



**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**  
Faculty of Health

School of Psychology

## **Programme Specification**

MSc Research Methods in Psychology

**Academic Year: 2022/23**

|                                |                |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Date of approval:</b>       | 15 August 2018 |
| <b>Date of implementation:</b> | September 2019 |
| <b>Year of first award:</b>    | 2020           |

| Internal Programme Code | Award Title                             | Site | Mode of Study |
|-------------------------|---|------|---------------|
| 7312                    | MSc Research Methods in Psychology (FT) | Ply  | FT            |
| 7313                    | MSc Research Methods in Psychology (PT) | Ply  | PT            |
| 6483                    | PgDip Clinical Psychology               | Ply  | PT            |
| 6484                    | PgCert Clinical Psychology              | Ply  | PT            |

| Reviewed | Amended following review (Y/N) | Sections amended |
|----------|--------------------------------|------------------|
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**1. Final award titles:**

MSc Research Methods in Psychology  
*Henceforth abbreviated MSc RM*

**Level 7 Intermediate award title(s)**

PGDip Research Methods in Psychology  
PGCert Research Methods in Psychology

**JACS code: C8 Psychology**

**HECoS codes:**

100497 Psychology

**2. Awarding Institution: University of Plymouth**

Teaching institution(s): University of Plymouth

**3. Accrediting body(ies) NA**

#### 4. Distinctive Features of the Programme and the Student Experience

The MSc Research Methods in Psychology (AP) forms part of four, interlinked programmes at level 7, which offer advanced training in the methods and application of psychological science, linked to advanced treatment of the psychological theories and methods in their chosen area of specialisation.

Students on the AP awards will gain in-depth and highly specialised expertise with cutting edge theory and methods in their area of interest, using elective modules to tailor their path through the programme to their chosen specialty, undertaking novel research, and extending the boundaries of current knowledge under the guidance of experts.

Further distinctive features of these programmes are described below:

##### *A thorough, experientially-based training in psychological research methods.*

Through core modules in advanced research methods students on all programmes will gain a secure understanding of the theory, application and limitations of quantitative statistical methods for experimental and observational data. Enhanced emphasis will be placed on fluency in data manipulation and visualisation, and in developing insight and understanding for the ways in which assumptions and theory form the basis on which statistics can be used for scientific inference. Specialist techniques (e.g. Bayesian inference, approaches to causal analysis in non-experimental data) will be offered as options, to ensure students can extend this conceptual understanding with practical experience applying specific techniques required in particular research domains.

##### *Advanced, training in theoretical and empirical advances in cognitive and brain science, behaviour change, or clinical psychology.*

Through the “current issues” and “foundations of clinical psychology” modules students will develop awareness and understanding of new research questions, debates and findings in their chosen field. Elective modules will enable students to extend this knowledge, tailoring their learning according to their specific interests. These modules are cross-cutting in nature, designed to integrate multiple research perspectives and prove relevant in different combinations for a variety of students. For example, modules such as *The Brain and its Disorders* enable students to explore in detail current knowledge of specific conditions, providing a secure grounding in the neuroscience of clinical approaches to schizophrenia, Parkinson’s disease and dementia.

##### *Deep and thorough conceptual understanding of chosen areas of study*

All aspects of these programmes aim towards deepening conceptual understanding of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological advances in their field. Students’ achievements on each module will be assessed entirely through coursework, which will provide a stimulus and opportunity for them to critically evaluate the material covered, to apply it to new problems, and to develop new ideas for future research.

##### *Professionalism and professional identity*

For all programmes, we shall organise the academic year such that students are encouraged to think of psychological research and practice as an iterative, cyclical process involving: *enquiry, design, technique, communication, practice, and reflection*. Students will be encouraged to reflect on their learning regularly throughout the year, and tutorial activities will ensure this is integrated within their own research practice. The work undertaken in all modules aims to develop students’ critical understanding of research methodology, and apply it to the design of their own research projects.

##### *A considered approach to PT study*

We have worked with timetabling to ensure that the current MPsych and Stage 5 and MSc PRM can be delivered within a 2-day timetabling footprint, and have been mindful to ensure this is also possible with these new awards. For students on the AP awards, PT study will allow some students to combine PT research assistant or similar work with study, again enhancing their skills and experience and increasing the chance of successfully accessing PhD funding or graduate-level employment on graduation.

As appropriate to masters-level study, students on the AP programmes will be expected to develop their own research ideas and hypotheses, based on a thorough review and understanding of the relevant literature, and to develop methods and analyses with increasing autonomy, with the support and guidance of a project supervisor. The absolute proportion of students' contributions will necessarily vary depending on the complexity and familiarity of the methods used, but this contribution should be substantially greater than for an undergraduate project.

