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Independent Evaluation Report on an Application for Revalidation of a Programme of Education and Training

Part 1.   Provider details

Provider name	DBS
Date of site visit	2nd June 2021
Date of report	25thJune 2021

Section A.   Overall recommendations

Principal programme	Title	MSc in Applied Psychology
	Award	Master of Science
	Credit	90 ECTS
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory*	Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions.

Embedded programme 1	Title	Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychology
	Award	Postgraduate Diploma
	Credit	60 ECTS
	Recommendation *Satisfactory OR Satisfactory subject to proposed conditions OR Not Satisfactory*	Satisfactory.

Section B.   Expert Panel

Name	Role on Panel	Affiliation
Dr Annie Doona	Chair	Consultant in Educational Quality, Strategy, Former President IADT
Mary Jennings	Secretary	Independent communications consultant
Dr Maria Dempsey	Academic	Lecturer in Applied Psychology, University College Cork
Dr Kevin Wilson-Smith	Academic	Senior Lecturer in Psychology; Programme Director MSc Psychology, University of Glasgow
Prof. James (Jim) Boyle	Academic	Emeritus Professor at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow
Dr Ceara Bergin	Industry Representative	Clinical Psychologist in the Health Service Executive (HSE)
David Ruttledge	Learner Representative	Current student undertaking an MSc in Psychology at Maynooth University.

Section C.   Principal Programme

Names of centre(s) where the programme(s) is to be provided	Maximum number of learners (per centre)	Minimum number of learners
DBS Campus, Ireland	200 maximum enrolment per annum	5 minimum enrolment per annum

Proposed Enrolment	
Date of first intake	September 2021
Maximum number of annual intakes	2 – September and January
Maximum total number of learners per intake	50
Programme duration (months from start to completion)	Full-time: 1 year (3 semesters of 12 weeks each) Part-time: 2 years (4 semesters of 12 weeks each)
Panel Commentary on proposed enrolment:	
Target learner groups	

- Applicants are required to hold a minimum of an upper Second-Class Honours degree (or above) in Psychology at NFQ Level 8 award from a recognised University course, which confers eligibility for PSI membership or equivalent professional body in the case of overseas applicants.
- In exceptional cases, the college may accept a lower Second Class Honours degree in Psychology at NFQ Level 8 award from a recognised University course, on the basis of an interview.
- For applicants whose first language is not English, the minimum English language requirement isB2+ + or above on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL).

Approved countries for provision	Ireland
Delivery mode: Full-time/Part-time	Full-time and part-time

The teaching and learning modalities

- Classroom lectures
- Case-based learning
- Workshops
- Tutorials
- Individual and group work
- Online synchronous and asynchronous classes

Brief synopsis of the programme (e.g., who it is for, what is it for, what is involved for learners, what it leads to.)

The programme comprises 90 ECTS credits and can be completed in one academic year by full-time learners and two academic years by part-time learners. The overall aim of the programme is to provide graduates with the underpinning academic knowledge to enhance their employment and educational opportunities and achieve the award of a Master of Science in Applied Psychology. The primary objective of the programme is to facilitate the platform for the learner to further explore the various theories of Psychology that enable them to understand how this theory can be applied to understanding human behaviour from individual, social and biological perspectives. Learners analyse and critically evaluate the support for competing theories, as well as the studies and projects that apply these psychological concepts, theories and processes.

Modules focus on the applied nature of professional and ethical issues, neuroscience, life transitions and interventions and advanced research methods. Other modules have a specific focus upon the application of theory to the 'real world' allowing learner to further develop and apply competencies and knowledge in both Health Psychology and Organisational Psychology-themed applied modules. Finally, the programme offers a choice of elective capstone pathways (30 ECTS) that provide an opportunity for independent placement or research and the production of a placement project or research dissertation.

Learners who complete the Master of Science in Applied Psychology will develop critical understanding of core areas in Psychology from a solution-focussed "real-world" perspective, while enhancing their research capability and practical skills. Through this programme, learners will develop discipline specific knowledge and skills as well as transversal skills of communication, teamwork, leadership and digital literacy whilst also developing research capability through critical enquiry and detailed analytical problem solving. This makes them appropriate to progress into further postgraduate study in Psychology in a range of specialisms, or progress into the workplace in a range of cognate and noncognate roles.

