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 PSYC3018.

Below are his ratings of the extent to which he agreed with the level of grade awarded. In general, there is good agreement about the grade that should be assigned to the assessed work.

<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>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with grade awarded</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe grade awarded to be unduly high</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe grade awarded to be unduly low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment about other matters

The reviewer was also asked to consider answers to the following questions. These are reproduced below.

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. The outcomes should be linked explicitly to the relevant assessment items.

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 objectives, which range broadly from professional values to critical thinking to domain-specific knowledge are quite comparable with 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

   The assessment tasks are diverse, thereby covering the syllabus, and scheduled to encourage student learning 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

   It isn’t clear if the students were given the detailed feedback guide (which influenced marking) before the assignment so it could be used when preparing and writing their essays.

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

   

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 used in third-year Psychology units at my University.

**Overall assessment structure**

The assessment structure (40% during the semester, 60% for a two-hour final exam) is similar to that in third-year units at my University (although 50/50 is the norm).

The unit outline does give a detailed list of learning outcomes and has a general statement that these outcomes are assessed in the different assessment items. A matrix that linked each assessment item to the learning outcome(s) assessed would demonstrate the purpose of the assessments to the students and be more effective than the general statement in the 'Evidence of learning' section.

**Written assignment**

The written assignment, as 2000-word structured essay, is an excellent learning and assessment task for the unit.

The 25 essays were marked blind to the mark assigned to each with close agreement between the marks and with no substantial discrepancies. My marks ranged from 40 to 95 with a mean of 68.1 whereas the original marks ranged from 40 to 94 with a mean of 67.7.
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 (PSYC3011) 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. These criteria are suited to the (essay) nature of the assignment (more so than for a lab report). However, supplementing these general criteria with specific marking criteria such as those in the assignment feedback sheet would give more guidance to both the students and the markers. It isn’t clear if students were given the feedback sheet in advance to guide their essay writing.

The essays were with some obvious exceptions very well written and argued.

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 word count 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 penalties for plagiarism are less severe than those applied at my University. 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. There should be a School-wide policy on plagiarism and other academic misconduct.

School response: There is a School-wide policy on plagiarism which is summarised in both individual unit outlines and general administrative guidelines. 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.

Oral presentation
The presentation is a very useful exercise that develops group work and oral presentation skills; these should be described as important learning outcomes in the unit outline (this helps students see the value of the exercise). There are clear and objective criteria for assessing the presentations which the students have in advance to shape their presentations. Evaluating each group member’s contribution to the presentation discourages freeloading.

Exam and quiz
The quiz is configured more as a learning task than an assessment task and is an opportunity for students to revise and learn key parts of the unit syllabus.

The final exam is an appropriate coverage of the unit syllabus. The multiple-choice questions require thoughtful analysis and the essay section of the exam paper is structured to give a comprehensive coverage of the syllabus. Detailed marking schema for each short-answer question (with marks allocated to the points sought in the answer) gives specific guidance to markers. The markers’ annotations on the exam scripts supplied show that the marking key was followed.