## 5. Relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Group(s)

There is currently no relevant QAA benchmark group for psychology at masters level, see <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements/masters-degree-subjects>

## 6. Programme Structure

The MSc RM is a 1-year, level 7 programme. It will also be available via a formal part time route. Each column presents core and elective credits required of students within each programme. A blank indicates the module is not available within the programme. The letter E indicates the module is an elective, and may be chosen to contribute the required number of elective credits (specified in the last row). A star represents a required but non-credit bearing module.

| Code    | Credits | Title  | MSc Research Methods in Psychology |
|---------|---------|--|------------------------------------|
| PSYC750 | 0       | Personal and professional development          | *                                  |
| PSYC751 | 10      | Asking psychological questions                 | 10                                 |
| PSYC752 | 10      | Advanced research design for psychology.       | 10                                 |
| PSYC753 | 20      | Data fluency                                   | 20                                 |
| PSYC754 | 20      | Advanced techniques for psychological research | 20                                 |
| PSYC755 | 10      | Advanced Interpretative methods                | E                                  |
| PSYC756 | 10      | Communicating psychological research           | 10                                 |
| PSYC757 | 10      | Success in science                             | 10                                 |
| PSYC771 | 10      | Issues in cognitive and brain science          | E                                  |
| PSYC774 | 10      | Supporting behavior change                     | E                                  |
| PSYC791 | 10      | Foundations of clinical psychology             | E                                  |
| PSYC792 | 10      | Understanding clinical interventions           | E                                  |
| PSYC781 | 60      | MSc Research project                           | 60                                 |
|         |         | <i>Elective credits to select</i>              | 40                                 |

Table 1. Proposed programme structures

| Module  | Semester1 | Semester2 |
|---------|-----------|-----------|
| PSYC750 | X         | X         |
| PSYC751 | X         | X         |
| PSYC752 | X         |           |
| PSYC753 | X         | X         |
| PSYC754 | X         | X         |
| PSYC755 | X         | X         |
| PSYC756 |           | X         |
| PSYC757 | X         | X         |
| PSYC771 | X         | X         |
| PSYC774 | X         | X         |
| PSYC781 | X         | X         |
| PSYC791 | X         |           |
| PSYC792 | X         | X         |

Typical programme structure, by-semester.

#### Arrangements for part time study

Students on the current MSc PRM have an option to study part time which we propose to preserve within the new award. In contrast with current arrangements, we would strongly suggest that students take the options specified in the table below in each year of study (although alterations could be made with the agreement of the academic lead).

| Award  | Year 1                  | Year 2                  |
|--------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| MSc RM | PSYC750 (0)             | PSYC756 (10)            |
|        | PSYC751 (10)            | PSYC781 (60)            |
|        | PSYC752 (10)            | 20 credits of electives |
|        | PSYC753 (20)            |                         |
|        | PSYC754 (20)            |                         |
|        | PSYC757 (10)            |                         |
|        | 20 credits of electives |                         |

## 7. Programme Aims

These new programmes are designed to meet the descriptors of the QAA's (2008) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for level 7 Master's degree. The aims specific to the programme are presented in the table below:

|  | MSc RM |
|--|--------|
| Develop a deep understanding and knowledge of specific specialist research areas, and research-informed areas of professional practice in psychology.  | X      |
| To equip students with the advanced intellectual, personal and technical skills necessary for their future gainful employment or advancement within their chosen research domain.  | X      |
| To develop students' professional ethos and identity within psychology, encouraging the consistent application of evidence-based thinking to novel contexts and problems.  | X      |
| To develop students' capability as independent researchers, capable of working autonomously to produce new psychological knowledge   | X      |
| To develop a deep and systematic understanding of research methods and techniques which cut-across many areas of psychological research, and to develop specialist expertise in methods that are at the forefront of the particular areas of psychological research. | X      |
| To provide a sophisticated understanding of the cultural, social, and regulatory context in which clinical psychology is practiced.  |        |
| To provide students with concrete clinical competencies and experiences --- linked to those defined by relevant regulators --- that will distinguish them as they apply for clinical jobs and professional training.   |        |

## 8. Programme Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion, graduates of the MSc RM should have developed knowledge, understanding, and skills in the following areas: Knowledge and understanding; Cognitive and intellectual skills; Employment related skills; Practical skills; and Transferable skills.

