to graduates' self-awareness and personal development over their lifespan.

2.5   At the core of the discipline is ethical understanding and ethical behaviour and this is often at the heart of course design. For example, there will be a range of activities that will facilitate the comprehensive application of ethics in research, professional practice and everyday conduct. Students will be able to apply this to their own ethical behaviour as well as critically evaluating the ethical behaviour of others.

2.6   Psychology is an evolving discipline marked by continued advances in science and scientific understanding. Therefore, courses will reflect emerging trends - for example, regarding the applications of psychology to real-world problems and intersections with other disciplines. Recent areas of development relevant to the discipline include, but are not limited to, community psychology, positive psychology, ecopsychology and environmental psychology, psychology of sexuality, sports-neuroscience, cyber-psychology, artificial intelligence, behavioural economics and genetics. Courses expose students to a range of established and emerging topics, methods and approaches which reflect local interest and expertise.

Progression

2.7   Over the course of an undergraduate degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10), a Psychology student will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with

the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that build towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold-level subject-specific and transferable skills listed in this Statement. Regulations and processes will therefore ensure sufficient knowledge, expertise and experience is evidenced at each level.

2.8   Students may also study Psychology as a conversion degree at postgraduate level. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Psychology or an associated discipline. For some postgraduate study there is a requirement for students to have passed a BPS-accredited Psychology degree. Students must gain a second-class degree or higher and pass the empirical project, or an accredited conversion course, with a pass mark of 50% or equivalent - for example, a second-class degree or merit - to gain the Graduate Basis for Chartered Member (GBC) of BPS.

2.9   Undergraduates studying joint or combined programmes will achieve core elements of the specific and transferable skills for the subject and will add others according to the subjects covered in joint courses. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between their two subject areas, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study. Such courses may or may not be accredited by a professional body, such as the BPS, depending on the breadth and depth of psychology covered.

2.10   Integrated master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available in the UK and comprise a four-year, full-time course or a part-time course of not less than five and not more than eight academic years.

2.11   In a standard three-year full-time undergraduate honours degree course, students may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education, a Diploma of Higher Education, or an ordinary degree depending upon the level and number of credits of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Scottish first degrees with honours typically include four years of study, which provides additional opportunities for learning and development. For students following part-time routes, their study time would be the equivalent of the three or four-year degree.

Flexibility

2.12   There is flexibility for courses to offer full-time, part-time and distanced modes of delivery, and the flexibility to move between these as institutional regulations allow. Course providers are encouraged where possible to provide a variety of digital, blended and/or hybrid learning opportunities, particularly to improve accessibility for students to learn at a preferred time, pace and place. Enhanced flexibility through the use of state-of-the-art technology to assist remote investigation offers new opportunities for involvement in research experiences that may not be possible in face-to-face environments.

2.13   Courses use technology-enhanced learning to ensure that students develop skills for online learning, interaction and collaboration, which will be important during future employment in a world that increasingly requires digital skills.

2.14   There is flexibility to allow students to have an input into the design of the curriculum and assessment, with active and participatory approaches, enhanced choice, and personalisation of education providing an opportunity for enhanced student learning. Approaches vary across the sector according to local institutional strategy - ranging from routine module feedback processes and staff-student committees to extensive consultation

on course content and the delivery of student-led modules.

Partnership

2.15   Course providers may work with internal and external partners to give students the opportunity to undertake work-based learning and/or placements. There may be a variety of flexible, paid and voluntary options to ensure accessibility and equity of learning opportunities.

2.16   Providers collaborate with internal and external partners to provide students with the opportunity to develop enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, and the opportunity to practice these skills in relation to real-world issues. There is flexibility in terms of how such collaborations are embedded within courses - for example, there may be opportunities in specific modules or options to work with partners on projects.

2.17   Course teams work in partnership with PSRBs as appropriate, such as the BPS and the Health and Care Professions Council.

Monitoring and review

2.18   Degree-awarding bodies and their collaborative partners routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation are a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning. Students actively contribute to monitoring and review processes where appropriate and receive feedback regarding their contributions.