Summary of specifications for teaching staff	WTE
Lecturing staff will have a minimum of a Level 9 Postgraduate Diploma or Masters and/or PhD in the following areas: Psychology (e.g., organisational, health, neuroscience), Human Resource Management, Business or Law. Additionally, experienced practitioners within the fields of addiction and rehabilitation, Psychologists with the additional qualification of BPS/EFPA Test User, and those with research supervision experience from both quantitative and qualitative approaches are required to deliver the programme. In modules where industry experience is desirable, holders of Level 8 honours degrees in the above disciplines, who are exceptionally qualified by virtue of significant senior industry experience may also be considered	8 full time

Learning Activity	Ratio of learners to teaching staff
Learning class-based activities	1:50
Workshops	1:25
Practical lab sessions	1:35

Online class – live	1:50
Online tutorial – interactive	1:25
Asynchronous content	n/a
Panel Commentary on programme outline and staffing:	

Programmes being replaced (applicable to applications for revalidation)		
Code	**Title**	**Last enrolment date**
N/A	N/A	N/A

Section D.   Other noteworthy features of the application

N/A

Part 2.   Evaluation against the validation criteria

Criterion 1. **The provider is eligible to apply for validation of the programme**

a)	The provider meets the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for validation of the programme.	
b)	The application for validation is signed by the provider's chief executive (or equivalent) who confirms that the information provided is truthful and that all the applicable criteria have been addressed.	
c)	The provider has declared that their programme complies with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.[1]	

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	

As an established provider of higher education programmes DBS has met the prerequisites (section 44(7) of the 2012 Act) to apply for revalidation of this programme. It was noted that DBS has in place procedures for access, transfer and progression. DBS has also established arrangements for the Protection of Enrolled Learners (PEL) which have been approved by QQI.

DBS provided the panel with a copy of the letter to be submitted to QQI with the application for the revalidation of the programmes. The letter contained the signature and declaration required under sub-criteria 1b) and 1c).

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[1] This criterion is to ensure the programme can actually be provided and will not be halted on account of breach of the law. The declaration is sought to ensure this is not overlooked but QQI is not responsible for verifying this declaration of enforcing such requirements.

Criterion 2. **The programme objectives and outcomes are clear and consistent with the QQI awards sought**

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a) The programme aims and objectives are expressed plainly.
b) A QQI award is specified for those who complete the programme.
   (i) Where applicable, a QQI award is specified for each embedded programme.
c) There is a satisfactory rationale for the choice of QQI award(s).
d) The award title(s) is consistent with unit 3.1 of QQI's *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards.*
e) The award title(s) is otherwise legitimate for example it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.
f) The programme title and any embedded programme titles are
   (i) Consistent with the title of the QQI award sought.
   (ii) Clear, accurate, succinct and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders.
g) For each programme and embedded programme
   (i) The **minimum intended programme learning outcomes** and any other educational or training objectives of the programme are explicitly specified.[2]
   (ii) The minimum intended programme learning outcomes to qualify for the QQI award sought are **consistent with** the relevant QQI awards standards.
h) Where applicable, the **minimum intended module learning outcomes** are explicitly specified for each of the programme's modules.
i) Any QQI minor awards sought for those who complete the modules are specified, where applicable.
For each minor award specified, the minimum intended module learning outcomes to qualify for the award are consistent with relevant QQI minor awards standards.[3]

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	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	

The panel found that the aims, objectives and rationale for the programme were clearly expressed. It was noted that the Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Applied Psychology will be available to learners who have successfully completed the taught modules of the MSc in Applied Psychology but are not progressing to do the Capstone Project necessary to be awarded the MSc.

It was concluded that the programme and module learning outcomes have been clearly outlined and were appropriate to the level of the awards. The titles of the programmes were deemed to be appropriate and in line with the QQI standard for the Major Award Type on the NFQ.