| PLO          |   | MSc | PGDip | PGCert |
|--------------|---|-----|-------|--------|
| Cognitive 1  | Ability to apply specialist methodological knowledge to the design of supervised research.  | X   | X     |        |
| Cognitive 2  | Capacity to process and critically evaluate a research complex literature—which may include contradictory or incomplete findings.   | X   | X     | X      |
| Cognitive 3  | The ability to synthesise ideas and techniques from multiple perspectives, demonstrating insight, understanding, and creativity in their work.  | X   | X     | X      |
| Employment 1 | Insight and understanding of the value of psychology in the workplace, and the range of career opportunities available to graduates, especially those outside of traditional professional psychological training  | X   | X     | X      |
| Employment 2 | Reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses, and take responsibility for personal and professional development.   | X   | X     | X      |
| Employment 3 | Demonstrate expertise in problem solving with technology for different purposes   | X   |       |        |
| Knowledge 1  | Systematic knowledge of the core techniques for quantitative enquiry in psychology, and the theoretical and practical limitations of current approaches and knowledge.  | X   | X     |        |
| Knowledge 2  | Understanding and expertise in the application of specialist methods related to the students chosen research and professional interests.  | X   |       |        |
| Knowledge 3  | Advanced understanding of psychological theory and evidence within specialist topics in psychology, including cognitive and brain science, behaviour change, or clinical psychology. Understanding of the interconnectedness of psychological understanding across these loci of enquiry. | X   | X     | X      |
| Practical 1  | Fluency and precision in written English.   | X   | X     | X      |
| Practical 2  | Clarity and confidence in oral presentation   | X   | X     | X      |
| Practical 3  | Sophistication in manipulating, visualising, analysing and communicating insights from quantitative data.   | X   |       |        |
| Transfer 1   | Explain complex ideas to non-experts, in plain English.   | X   | X     | X      |
| Transfer 2   | Experience of group and team-working, and of developing and maintaining effective working relationships with supervisors and peers.   | X   | X     | X      |
| Transfer 3   | Fluency and confidence in visualising and communicating insights from quantitative data.  | X   |       |        |



| PLO        |   | MSc | PGDip | PGCert |
|------------|---|-----|-------|--------|
| Transfer 4 | Capacity to act autonomously to undertake a sustained research project; insight into the nature of research impact and leadership | X   | X     | X      |

## 9. Admissions Criteria, including APCL, APEL and DS arrangements

Students should have an honours degree or equivalent, preferably in psychology but also in cognate subjects (e.g. computational neuroscience). BPS graduate membership is not required for entry. Wherever possible, established relationships or equivalencies to other international qualifications will be used, with reference to current University guidance on these matters. However, the admissions policy is based upon the principle that students will be admitted if we believe that they can benefit from the experience, and this principle will be used to make decisions where equivalencies are not available.

Those with lower qualifications but relevant industrial experience will also be considered for entry, subject to interview by the programme lead. Candidates with existing achievements may be considered for exemption from specific modules under the University guidelines for accreditation of prior learning (APCL) and assessment of prior experiential learning (APEL). The Director of Postgraduate Programmes has responsibility for approving exemption under these guidelines. Her decision will be made after consulting with the Programme/Module Leaders.

### Applicants with Disabilities

The University is committed to promoting and providing a positive study environment for all students and has a dedicated department to help students with disabilities, the Disability Services team <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/learning-gateway/disability-and-dyslexia>

Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability of an individual to carry out normal day-to-day activities, and can mean different things to different people.

The University has a duty to make anticipatory 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure students with disabilities are not discriminated against. Where a person with a disability is at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with a person without a disability, the University has a duty to take reasonable steps to remove that disadvantage by:- changing provisions, criteria or practices, altering, removing or providing a reasonable alternative means of avoiding physical features and providing auxiliary aids.

Please contact us for further details.

### International applications (all programmes)

Overseas students for whom English is not the first language will be expected to demonstrate proficiency in English with a minimum IELTS score of 6.5. Successful completion of the University's English pre-sessional Programme will be accepted as equivalent.

### Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

Students undertaking research dissertations involving members of the public (including patients recruited from the NHS or support groups) need to provide evidence of an up to date DBS check. This will be made evident at induction to allow students to undertake DBS checks if required.

## **10. Progression criteria for Final and Intermediate Awards**

Students on the MSc RM award must pass 180 credits, in accordance with the standard university procedures for PG awards. Awards will be classified in line with university procedures for PG awards, based on the students aggregate percentage.

To achieve MSc awards at distinction, merit and pass students must achieve an aggregate mark of 70%, 60% and 50% respectively, and a dissertation mark equal to or greater than that percentage.

MSc RM students who fail to complete 180 credits may be awarded one of the specified intermediate awards (PGDip/PGCert Research Methods in Psychology), provided they meet the learning outcomes of these intermediate awards (see mapping documents attached to the operational specification).

