Overall Assessment

An external assessor – a senior Psychology academic from another Go8 university – reviewed a sample of marked assessment items awarded grades of Below Pass, Pass, Credit, Distinction, High Distinction in the Unit PSYC3011.

Below are his ratings of the extent to which he agreed with the level of grade awarded. For the grades of Pass and Distinction there was agreement with the grades awarded, while for Credit and Distinction there was some disagreement with the grade awarded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of assessments</th>
<th>Below Pass</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Credit</th>
<th>Distinction</th>
<th>High Distinction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed in total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with grade awarded</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe grade awarded to be unduly high</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe grade awarded to be unduly low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review of specified learning objectives

1. To what extent is the information provided about learning objectives clear and sufficient? (Please mark the box that best represents your view).

Not at all       Somewhat   Adequately   Very Well    Completely
☒                 ☑         ☧           ☒            ☛

Please list up to three reasons for making this rating

1. It would be clearer if the specific and generic learning outcomes were listed as separate and distinct outcomes.

School response: This is a useful suggestion which is consistent with the University of Sydney’s revised assessment policy. The link between generic and specific learning outcomes and particular assessment tasks are currently discussed in lectures and tutorials but will be incorporated in future unit outlines.

2. To what extent are the specified learning objectives appropriate for a final year subject? (Please mark the box that best represents your view).

Not at all       Somewhat   Adequately   Very Well    Completely
☒                 ☒         ☦           ☑            ☚

Please list up to three reasons for making this rating

3. How do the specified learning objectives compare with those of final year subjects from similar universities?

The learning outcomes closely resemble those at my University

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Review of assessment tasks

1. To what extent are the assessment tasks suitable for the specified learning objectives? (Please mark the box that best represents your view).

   Not at all  Somewhat  Adequately  Very Well  Completely

   □          □               □           □          □

Please list up to three reasons for making this rating

1. They give a comprehensive coverage of the unit syllabus.
2. They are spaced and weighted appropriately to engage the students throughout the semester.

2. To what extent are the assessment requirements and the marking criteria explained clearly? (Please mark the box that best represents your view).

   Not at all  Somewhat  Adequately  Very Well  Completely

   □          □               □           □          □

Please list up to three reasons for making this rating

1. The marking criteria are very general and provide only broad guidance for report preparation (and marking).
2. The feedback form is very specific and could be adapted to be a guide for report preparation as well as marking.

   School response: The tutors cover all of the relevant aspects of report writing in class. This includes detailed discussion of report format as well as elaboration of the key qualities listed in the feedback sheet as they relate to the particular report topic chosen for that tutorial group. The assessor’s suggestion that the information provided in class be supplemented by a written summary will be considered for future years.

3. To what extent are the assessment tasks and the marking criteria appropriate for a final year subject? (Please mark the box that best represents your view).

   Not at all  Somewhat  Adequately  Very Well  Completely

   □          □               □           □          □

Please list up to three reasons for making this rating

1. Both are very similar to those at my University.

4. How do the assessment tasks and the marking criteria compare with those of final year subjects from similar universities?

   Both are very similar to those at my University.

Overall assessment structure

The assessment structure (50% during the semester, 50% for a two-hour final exam) is appropriate to the unit and consistent with that used at my University.

The unit outline should explicitly link the learning outcomes to the assessment items. This can be done in a matrix and serves the good purpose of showing students the point of the different assessments (It’s not always obvious to students that writing a lab report, say, develops important specific and generic skills).
Laboratory reports

The laboratory projects are innovative extensions of the syllabus which is contemporary and comprehensive, with an appropriate recognition of the historical roots. Students were well prepared for the laboratory report with detailed tutorial notes that outlined the rationale, hypotheses, results, and conclusions for both experimental projects.

The 20 laboratory reports were marked blind to the mark assigned to the report. Although my marks and those assigned by the University of Sydney were highly correlated (my mean = 70.6; Sydney mean = 74.6) and covered a wider range (my range = 32-95; SD = 16.2; Sydney range = 52-95; SD = 12.6) than those in the initial marking. The general criteria used to assess the report would be helpful to students when preparing their reports, and the use of the same criteria in at least one other unit (PSYC3018) gives a valuable consistency of approach. The general criteria, with their emphasis on critical thinking and evaluation, are consistent with those used at my University. However, supplementing these general criteria with marking criteria specific to the report would give more guidance to markers and might reduce variation between markers. Some of the reports were not well written and it may be that I gave greater weight to this than the original markers. The detailed feedback sheet would give focused (and therefore valuable) feedback to students but it does not serve as a marking guide (eg, 30 marks for the Discussion, allocated according to the set criteria). This might be worth considering for laboratory reports which can usefully be broken down into sections with different requirements (which can have different marking criteria assigned).

School response: The coordinator and tutors discussed the specific criteria for each report topic at some length in tutors’ meetings to establish consistent criteria. Since the students had a choice of two experiments to write up, these individual criteria were tailored to the specific report that the tutor would be marking while the feedback form was used for both reports, and was therefore more generic. Development of individual feedback sheets for each topic providing more specific criteria will be considered for the future.

The word limit was 2000 words but few papers reported a word count and it is not clear if a penalty was applied to over-length papers. A School-wide policy on assignment word length and associated penalties should be considered.

School response: All submitted reports are required to include a School-provided coversheet, attached to the hard copy, on which the word count is reported. There is a clear School policy across all undergraduate psychology assessments that students may be penalised for exceeding the word count by more than 10%. Unit co-ordinators are provided with word counts for all units and determine consistent penalties that are implemented across the unit. Students are informed of the wordcount policy in general administrative guidelines that apply to all undergraduate units which all unit co-ordinators inform students about and are linked to the e-learning site for each individual unit.

The unit outline does not refer students to the University policy on plagiarism. Does the software used to detect plagiarism give students originality (or duplication) reports on draft submissions and allow revision? Such an educative approach seems better than a purely punitive approach. The penalties for plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct are not specified.

School response: As is evident in the unit outlines available on the School website, all unit outlines DO include a summary of the School’s policy for dealing with plagiarism, and the penalties applied, and a link to the University policy. We are not sure why the assessor failed to receive or notice this information. First year Psychology units adopt an educative approach in which students summarise a short paper and submit their summary to the plagiarism software used by the School to provide the basis for a class discussion of what constitutes plagiarism and to educate students in effective academic writing. At the 3rd year level, we believe students have already had sufficient exposure to such preventative approaches and feedback on their writing style. Since the preventative strategies were introduced in earlier years, the incidence of plagiarism at senior levels is very low.

Exams and quizzes

The exams and quizzes are well tailored to the unit teaching. The multiple-choice questions have been carefully developed, and mostly require thoughtful analysis of the alternative answers. The quizzes also give a comprehensive assessment of the laboratory/tutorial content and keep students ‘on track’.
The final exam is structured to survey the unit syllabus broadly. A detailed marking key for each essay question (with marks allocated to the points sought in the answer) gives very specific guidance to markers. The markers’ annotations on the exam scripts supplied show that the marking key was followed closely.