



School of Social Sciences

Department of Psychology

Subject Level Report - Abstract

2020

Introduction

In accordance with the *Quality Enhancement Framework for Icelandic Higher Education 2017*, the Department of Psychology, School of Social Sciences at Reykjavik University, initiated a process of review and self-evaluation. The results are presented in a Subject Level report and are summarized in this abstract. A Subject-level Review (SLR) Committee was established in September 2020, and the main work of the Committee was undertaken during autumn 2020 and continued into the spring 2021. The Committee comprised the following members:

Department Chair and SLR Committee Chair:

Bryndís Björk Ásgeirsdóttir, PhD

SLR Report Coordinator:

Jack James, PhD

Directors of Psychology Programs:

BSc Psychology - Kamilla Rún Jóhannsdóttir, PhD

MSc Clinical Psychology - Linda Bára Lýðsdóttir, PhD

MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis - Berglind Sveinbjörnsdóttir, PhD

PhD Studies - Birna Baldursdóttir, PhD

External Member:

Robert (Bobby) Zachariae, PhD, Professor, Departments of Psychology and Behavioural Science/Oncology, Aarhus University

Student Members:

BSc Psychology, Year 3 - Elva Björg Elvarsdóttir

MSc Clinical Psychology, Year 2 - Hjalmtýr Alfreðsson

MSc Clinical Psychology, Graduate 2016 - Heiða Rut Guðmundsdóttir

Summary

Academic studies in psychology at Reykjavík University were initiated in 2009 following formal approval by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture. For much of the intervening period, the discipline was incorporated as part of the School of Business. Then, following restructuring of the University in 2019, the Department of Psychology was established as one of seven academic departments organised within two Schools. The Departments of Psychology, Business Administration, Law, and Sport Science comprise the School of Social Sciences, and the Departments of Computer Science, Engineering, and Applied Engineering comprise the School of Technology. Table 1 summarises current staffing in the Department of Psychology with reference to both permanent faculty and part-time teachers, showing the number of individuals and the full-time equivalent (FTE). Table 2 summarises the main pillars of the Department's program of teaching and learning, namely, the BSc Psychology, MSc Clinical Psychology, MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis, and PhD Psychology.

Table 1. Permanent Faculty Members and Part-time Teachers of the Department of Psychology, Number (No.) and Full Time-equivalent (FTE), 10 September 2020.

Faculty	Male No.	FTE	Female No.	FTE	Total No.	FTE
Professors	2	1.5	2	2	4	3.5
Associate Professors	2	1.1	3	2.8	5	3.9
Assistant Professors	0	0	5	5	5	5.0
Lecturers	0	0	1	1	1	1
Total Permanent	4	2.6	11	10.8	15	13.4
Part-time teachers	29	2.4	65	3.8	94	6.2

Table 2. Study Programmes in Psychology.

Program	Abbreviation	Year of introduction	Credits (ECTS)
Bachelor of Science in Psychology	BSc Psychology	2009	180
Master of Science in Clinical Psychology	MSc Clinical Psychology	2014	120
Master of Science in Applied Behaviour Analysis	MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis	2019	120
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology	PhD Psychology	2014	240

Teaching and Learning

Bachelor of Science in Psychology (BSc Psychology) – 180 ECTS

The BSc Psychology consists of 6 semesters completed over 3 years of full-time study, with the core objective of providing a comprehensive foundation in the discipline of psychology. The degree emphasises both the science and practice of psychology with the aim of ensuring graduates have the best possible preparation for employment in Iceland and abroad in occupations where a background in psychology is relevant. Acknowledging that the Bachelor-level degree in psychology is a foundation qualification for further study (rather than conferring rights of professional practice), the BSc Psychology aims to enable students to access the widest possible range of opportunities for postgraduate education and training in psychology. In addition, the BSc Psychology seeks to serve as a valuable and meaningful terminating degree for those choosing not to pursue further education and/or employment within the formal discipline of psychology.

For those seeking to continue in the field of psychology, the degree is a relevant qualification for progressing to postgraduate study in professional practice and/or research in psychology at Masters and/or Doctorate level. Thus, by providing broad knowledge of the science and practice of psychology, the BSc Psychology serves as a grounding for postgraduate education and training in specialist areas of the discipline (e.g., clinical, health, organisational, neuropsychology, etc.), while also providing generic knowledge and skills relevant to educational and career paths in fields other than psychology. To maximise applicability within Iceland as well as transferability internationally, the BSc Psychology is benchmarked so as to satisfy relevant content and quality standards promulgated within Iceland and internationally.