## **11. Non-Standard Regulations**

Not applicable

## 12. Transitional Arrangements

Transitional arrangements will be required for the small number of PT students on the MSc PRM: For PT PRM students who have not yet completed modules that are withdrawn in 2019 we propose to match these modules with equivalents in the new MSc RM (see Table 3). Nonetheless, these students will receive the award for which they were originally registered (i.e. the MSc PRM).

| <b>MSc PRM module</b>                     | <b>MSc RM alternatives</b>  | <b>Notes</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| PSY555, 559, 560, 567, 566, 570, 564, 572 | Carried forward with direct equivalents in the new programme.   |  |
| PSY556                                    | “Data fluency” module   | Students on the PT MSc PRM who have not taken PSY556 in their first year will be required to take PSYC753. Although this substitutes a 20-credit module students will not be financially disadvantaged by this replacement.<br><br>To minimise numbers of students affected, we will recommend to all students starting the PRM PT in 2018 to take PSY556 in year 1. |
| PSY558 and PSY557                         | Advanced techniques for psychological research  | Students on the PT MSc PRM programme, starting in 2018, will be advised not to take PSY558 and PSY557 in their first year, and to instead take the new advanced techniques module PSYC754 in their second year.  |
| PSY571                                    | Answering psychological questions AND Success in science  | Students must complete both of these modules.  |
| PSY561/PSY562                             | Data fluency<br>Advanced techniques for psychological research<br>Success in science<br>Another elective module | Selection will depend on modules student has already completed.  |

# Appendices

## Programme Specification Mapping (PGT): module contribution to the meeting of Award Learning Outcomes

| Module                               | Credits | C<br>core<br>E<br>elective | Award Learning Outcomes contributed to (for more information see Section 8) |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   |                  |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | Compensation<br>Y/N | Assessment<br>element(s) and<br>weightings<br>[use KIS definition]<br>E1 - exam<br>E2 - clinical exam<br>T1 - test<br>C1 - coursework<br>A1 - generic assessment<br>P1 - practical |
|--------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|--|
|                                      |         |                            | Cognitive & intellectual skills   |   |   |   | Employment related skills |   |   |   | Knowledge & understanding |   |   |   | Practical skills |   |   |   | Key & transferable skills |   |   |   |                     |  |
|                                      |         |                            | 1   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1                         | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1                         | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1                | 2 | 3 | 4 | 1                         | 2 | 3 | 4 |                     |  |
| PSYC750                              | 0       | C                          |   |   |   |   | X                         | X |   |   | X                         |   |   |   |                  | X |   |   | X                         | X | X |   | Yes                 | C1, P1 (Pass/Fail, Pass/Fail)  |
| PSYC751                              | 10      | C                          | X   | X | X |   |                           |   |   |   | X                         |   |   |   | X                |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC752                              | 10      | C                          | X   |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | X                         | X |   |   | X                |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC753                              | 20      | C                          |   |   | X |   |                           |   | X |   | X                         |   |   |   |                  |   | X |   | X                         |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC754                              | 20      | C                          |   |   |   |   |                           |   | X |   |                           | X |   |   |                  |   | X |   |                           |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC756                              | 10      | C                          |   |   |   |   | X                         | X |   |   |                           |   |   |   | X                | X | X |   | X                         |   | X |   | Yes                 | P1 (100%)  |
| PSYC757                              | 10      | C                          |   |   |   |   | X                         |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | X                |   |   |   | X                         | X | X | X | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC781                              | 60      | C                          | X   | X | X |   |                           | X | X |   | X                         | X | X |   | X                | X | X |   | X                         | X |   | X | No                  | C1, P1 (100%, Pass/Fail)   |
| PSYC755                              | 10      | E                          | X   | X | X |   |                           |   |   |   | X                         | X |   |   |                  |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC771                              | 10      | E                          |   | X | X |   | X                         |   |   |   |                           | X | X |   |                  |   |   |   |                           |   |   |   | Yes                 | C1 (100%)  |
| PSYC774                              | 10      | E                          |   | X | X |   |                           |   |   |   |                           |   | X |   |                  |   |   |   |                           |   | X |   | Yes                 | C1, A1 (100%, Pass/Fail)   |
| PSYC791                              | 10      | E                          |   | X | X |   |                           | X |   |   |                           |   | X |   |                  | X |   |   |                           | X | X |   | Yes                 | C1, A1 (100%, Pass/Fail)   |
| <b>Learning Outcomes 180 credits</b> |         |                            | X   | X | X |   | X                         | X | X |   | X                         | X | X |   | X                | X | X |   | X                         | X | X | X |                     |  |
| <b>Confirmed Award LOs</b>           |         |                            | X   | X | X |   | X                         | X | X |   | X                         | X | X |   | X                | X | X |   | X                         | X | X | X |                     |  |