2.19   External review is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Higher education providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.20   The external examination system currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within other UK higher education providers. Examiners will consider whether regulations ensure that all students have demonstrated adequate breadth and depth of knowledge, and application of psychology. Examiners are encouraged to comment on accessibility and equality in learning and assessment. External examiners are asked to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one for Psychology, play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.21   The BPS accredits undergraduate and postgraduate study and training in Psychology and maintains a public Directory and a list of Chartered Members. In order to become a Chartered Psychologist (C.Psychol), students need to complete an accredited programme in order to acquire GBC, followed by additional postgraduate study and training. For students who have not completed an accredited undergraduate degree, conversion

courses are available at master's level; these are also accredited by the BPS. The BPS has robust mechanisms in place to review courses on a cyclical basis to ensure that providers are maintaining the standards of accreditation.

3   Content, structure and delivery

Subject knowledge and understanding

3.1   The following list of core areas reflects the current scope of Psychology. For each of the core areas, a list of example topics is provided. These example topics are not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive and it is recognised that their role in degree courses varies from provider to provider and over time. Employability skills, examples of which are provided in section 4, are essential for psychology as a discipline and are fundamental to any honours degree or conversion-level course.

3.2   Core areas may be delivered and assessed by distinct modules or as part of an integrated structure over a number of modules. The teaching in each core area addresses the historical and contemporary ethical issues associated with research and practice, including inappropriate applications.

3.3   Courses cover knowledge in the areas identified and the links between these to promote an understanding of the use of psychological theory to answer real-world questions. Courses acknowledge the value of multiple perspectives and the inherent difficulties associated with extrapolating research conducted with Western samples to other cultures.

3.4   Where possible, any programme of study provides examples of the application of psychological theories to contemporary society, and to participants' own lives, drawing as appropriate from local expertise in clinical, educational, organisational, forensic, ecological, or sport and exercise psychology, or other areas in which psychology is used in an applied context.

- **Biological psychology:** for example, biological bases of human and non-human behaviour, brain structure and function, hormones and behaviour, behavioural genetics, neuroscience, psychopharmacology, neuropsychology, comparative and evolutionary psychology.
- **Cognitive psychology:** for example, attention, perception, learning, memory, thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, metacognition, language, consciousness, artificial intelligence, cognitive neuropsychology, cognitive bias and social cognition.
- **Developmental psychology:** for example, attachment, social relations, cognitive and language development, cognitive decline, biological ageing and cultural development, with reference to development across the full lifespan - prenatal, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older age and death.
- **Individual differences:** for example, diversity in personality, intelligence, cognitive style, emotion, motivation, mood, physical and mental health (including social, biological and cognitive processes), as well as positive psychology.
- **Social psychology:** for example, citizenship, community psychology, attribution, attitudes, group processes and intergroup relations, social influence, leadership, political psychology, culture, close relationships and sexualities, social constructionism, power, powerlessness and empowerment, and self and identities in context.

Conceptual and historical issues in psychology and interdisciplinarity

3.5   Conceptual and historical issues are integral to all areas of psychology. Courses provide students with an understanding of epistemological and ontological issues to provide a foundation in the philosophy of science. Courses also address historical and contemporary positions within psychology, the dominance of privileged perspectives, and the impact of these. The value of interdisciplinary approaches is recognised throughout the course.

Methods of research and enquiry

3.6   Rigour in research design and methods of enquiry is integral to psychology. Students obtain a sound knowledge of, and demonstrate an ability to use, interpret and disseminate a range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods, as appropriate to the research question. Knowledge and understanding of how to operationalise research questions, investigate psychological phenomena and select appropriate measures is required. In particular, this includes the ability to design, obtain, analyse and disseminate evidence. Relevant knowledge and understanding are best acquired and demonstrated through extensive and progressive empirical work in laboratories (physical or virtual) and naturalistic settings through all stages of a course.

