

External Examiner Overview report 2020/21

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Summary

- All reports confirm that validated courses at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust meet or exceed Academic Standards compared to relevant benchmarks.
- Most reports specifically comment on the high standards of students' work and the evidence of progression
- The response to the COVID pandemic was commended
- One examiner recommended closer working between the Trust and a national centre to streamline marking

Introduction

As part of the Trust's commitment to reviewing and maintaining the academic standards and quality of its validated provision, it continues the practice of summarising the External Examiner reports.

The purpose of this report is to capture common themes – that is, issues or commendations that span a number of reports, or have a wider applicability across the Trust.

Course-level scrutiny of the external examiner reports also takes place and course teams respond to the external examiners in a formal letter, and also include the reports within their Annual Review of Courses as part of their review of the previous academic year.

The following reports were included in this review:

Course Code	Course Title	External Examiner
D4F / D4I	Graduate Certificate in Systemic Approaches to working with individuals, families and organisations (Foundation)	Billy Hardy

	Postgraduate Certificate in Systemic Approaches to working with individuals, families and organisations (Intermediate)	
D10	MA Consulting and Leading in Organisations: Psychodynamic and Systemic Approaches	Julian Manley
D10D	DProf Consultation and the Organisation	Julian Manley
D24/D24A	PGCert Child, adolescent and family mental wellbeing: multidisciplinary practice	Helen Damon
D55	DProf Advanced Practice and Research (Social Work and Social Care)	Nini Fang
D58	MA Foundations of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy	Evrinomy Advl
M4	DProf Child, Community and Educational Psychology (Essex)	Andrea Honess
M6	MA Systemic Psychotherapy	Chip Chimera
M7	MA Working with Children, Young People & Families: A Psychoanalytic Observational Approach	Gillian Ruch
M7 Italian centres	MA Working with Children, Young People & Families: A Psychoanalytic Observational Approach	Alberto Poletti
M10	DProf Systemic Psychotherapy	Catherine Butler

Standards of student work

All of the examiners agreed that students were meeting or exceeding national standards in terms of the quality of the work which they are producing for assessment. A sample of comments below:

D10 “academic outcomes are remarkable” (J Manley)

D4 “high degree of quality of academic work” (B Hardy)

D58 “Very high standard” (E Avdi)

M6 “Rigorous and comprehensive” (C Chimera)

Some examiners did raise a concern about how assessment policies such as misconduct (plagiarism) and confidentiality were being applied consistently.

There was also a small number of Examiners who asked what support was provided for students who were second-language English speakers, and support for students with academic skills, in particular referencing.

Assessment design

The examiners were complimentary about the assessments used within the programmes and many identified how it was possible to see student development moving from one stage to the next through their work.

Most examiners felt that there was a good variety of assessment methods, but one noted that all assignments (M71) were essays which could disadvantage students with certain learning styles.

Assessment Marking and Feedback

Some examiners requested greater clarity and transparency around these processes. It was not clear that the examiners had consistently received the assessment policy as part of the external examining process.

Notably, on the courses that use large numbers of markers (i.e. M6, M7), there was concern that they were not reaching a consistent approach and there was too much variation.

The fact that this was also raised by the M7 Italy Examiner raised the question of whether the tutors at the Italian centres apply the policy, marking feedback sheets and Internal Verification process when they are all written in English.

There is some evidence that the marking and verification procedures in the assessment and marking policy are not being consistently applied. There were a small number of comments relating to clarity in the assessment criteria, which mirrors comments about assessment criteria in the student survey responses. Conversely, the M4 external examiner noted “Highly consistent, criteria clear and unambiguous” (A Honess).

Good Practice and Enhancements

Many External Examiners commented on the integration of theory and practice.

Two examiners commented on how the markers framed the feedback, offering a reflective commentary which encourages learning and growth (M7, D24).

A number of markers noted that the feedback sheet was helpful 1) in relation to the criteria having a word limit to encourage substantial but focussed feedback, and 2) to be very clear to students how their work met (or did not meet) the assessment criteria.

Curriculum

Some examiners noted helpful changes made to accommodate the move to online learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic.

Exam Boards and Preparations for External Examiners

A number of examiners felt that it would be helpful to be provided with the time and date of the exam board earlier.

Covid-19

Most examiners were impressed by the maintenance of high standards, the support provided and the ability of students and staff to work through these difficulties so successfully. No issues were raised.

Recommendations

- 1) To ask CAs to include a link to the assessment webpage when sending samples to external examiners, and to send the policy with the exam board papers
- 2) AGQAC Discuss parity and consistency of marking across large teams of markers and whether markers’ workshops should be written into the policy where there are numerous markers to ensure consistency and fairness.
- 3) Discuss how the Italian centres apply the assessment policy, and how to ensure the policy is applied consistently across all courses

Action plan for 2020/21 based on the External Examiner reports for 2019/20

Specific issue	Action	Responsibility	Timescale	Indicators of success
<p>Preparations for External Examiners</p> <p>not always seeming to be aware of the assessment policy and procedures</p> <p>wishing to know the date and time of exam boards earlier.</p>	<p>Ask CAs to send the link to the assessment page when they provide samples to examiners. Also to send a link to the policy along with the exam board papers.</p> <p>Ensure this becomes embedded into standard practice</p>	AGQA	May 2022 in time for assessment season and exam boards	Examiners are more confident about the Trust's policy and processes around assessment, including plagiarism and confidentiality.
External Examiners were not confident that assessment policies and procedures were always being applied consistently	<p>Provide training for new course leads (and refresher for established course leads) on assessment policy and procedures</p> <p>Produce an email with guidance on assessment to go to all course leads</p>	AGQA	May/June 2022	
Parity of marking across large teams of markers	Discuss at AGQAC – in relation to updating the policy			
Parity of marking (application of the policy and procedure) at Italian centres	Discuss at AGQAC			

Taking forward good practice	Discuss at AGQAC – in relation to updating the policy and sharing with course teams.			
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