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[2] Other programme objectives, for example, may be to meet the educational or training requirements of a statutory, regulatory or professional body.
[3] Not all modules will warrant minor awards. Minor awards feature strongly in the QQI common awards system however further education and training awards may be made outside this system.

It was noted that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes for the MSc in Applied Psychology were informed by the QQI Science Awards Standards for Higher Education and Training and have been mapped against these standards.

The panel was informed that, in the course of the review of the programme, both the QQI Science and QQI Generic Award Standards were interrogated by the programme team for suitability as it is recognised that many programmes in psychology use the generic standards. Having conducted this analysis, and given that the analytical, technical and applied nature of the programme has not been substantially altered, it was felt that the Science Award Standard was the most appropriate. The panel is satisfied with this approach.

Criterion 3. **The programme concept, implementation strategy, and its interpretation of QQI awards standards are well informed and soundly based (considering social, cultural, educational, professional and employment objectives)**

a) The development of the programme and the intended programme learning outcomes has sought out and taken into account the views of stakeholders such as learners, graduates, teachers, lecturers, education and training institutions, employers, statutory bodies, regulatory bodies, the international scientific and academic communities, professional bodies and equivalent associations, trades unions, and social and community representatives.[4]

b) The interpretation of awards standards has been adequately informed and researched; considering the programme aims and objectives and minimum intended programme (and, where applicable, modular) learning outcomes.
   (i) There is a satisfactory rationale for providing the programme.
   (ii) The proposed programme compares favourably with existing related (comparable) programmes in Ireland and beyond. Comparators should be as close as it is possible to find.
   (iii) There is support for the introduction of the programme (such as from employers, or professional, regulatory or statutory bodies).
   (iv) There is evidence[5] of learner demand for the programme.
   (v) There is evidence of employment opportunities for graduates where relevant[6].
   (vi) The programme meets genuine education and training needs.[7]

c) There are mechanisms to keep the programme updated in consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

d) Employers and practitioners in the cases of vocational and professional awards have been systematically involved in the programme design where the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

e) The programme satisfies any validation-related criteria attaching to the applicable awards standards and QQI awards specifications.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendation below.
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendation below.

The panel is satisfied that the intended programme had taken account of the views of stakeholders, including employers, learners and graduates and professional bodies such as the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI). Account had also been taken of government policy in relation to current and

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[4] Awards standards however detailed rely on various communities for their interpretation. This consultation is necessary if the programme is to enable learners to achieve the standard in its fullest sense.

[5] This might be predictive or indirect.

[6] It is essential to involve employers in the programme development and review process when the programme is vocationally or professionally oriented.

[7] There is clear evidence that the programme meets the **target learners'** education and training needs and that there is a clear demand for the programme.

future training needs and employment opportunities as outlined in a series of reports cited in the documentation provided. These point to the need for the type of skills and attributes that the programme seeks to develop in its graduates.

It was noted that DBS has both formal and informal mechanisms in place for continuous consultation with employers in the sector. These include involving experts on advisory panels and also having them as guest lecturers in this applied programme. Learners are afforded the opportunity to visit and meet with appropriate agencies during the course of their studies as DBS has built up good relationships with a range of organisations that employ psychologists.

As part of the review, a comparison with similar programmes had been undertaken and it was stated that the applied nature of the proposed programme provided a point of differentiation for graduates.

It was noted that the modifications to the programme, including the change from offering mandatory modules instead of elective modules, had been made in part due to feedback from employers, professional bodies and graduates.

Graduates that the panel met indicated that the programme had offered them relevant skills for employment in a range of occupations in the area of both health and organisational psychology. These included employment as project leaders in care services such as the NHS and in disability services. They informed the panel that they had gained many transferable skills, including, for example, a good understanding of the importance of the therapeutic relationship in working with clients as well as so-called softer skills in the area of managing conflict in work-related settings. They also indicated that the successful completion of the programme had facilitated them to gain entry to other courses such as training in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to further enhance their skills.