3.7   Quantitative skills include experimental and quasi-experimental study design, measurement and analysis, including the ability to conduct and interpret appropriate statistical tests, which may include, Null Hypothesis Significance Testing (NHST) or Bayesian approaches. Students will typically use software specifically designed to implement statistical tests and may additionally be exposed to software designed to run experiments, or to understand the role of formal modelling. Qualitative skills include the conduct and analysis of interviews, focus groups or case studies, inter alia, and may provide insights into complex social phenomena which cannot be captured through quantitative approaches alone, using methods such as thematic, conversation or discourse analysis. These skills are best acquired and demonstrated through extensive and progressive empirical work in laboratories (physical or virtual) and naturalistic settings through all stages of a degree.

3.8   Courses acknowledge the context in which research is conducted and the value of an inclusive approach - for example, through introducing participatory action research and expert practitioners. Ethical issues are addressed at the design, data collection and dissemination stages of research, including the accurate representation of research findings. Students also develop an understanding of the value of being self-reflexive as a researcher, as well as the ethical consequences of research.

3.9   Research approaches adopted by each core area can be outlined in course content. For example, for Individual Differences, psychometric tests may be covered, with a critical appraisal of their use, limitations and historical origins.

3.10   Psychology students learn the basic principles of sound ethical data collection and socially responsible research - for example, with open science and pre-registration. Given the broad theoretical scope of psychology, rigorous specialist training is required to engender a critical understanding of the role of research design and enquiry. This includes the choice of research methods employed. It extends to analytic approaches taken for developing, testing and refining psychological theories. And it applies psychological methods and approaches to real-world problems - locally, nationally and globally.

3.11   A graduate of Psychology will have successfully completed a series of research reports throughout their course, culminating in an empirical project or equivalent reporting on a substantial piece of research. The project involves the collection of original quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods data, or equivalent alternatives such as computational modelling or secondary data analysis.

Skills

3.12   Psychology provides an opportunity for students to develop a rich and diverse range of attributes, drawing on skills that are associated with the natural and social sciences (for example, hypothesis-testing, quantitative and qualitative analysis) and the humanities (critical and reflective thinking and writing).

3.13   In addition, the nature of the discipline, and the kinds of learning opportunities that it provides, allows students to develop and practice a range of transferable skills which can be underpinned by their own formal knowledge of psychological processes. For example, understanding psychological theories of learning can help students develop study plans; knowledge of group processes can help in teambuilding and leadership.

3.14   Transferable skills are less closely tied to the subject matter of psychology; these are covered in paragraph 4.6. While the distinction between subject-specific and transferable skills is not clear-cut, psychological training allows subject-specific understanding to lead to enhanced transferable skills, as noted in paragraph 4.2. In addition, many of the subject-specific skills, including research design, methods of enquiry and data analysis, have direct application in professions outside psychology, and many of the transferable skills are essential in the work of a professional psychologist.

3.15   Together, the development of these subject-specific and transferable skills enhances students' employability. Subject-specific and transferable skills are of benefit to the local, national and global economy across a range of sectors and industries. The application of these skills also benefits communities and the environment. Students can effectively articulate the value of specific skills, how these can be applied in different contexts and how these skills contribute to their own wellbeing.

Subject-specific skills

3.16   On graduating with an honours degree in Psychology, or appropriate conversion course, students are able to:

- understand the conceptual and historical underpinnings of psychology as a discipline
- apply multiple perspectives to psychological issues, recognising that psychology involves a range of methods of research and enquiry, theories, evidence, interpretations and applications
- integrate ideas and findings across multiple perspectives and approaches in psychology and apply psychological knowledge ethically, professionally and safely to real-world problems
- identify, contextualise and evaluate diverse patterns in behaviour, psychological functioning and experience
- apply critical-thinking skills to address complex problems to identifying creative and innovative solutions
- generate and explore appropriate psychological hypotheses and research questions, drawing on relevant theory, research and practice, design studies and collect original data
- apply a variety of methods of inquiry, such as experiments, observation, questionnaires, psychometric tests, interviews, focus groups, creative methods or secondary data analysis
- understand and appreciate the value of participatory and/or action research and user involvement in research and community, and peer research
- analyse, present and evaluate quantitative, qualitative data and mixed methods data and critique research findings