Faculty in the BSc Psychology are committed to consolidating past achievements, while simultaneously working towards ever-greater excellence in teaching, including increased utilization by faculty of relevant technology to implement a wide range of “blended learning” teaching formats. For example, pre-recording of course content is one means by which class time can be used more effectively by teachers to explore topics in greater depth, to assist in identifying and addressing particular challenges students may experience and to improve student-teacher engagement, and to improve student opportunities for revision. At the same time, the Department firmly believes that no single use of technology is ideal for all learning purposes. Rather, faculty are encouraged to explore available alternatives to identify uses that best suit the aims and objectives of their respective courses. In that regard, the ultimate goal is to deliver the best possible learning experience for all students.

Master of Science in Clinical Psychology (MSc Clinical Psychology) - 120 ECTS

The MSc Clinical Psychology is accredited by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture as fulfilling the necessary educational requirement to practice as a psychologist in Iceland. In turn, legal certification to practice is provided by the Ministry of Health. As such, the MSc Clinical Psychology program provides essential professional training in the main areas of work performed by psychologists in Iceland, including adult clinical psychology, child and adolescent psychology, and intellectual disabilities. The course is distinctive in that it combines the major evidence-based approaches of cognitive-behaviour therapy and applied behaviour analysis. Through the provision of expert knowledge, skills, and competence, the MSc Clinical Psychology program aims to produce well-rounded and capable practitioners,

thoroughly prepared professionally and ethically for work within a wide range of human-service settings in Iceland.

The program espouses the Scientist-Practitioner Model of training, which emphasises an evidence-based approach to professional practice. Students are encouraged to evaluate and appraise information openly and with an enquiring mind, to critically evaluate their own performance, and to always seek evidence in relation to the theory-practice nexus. Application for admission to the MSc Clinical Psychology is advertised, and selection is based on a competitive application process. Demand for the program is high, evidenced by the number of applications consistently exceeding the number of available places in the program, with current demand being four-fold greater than places available. The success of the program is such that almost all graduates find employment within a short time of graduating, with a sizable number being employed even before graduating.

Course content is reviewed at regular intervals with the aim of ensuring the best possible sequence of study for preparing students for assignment to clinical placements, filling gaps and removing redundancies in course content, and gauging the optimum depth of relevant course content. Special attention is given to student preparation in relation to primary competencies and diversity in client presentations (e.g., older age and social diversity in all its dimensions), client health and wellbeing (e.g., rehabilitation and prevention), and practitioner professional skills (e.g., decision making, problem solving, communication, and leadership).

Master of Science in Applied Behaviour Analysis (MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis) - 120 ECTS

The MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis equips students with skills in the application of general principles of learning and behaviour aimed at addressing common problems experienced by individuals and in society. The purpose of the program is to impart high-level skills in supervision, consultation, research, and direct service provision in institutions, hospitals, and schools, where the aim is to improve behaviour that is socially relevant and important in everyday life. In addition, the program aims to disseminate understanding of the science of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) to practitioners. The program contributes to the evidence base of ABA through research conducted by faculty and students, and by delivering consultancy services for and with practitioners and consumers. As with the MSc Clinical Psychology, the MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis espouses the Scientist-Practitioner Model of training for the professional practice of psychology. Research and practice in ABA are relevant in general education, special education, paediatrics, and across the spectra of mental health and physical health.

The MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis incorporates a course sequence (referred to internationally as the “verified course sequence”; VCS) promulgated by the Behaviour Analyst Certification Board (BACB). The BACB is a non-profit cooperation, headquartered in the United States, whose mission is to protect consumers of behaviour analysis worldwide, and to increase the availability of qualified behaviour analysts globally. Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (i.e., BCBA-certified) are independent practitioners who provide behaviour analytic services. Completion of the VCS coursework, such as that which is embedded in the MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis, is an essential step towards becoming a BCBA-certified professional. Overall, the MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis incorporates courses on the application of behaviour analysis in diverse areas,

including gerontology, brain injury, clinical psychology, autism, and early intensive intervention and education.

There is strong and increasing interest in the MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis among the professional community and service providers, and demand from prospective students is high. In that context, future plans and actions include the formation of a research “lab” designed to pursue a host of aims, including: providing students with a forum for developing skills in research; offering a site that complements current practicum placements, which include schools, hospitals, and community services; offering supervised consultancy services for parents and teachers in diverse areas of child behaviour; providing short courses in ABA for practitioners (e.g., teachers) and parents; increased opportunities for students to engage in ABA research; acknowledging that the program incorporates the VCS course sequence and is taught in English, recruitment of international students; and by working with others, pursue the introduction of professional standards and certification processes for behaviour analysts in Iceland and the Nordic region.