The panel noted that, in the main, the target cohort for the programme is aimed at learners based in Ireland, with little emphasis on attracting learners from overseas. In discussion with DBS at the review, the programme team outlined some of the issues that would need to be resolved to offer the programme to a wider cohort. These included regulatory issues whereby applicants would need to be eligible for membership of professional bodies equivalent to PSI. In addition, the programme would need to be delivered via a blended learning approach and, currently, the programme is not approved by QQI for this mode of delivery. The team did inform the panel that discussions with QQI were ongoing in this regard. The panel made the following recommendation for consideration by DBS:

Recommendation

It is recommended that DBS give greater consideration to internationalisation of the programme to include increasing international learners; the panel recognises and supports the present engagement with QQI on this issue.

Overall, the panel noted that the engagement with stakeholders had been undertaken as part of the review and was continuing in formal and informal ways to ensure that the programme met the needs of employers and learners alike.

Commendation

The panel commends DBS on the extent of the engagement with stakeholders and how this has fed into the development of the programme.

Criterion 4. **The programme's access, transfer and progression arrangements are satisfactory**

a) The information about the programme as well as its procedures for access, transfer and progression are consistent with the procedures described in QQI's policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training. Each of its programme-specific criteria is individually and explicitly satisfied[8].

b) Programme information for learners is provided in plain language. This details what the programme expects of learners and what learners can expect of the programme and that there are procedures to ensure its availability in a range of accessible formats.

c) If the programme leads to a higher education and training award and its duration is designed for native English speakers, then the level of proficiency in English language must be greater or equal to B2+ in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL[9]) in order to enable learners to reach the required standard for the QQI award.

d) The programme specifies the learning (knowledge, skill and competence) that **target learners** are expected to have achieved before they are enrolled in the programme and any other assumptions about enrolled learners (programme participants).

e) The programme includes suitable procedures and criteria for the **recognition of prior learning** for the purposes of access and, where appropriate, for advanced entry to the programme and for exemptions.

f) The programme title (the title used to refer to the programme):-
   (i) Reflects the core *intended programme learning outcomes*, and is consistent with the standards and purposes of the QQI awards to which it leads, the award title(s) and their class(es).
   (ii) Is learner focused and meaningful to the learners;
   (iii) Has long-lasting significance.

g) The programme title is otherwise legitimate; for example, it must comply with applicable statutory, regulatory and professional body requirements.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendation below.
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendation below.

The panel was satisfied that the programmes' access, transfer and progression arrangements are, in general, working in practice. Information on access, transfer and progression is available through the DBS website, promotional material and the Student Handbooks.

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[8] Each of the detailed criteria set out in the Policy and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners for providers of further and higher education and training must be addressed in the provider's evaluation report. The detailed criteria   are (QQI, restated 2015) arranged under the headings
- Progression and transfer routes
- Entry arrangements
- Information provision

[9] http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf (accessed 26/09/2015)

It was stated that applicants are required to hold a minimum of 2.1 grade in a level 8 degree in psychology and be eligible for membership of the PSI or equivalent professional body from another country. All applicants are also interviewed by the Course Director in advance of being offered a place on the programme. It was noted that, in certain circumstances, DBS may accept a lower second-class honours level 8 degree in psychology on the basis of an interview with the Course Director. This interview is to explore whether the applicant has undertaken a sufficiently large-scale research project at undergraduate level as a developed research capacity is deemed to be necessary for the MSc programme.

The panel is not satisfied that it is sufficiently clear in the documentation that applicants are made aware that without an accredited undergraduate degree in psychology of 2.1 grade or better that the MSc in Applied Psychology may not meet the requirements for entry into some professional training courses such as clinical psychology, for instance, and further study would be required.
Recommendation

It is recommended that DBS ensure that applicants who do not have an accredited undergraduate degree, or equivalent, in psychology are made aware that the MSc in Applied Psychology does not meet the requirements for entry to some professional education programmes in psychology and further qualifications would be required.