- the ability to manage, synthesise and evaluate potentially conflicting sources such as primary research studies or theories
- employ evidence-based reasoning and examine practical, theoretical and ethical issues associated with a range of methods of inquiry and other activities
- use and critique a variety of psychological tools, including specialist software, laboratory equipment and psychometric instruments
- critically and reflectively evaluate psychological theory and research
- understand and apply the process of theory development and be capable of developing theory driven psychological questions
- carry out an extensive independent piece of empirical research that requires students individually to demonstrate a range of research skills, including designing and planning, considering and resolving ethical issues, analysis and dissemination of findings.

Transferable skills

3.17   On graduating with a degree in Psychology, students are able to:

- communicate effectively using a range of verbal and/or non-verbal methods
- interact professionally with others, respond inclusively in a manner sensitive to the needs and expectations of a diverse range of audiences
- demonstrate numerical reasoning skills including the analysis, presentation and interpretation of quantitative data
- demonstrate the ability to analyse, interpret and present qualitative data
- demonstrate digital literacy through the use of online databases and analytic software, and digital approaches to personal and professional development
- understand the function and role of artificial intelligence in the context of learning and teaching, problem-solving and working practices
- understand the ethical, practical and legal issues associated with the collection, management, storage, processing, sharing and presentation of information, including in digital formats
- retrieve and organise information found in a range of sources (for example, academic books, policy documents and non-academic sources) while recognising the different perspectives and influences that amplify or marginalise certain forms of knowledge and evidence
- demonstrate inclusive and collaborative working and reflect on the value of engagement with a variety of views in reaching consensus in solutions to problems
- reflect on and articulate personal strengths and areas for development and identify how these may be addressed
- take ownership for one's own learning, employability and development, including effective personal planning and project management skills.

Teaching and learning

3.18   A degree in Psychology covers specific subject knowledge (including core areas of the discipline), subject-specific skills and transferable skills, with a particular emphasis on conducting and reporting empirical research - including an independent research project.

3.19   Courses are designed to ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge outlined above, and need to demonstrate that the learning, teaching and assessment methods are fit for that purpose. It is recognised, within psychology, that there are a variety of ways in which material can be delivered, with developed skills including opportunities for students to shape and co-create aspects of their learning and assessment.

3.20   The strategies employed can prioritise student-centred approaches and utilise a diverse range of delivery methods, incorporating experiential, practical and formal academic

practices as appropriate. Teaching sessions may take place synchronously, asynchronously, or in a blended format, depending on the circumstances. It is considered good practice to offer a variety of activities and consider how students' module choices may influence the range of available learning opportunities for them.

3.21   Course delivery equips students with the ability to apply ethical principles from the discipline across a range of contexts, not only in conducting ethical research but also ethical conduct in professional practice and social responsibility. The teaching of these principles will be based upon the guidance on appropriate ethical knowledge and practice at undergraduate level as published by the BPS.

3.22   Teaching and learning strategies help students to demonstrate an awareness of the values and expectations expressed by relevant professional and regulatory bodies (such as BPS and the Health and Care Professions Council).

3.23   Teaching and learning strategies in Psychology are designed to support students in acquiring subject knowledge, skills and psychological literacy starting with structured and supported study methods and gradually transitioning to more independent and self-directed activities. As students progress through the course, they assume increasing responsibility for their own learning, preparing them for their future professional careers. To facilitate this progression, a variety of learning and teaching methods are employed. The aim is to design teaching and learning strategies that are engaging, effective and enjoyable for students.

3.24   There is an emphasis on practical work within the discipline, covering a wide variety of methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. The practical elements expose the student to a range of core domains and encompass both collaborative group work and independent research.

3.25   Many different forms of learning and teaching are encouraged in Psychology; these include:

- lectures
- laboratory classes
- workshops
- seminars
- tutorials
- independent study
- working collaboratively
- project supervision.