PhD in Psychology (PhD Psychology) - 240 ECTS

A main objective of the PhD Psychology is to advance the discipline of psychology by equipping graduates with the requisite knowledge and skills for improving professional practice, disseminating knowledge (e.g., teaching), and/or contributing to the science of psychology. Accordingly, graduates acquire high-level skills in research evidenced by independence and initiative in scientific work; professional skills for assuming responsibility as principal investigator for projects; supervisory skills for providing effective oversight of the work of others; intellectual skills for participating in critical debate, including initiating and leading theoretical discourse; and communication skills for disseminating research findings to peers, other scholars, and the general public.

Completion of a Master’s degree in psychology or a cognate discipline is a prerequisite for admission to the PhD Psychology. Applications are received at any time, and must be accompanied by a research proposal and agreement of a proposed supervisor from among the permanent faculty of the Department of Psychology. Following admission, a Thesis Committee is appointed, comprised of no fewer than 3 scholars, one of whom must be external to RU. In addition to submission of a thesis and completion of related activities (e.g., seminar presentation), PhD students are required to take courses equivalent to a minimum of 30 ECTS, and the thesis work must be an original and substantial contribution to knowledge. Several channels exist for funding for PhD studies, including the internal RU competitive process, grants from external awarding bodies (e.g., RANNÍS; the Icelandic Research Fund), and grants in instances where the supervisor has sought and been awarded external funding for a PhD student.

Following its introduction in 2014, the program has attracted a steady stream of enquiries and applications from prospective doctoral candidates with diverse academic backgrounds from universities both domestic and international. A goal of the Department of Psychology is to progress from the current average of approximately 1 PhD student per permanent faculty member to approximately 2 students per faculty member. The rate of recruitment of new students to date suggests that the steady-state objective of an average of 2 PhD students per permanent faculty member is likely to be realised by 2025.

Student Support

The Administrative Office of the Department of Psychology has a key role in enhancing the student experience. Each programme has a designated Programme Administrator, whose main function is to support and assist students throughout their studies. The Office is open to students during office hours for appointment and drop-in, as well as via phone and e-mail. Students' needs, concerns, and feedback are directed to relevant administrators, faculty, student representatives, and specific services as appropriate. The Office and the Department generally follow an open-door policy, wherein students have direct access to administrators and faculty in person, by phone, and/or by email. In addition, RU students in general have access to: career and guidance counsellors; student study areas located strategically throughout the campus; Reykjavik University Library, which provides access to book and journal collections, reading and study spaces, computer workstations, and photocopying/scanning/printing facilities; and the Student Union which provides space and facilities for student meetings and administration.

Management of Research

In accordance with the principle of "teaching informed by research", an ethos of engagement in research has been, and continues to be, an important feature of the Department of Psychology. All permanent faculty members hold a PhD, and all are active in research. Independent analysis has shown that compared to all relevant benchmarks the Department has a sustained record of strong performance in research. Taking articles published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals as a key metric of research *output*, Psychology has achieved a consistently higher average year-on-year output than averages for the School of Social Sciences and the University as a whole. Similar relative performance is revealed for research *impact*, wherein year-on-year average number of research citations and average h-index (an individual-level metric of productivity and impact) for Psychology are both substantially higher than averages for the School of Social Sciences and the University.

The Department's strong research ethos (which includes student engagement in research) is supported by faculty and student access to laboratory and computer areas for conducting experimental research and computer-based survey research. While most research space, including research-training space for students, is located proximally to the physical space occupied by the Department, Psychology faculty and students also have access to shared research areas elsewhere in the University, including a blackout room in the Department of Computer Science and facilities for sleep research in the Department of Engineering. The research and research-training facilities of the Department include an extensive complement of equipment (e.g., cardiovascular monitors, EEG, and virtual reality equipment) suitable for research in fields such as perception, cognitive psychology, psychophysiology, and neuropsychology. Psychology also houses a biobehavioural laboratory that incorporates a sound-attenuated *BioBus* (an ambulance-style vehicle) serving as a mobile laboratory and a wet lab for analysing biological material. In addition, students and faculty derive extensive support by way of the Department's participation in diverse RU centres of research excellence, including the Icelandic Centre for Trauma Research (ICE-TRE), Centre for Research Training in Clinical Psychology (CRTCP), Reykjavik University Sleep Institute (RUSI), Centre for Analysis and Design of Intelligent Agents (CARDIA), Icelandic Behavioural Genetics Centre (IBGC), and the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA).