3.26   Problem-based learning, team-based learning, experiential learning, student-led learning and work-based learning (for example, placements and fieldwork) are also considered good practice for the development of transferable and subject-specific skills.

3.27   It is expected that all staff members involved in student learning, including demonstrators, temporary and visiting lecturers, as well as permanent academic staff, have access to professional development opportunities related to education.

Assessment and feedback

3.28   Assessment and feedback enable students to develop and demonstrate a full range of knowledge, skills and attributes through individual and group work.

3.29   Courses have a coherent assessment and feedback strategy which considers the range and level of assessments employed in relation to facilitating the attainment of learning outcomes and skills development both at a modular and course level. Throughout their studies students are provided with clear, constructive feedback and feedforward that is integrated across the degree course.

3.30   A range of assessment methods is encouraged to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. The choice of assessment methods clearly relates to the learning outcomes they seek to develop and measure. Assessment methods may include essays, research reports, reflective reports, presentations and examinations. Authentic and innovative assessments such as case studies, portfolios, artefacts and blogs are encouraged. Assessments oriented towards a variety of academic and non-academic audiences (such as information leaflets and websites) are considered to be good practice.

3.31   Assessment criteria are clearly articulated and related to the module and course learning outcomes. It is good practice for assessments to be collaboratively developed with students and relevant interested parties. This includes integrity of assessment which can be linked to artificial intelligence developments, including students' appropriate use of digital skills.

3.32   Assessments help students to monitor and reflect on their own development and also lead to the progressive development of transferable skills and competencies, such as of critical thinking.

4   Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1   This Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Psychology, or a master's conversion degree.

4.2   Achievement can be mapped to four key categories: knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills and transferable skills. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining appropriate evidence for achievement and can refer to Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees. This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main UK degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.5   Students will undertake a variety of assessments matched against the learning outcomes for their particular curricula of study. This allows them to achieve the standard required and to develop and demonstrate characteristics associated with higher levels of learning within a bachelor's degree with honours. At the base level, the classification means that students will have achieved the characteristics of Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Level 10 in Scotland of the respective qualification. The standards also provide a reference point for setting and maintaining academic standards for Psychology conversion courses at Level 7 (FHEQ) or 11 (FQHEIS), although outcomes for these courses must ultimately align with the appropriate levels on the Qualifications Frameworks.

4.6   The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Alongside consideration of the wide range of transferable and practical skills defined and detailed within the Annex D descriptors, the standards within this statement illustrate achievement that goes beyond thresholds, extending to typical and excellent levels based on:

- depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding
- engagement in research and independent study
- prevalence of critical insight
- advanced and appropriate application of psychological theory and methodology to contemporary issues.

4.7   The following subject-specific criteria accompany Annex D guidance for more generic transferable skills. It is emphasised that individual providers can interpret such information in ways that they deem most appropriate within the context of their own institution, nation or sector. Providers will have their own methods and systems for using standards to determine outcomes when all threshold criteria are met, but with some students achieving at higher levels either vertically or horizontally. For example, a student might achieve higher levels in knowledge and understanding, but not necessarily in subject-specific skills - which may remain at threshold levels.

Threshold

4.8   A graduate in psychology who has attained the threshold level will have:

- identified the core areas of psychology and the contexts in which they might be applied
- systematically reviewed and evaluated key psychological literature

- understood the interrelatedness of different areas of psychology and compared different perspectives within the discipline
- appreciated the role of evidence in forming conclusions in psychology
- understood the principles and protocols required for conducting psychological investigations, and applied relevant legal, ethical and professional guidelines
- constructed and tested research hypotheses and undertaken supervised research investigating specific lines of enquiry, both individually and in groups
- summarised research findings emerging from the application of quantitative and qualitative methods and understood their contribution to knowledge
- used appropriate hardware and software for learning and research purposes
- communicated psychological knowledge and research findings in a range of formats.

Typical

4.9   A graduate in psychology who has attained the typical level will have:

- understood the breadth of psychology and its potential for impact across a wide range of real-world challenges
- conducted in-depth reviews of psychological literature, reflected on historical concepts and theories in psychology, and explored ramifications for current thinking
- adopted multiple perspectives in psychology and systematically analysed research paradigms, methods of enquiry, and measurement techniques
- reflected on the role of evidence in forming conclusions and reasoning scientifically in psychology
- posed and critiqued research questions leading to the demonstration of competence in a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods
- initiated and completed psychological enquiries, recognising theoretical, practical and methodological limitations
- drawn conclusions from research findings, including evaluating their psychological significance, accounting for the diverse nature of individual experience, and making recommendations for further investigation
- understood the implications and consequences of using different subject-relevant hardware and software, and of adopting different theoretical perspectives
- disseminated psychological research findings to peers and academic supervisors, tailoring communication according to different audiences' needs.

Excellent

4.10   A graduate in psychology who has attained the excellent level will have consistently:

- demonstrated the ability to engage in precise technical discussion about the nature of psychology, pointing to potential misinterpretation or misunderstandings
- engaged in original theoretical and practical reviews of psychological knowledge, and identified the limits of psychological understanding, including challenging myths and offering alternative interpretations
- interpreted a wide range of evidence within and across psychology sub-specialisms and related disciplines, making significant connections and showing comprehensive applications of subject knowledge
- demonstrated the use of critical-thinking skills and the ability to evaluate the rigour and significance of evidence when forming novel conclusions in psychology
- articulated complex psychological arguments and concepts in coherent and balanced ways

- demonstrated creative thinking when designing psychological research with relevance to contemporary psychological issues
- reflected on the significance of historical and contemporary findings within psychology when applied to social, political and ethical debates and policies
- understood the importance of personal and professional skills and gained transferable employability skills - for example, mastery of specific hardware and software and analytical capability
- imparted to peers, tutors, supervisors and mixed audiences a comprehensive grasp of psychology as it informs popular debates and decision making.

Postgraduate study

4.11 Following on from undergraduate or master's conversion studies, are a variety of other postgraduate qualifications in psychological professions.

4.12 Postgraduate qualifications in Psychology set out the requirements for professional training in Psychology. The content of such courses is very much determined by the specific domain in Psychology with Stage One and/or Stage Two courses of study. Stage One is designed to prepare students in the core skills required to progress onto the Stage Two professional training routes for a particular domain. Stage Two professional training courses of study are designed to be sufficiently flexible in content and structure to adapt readily to current and future needs and to the emergence of new knowledge in the specific domain of psychology and its related fields.

Award nomenclature

4.13 It is important that all postgraduate study in Psychology accurately reflects the level of students/trainees' achievements, represents appropriately the nature of the field(s) of study undertaken and is not misleading, either to potential employers or to the general public. Hence, postgraduate study in specific domains of Psychology reflects the discipline of study in the course title. Furthermore, the course provider must ensure that students are made aware that the psychological professions regulated by the HCPC have one or more designated titles that are protected by law and professionals must be registered to use them. More information regarding the protected titles is available on the HCPC website.

4.14 Other wider psychological workforce profession routes in Psychology may also require qualified individuals in their specific area to be placed on a professional register regulated by the Professional Standards Association and the relevant professional body.

5   List of references and further resources

Advance HE (2016) - The Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit:
www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/developing-engagement-feedback-toolkit-deft

British Psychological Society:
www.bps.org.uk and www.bps.org.uk/accreditation

Health and Care Professions Council:
www.hcpc-uk.org/about-us/who-we-regulate/the-professions

Health Education England:
 www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/mental-health/psychological-professions

QAA (2019) *Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees*:
www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/qualifications-frameworks

QAA and Advance HE (2021) *Education for Sustainable Development Guidance*:
www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/education-for-sustainable-development

QAA (2018) *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education: Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers*:
www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/enterprise-and-entrepreneurship-education

QAA Glossary (2022): www.qaa.ac.uk/glossary

QAA - Quality Enhancement Framework (Scotland):
www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework

QAA - Quality Enhancement Review (Wales):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-enhancement-review