The Future

In the context of a history of rapid development, a main challenge for the recently-formed Department of Psychology is finding the right balance between consolidation aimed at preserving and enhancing that which has been achieved in the past and the pursuit of future high-quality growth and development. Future expansion is most likely to occur in relation to growth in existing programs, including recruitment of international students; and the introduction of new academic initiatives, including, for example, Masters-level studies in health psychology and neuropsychology, and Diploma-level studies in applied behaviour analysis. At the same time, care will be needed in the timing of all such developments, wherein account must be taken of such factors as student and societal demand, and relevant special circumstances as may exist at particular points in time, such as challenges posed by the current COVID-19 pandemic and what may transpire in its aftermath.

Table 3 summarises future action plans predicated on a consensus that rather than setting hard deadlines, future actions are likely to be better served by a process of regular reporting to relevant Department Councils and Committees. Within the Department, principal responsibilities generally rest with identifiable individuals, including the Department Chair, Program Directors, and Chairs of Councils and Committees (e.g., Department Council, Psychology Curriculum Council, BSc Psychology Quality Council, Psychology Research Council, and the respective academic program Quality Councils and Assessment Committees). Accordingly, responsibilities are borne collectively by members of relevant councils and committees and ultimately by all faculty.

Table 3. Action Plans.

The Department		
Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Competition for students and the maintenance of quality control.	Ongoing commitment to strong and transparent quality control mechanisms with periodic review.	Department Committee, Department Council, Psychology Research Council, Assessment Committees, Quality Councils, and Psychology Advisory Board.
Expand faculty numbers in each of the main speciality areas so as to achieve “critical mass”. Expand the resource basis by continuing to plan for increases in student numbers.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Ditto.
Seek to correct the current substantial undergraduate and postgraduate student gender imbalance, wherein females are a large majority. One strategy could be to contribute to the teaching of psychology within high schools (menntaskólar).	2023 and beyond with periodic review.	Ditto.

Examine whether the fee-paying requirements of Reykjavík University discourage prospective students from lower socioeconomic background from seeking places. If so, examine ways to mitigate the problem (e.g., targeted scholarships).	2024 and beyond with ongoing periodic review.	Ditto.
Foster strong engagement with alumni by way of surveys, social media, and virtual networking, and the staging of social and professional events.	2022 and beyond with ongoing periodic review.	Ditto.

Teaching and Learning		
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Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
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Bachelor of Science in Psychology		
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Encourage use of innovative teaching and learning practices, with specific reference to the use of evolving digital technology.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Program Director, BSc Psychology Assessment Committee, BSc Psychology Quality Council, Psychology Curriculum Council, Department Council, Department Committee, and Psychology Advisory Board.
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Stakeholder collaboration to establish a formal domestic process for accrediting undergraduate studies in psychology in Iceland.	2024 with ongoing periodic review.	Ditto.
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Master of Science in Clinical Psychology		
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Stakeholder collaboration to implement the 12-month practice requirement for professional certification.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Program Director MSc Clinical Psychology, Quality Council, MSc Programs Assessment Committee, Psychology Curriculum Council,
Review of all course content with reference to student preparation for clinical placement.	Initially, Autumn 2021, ongoing with periodic review thereafter.	Department Council, Department Committee, and Psychology Advisory Board.

Master of Science in Applied Behaviour Analysis		
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Develop supervised consultancy services for parents and teachers.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Program Director
Nordic collaboration to reinstate BACB certification in the Nordic countries.	Ditto.	MSc Applied Behaviour Analysis, Quality Council, MSc Programs Assessment Committee, Psychology Curriculum Council, Department Council, Department Committee, and Psychology Advisory Board.
Nordic collaboration to establish local certification for behaviour analysts.	Ditto.	Ditto.
Develop short education and training courses in applied behaviour analysis.	Ditto.	Ditto.
Recruit international students.	Initially, Autumn 2021, ongoing with regular periodic review thereafter.	Ditto.

PhD in Psychology

Detailed reference guide for use by prospective students, registered students, and supervisors.	Autumn 2021.	Program Director.
Achieve an approximate steady-state enrolment of 2 PhD students on average per academic faculty member.	2026 with ongoing periodic review.	Program Director, Psychology Research Council, Psychology Curriculum Council, Department Council, Department Committee, and Psychology Advisory Board.
Maximise funding for PhD studies.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Ditto.

Management of Research

Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
Maintain overall current levels of research outputs as steady-state objectives for the Department, especially in relation to publication in ISI-listed journals and applications for competitive grants.	Ongoing with periodic review.	Department Chair, Department Council, Department Committee, Psychology Research Council, and Psychology Advisory Board.
Enhance collegial support, especially by more senior faculty of newer appointees, to	Ditto.	All faculty.

achieve and maintain overall steady-state objectives.		
Integration of graduate-level research into the mainstream of the Department's research management processes.	Ditto.	All faculty.

23 November 2021