QAA (2018) *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education*:
www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code

QAA (2018) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance*:
www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance

United Nations (2015) *Sustainable Development Goals*:
https://sdgs.un.org/goals

6   Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology 2023

Dr Simon Goodson (Chair)	Nottingham Trent University
Dr Gail Steptoe-Warren (Deputy Chair)	Arden University Limited
Dr Sofia Barbosa Boucas	Brunel University London
Dr Lizann Bonnar	University of Strathclyde
Dr Gayle Brewer	University of Liverpool
Professor Martin Corley	University of Edinburgh (Association of Heads of Psychology Departments)
Professor David I Donaldson	University of St Andrews (Association of Heads of Psychology Departments)
Dr Stephen Dunne	Northumbria University, Newcastle
Dr Gareth Hall	Aberystwyth University
Dr Patrick Hylton	University of Lincoln
Aiko Leung	The British Psychological Society
Patricia Lyons	The British Psychological Society
Dr Emma McDonald	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Dr Gina Pauli	University of Roehampton
Professor Danny Saunders	QAA Officer
Laura Sperry	QAA Coordinator
Dr Helen St Clair-Thompson	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Dr Jacqui Taylor	Bournemouth University
Dr Paul Wilson	Queen's University Belfast

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology 2019

The fourth edition, published in 2019, was revised by QAA to align the content with the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published in 2018. Proposed revisions were checked and verified by a member of the review group of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology from 2016.

Dr Simon Goodson	University of Huddersfield; Chair of BPS Division of Academic Researchers and Teachers of Psychology
Simon Bullock	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology 2016

Details provided below are as published in the third edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement.

Professor Thom Baguley	Nottingham Trent University
Dr Phil Banyard	Nottingham Trent University
Dr Renee Bleau	University of Glasgow
Professor John Clibbens (Chair)	Birmingham City University
Dr Lisa Morrison Coulthard	The British Psychological Society
Professor David I Donaldson	University of Stirling; The Association of Heads of Psychology Departments
	University of Huddersfield; Chair of BPS

Dr Simon Goodson	Division of Academic Researchers and Teachers of Psychology
Dr Julie Hulme	Keele University
Professor Michelle Lee	Swansea University
Professor Catriona Morrison	University of Bradford
Professor Stephen Newstead	Plymouth University
Dr Rachel Shaw	Aston University
Dr Liz Simpson	Ulster University
Dr Niamh Stack (Deputy Chair)	University of Glasgow; Chair of BPS Undergraduate Education Committee

Employer representative

| Lesley-Anne Livesey | PLUS Stirling |

Student reader

| Chris Hardy | University College London |

QAA officers

| Dr Catherine Kerfoot | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |
| Natalja Sokorevica | Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education |

Membership of the review group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology 2007

Details provided below are as published in the second edition of the Subject Benchmark Statement.

Professor Peter Banister	Manchester Metropolitan University
Professor Stephen Newstead	University of Plymouth
Professor Dominic Abrams (Chair)	University of Kent
Dr Peter Wright	University of Edinburgh
Annie Trapp	Higher Education Academy; Psychology Network
Professor Dominic Upton	University of Worcester
Dr Richard Latto	University of Liverpool
Professor Uta Frith	University College London
Dr Lisa Morrison Coulthard (Adviser)	The British Psychological Society

Membership of the original benchmark statement group for Psychology 2002

Details below are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement for Psychology.

Professor Peter Banister	Manchester Metropolitan University
Professor Diane Berry	University of Reading
Professor Martin Conway	University of Bristol
Professor Steven Cooper	University of Liverpool
Professor Hadyn Ellis	Cardiff University
Dr Pamela Maras	University of Greenwich
Dr Carol McGuinness	Queen's University Belfast
Professor Peter Morris	University of Lancaster
Professor Stephen Newstead (Chair)	University of Plymouth
Professor Denis Parker	Glasgow Caledonian University
Professor Anne Woollett	University of East London
Lisa Morrison (Secretary)	The British Psychological Society