Criterion 5. **The programme's written curriculum is well structured and fit-for-purpose**

a) The programme is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of its intended programme learning outcomes. The programme (including any stages and modules) is integrated in all its dimensions.

b) In so far as it is feasible the programme provides choice to enrolled learners so that they may align their learning opportunities towards their individual educational and training needs.

c) Each module and stage is suitably structured and coherently oriented towards the achievement by learners of the intended *programme* learning outcomes.

d) The objectives and purposes of each of the programme's elements are clear to learners and to the provider's staff.

e) The programme is structured and scheduled realistically based on sound educational and training principles[10].

f) The curriculum is comprehensively and systematically documented.

g) The credit allocated to the programme is consistent with the difference between the entry standard and minimum intended programme learning outcomes.

h) The credit allocated to each module is consistent with the difference between the module entry standard and minimum intended module learning outcomes.

i) Elements such as practice placement and work-based phases are provided with the same rigour and attentiveness as other elements.

j) The programme duration (expressed in terms of time from initial enrolment to completion) and its fulltime equivalent contact time (expressed in hours) are consistent with the difference between the minimum entry standard and award standard and with the credit allocation.[11]

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Partially	See conditions set in relation to Capstone Project for MSc.
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	Note that conditions set by the panel under this criterion do not apply to the Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology as this cohort do not do a Capstone Project or undertake a placement in an organisation.

In general, the panel is satisfied that the curriculum is well structured and fit for purpose. It was noted that learners are offered two options for their final capstone project. Capstone Module 1 (Placement) is based on learners undertaking an applied research project while on placement in a particular organisation. The project focus is agreed with the organisation, supervisors and learners in advance. Capstone Module 2 is an academic research project, undertaken on topics agreed by the learners and supervisors.

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[10] This applies recursively to each and every element of the programme from enrolment through to completion.
In the case of a modular programme, the pool of modules and learning pathway constraints (such as any prerequisite and co-requisite modules) is explicit and appropriate to the intended programme learning outcomes.

[11] If the duration is variable, for example, when advanced entry is available, this should be explained and justified

However, the panel found that, in relation to the Capstone Module 1, (Placement) there was a disparity between the overall contents of the module and the title. The panel found that it was a requirement of learners that they produce a substantial research project while also undertaking some tasks while on placement. The work tasks or role expected of the learners were not sufficiently outlined: while the programme team indicated that there is a performance review of learners as part of their placement, it was not clear how this might be carried out or assessed or how this aspect of the work was to be done alongside the requirements of a large-scale research project. The panel considered that, as the research requirement was the core element of the module, that this be reflected in the title and set the condition below.

A further condition was set requiring DBS to more fully differentiate between the focus and contents of Captone Module 1 (Placement) and Capstone Module 2 as the panel considered that the differences were not clear.

Conditions

It is a condition that the Capstone Module 1 (Placement) changes its name to' Research in an Applied Work Setting' or 'Research Placement' to more clearly reflect the content of the module.

It is a condition that the focus and contents of Capstone Module and Capstone Module 2 are more clearly differentiated.

The panel found that it was not sufficiently clear how the Advanced Research Methods was delivered in a flexible manner for learners at Level 9, as it seemed that many of the topics would have been covered at a Level 8 honours programme. The programme team indicated that, as the experience and competence of learners coming onto the programme tended to vary a great deal, some attention was given to providing a refresher course for learners, as well as facilitating them to undertake more advanced work in the area of, for example, regression analysis and modelling. The team also indicated that there was considerable variation in learner experience of using qualitative methods and this was also addressed in the approach taken.

In conversation with the team, the possibility of carrying out an initial assessment of learner needs to evaluate their prior learning in advanced research method was discussed as this would allow DBS to take account of specific learner needs and, at the same time, have sufficient differentiation in the approach to teaching research methods. The panel made the following recommendation as set out below.

See also the recommendation on the criteria for evaluation of placement under Criterion 8 as this is linked to the overall topic of the Capstone Module (1).

Recommendation:

It is recommended that DBS ensure that there is sufficient differentiation in the Advanced Research Methods to meet the individual needs of learners, to take into account their prior learning.

The panel is satisfied that there is a sufficient variety of t approaches to research, both quantitative and qualitative, available to the programme to deliver it as planned.

In a review of the reading lists provided in the documentation, the panel is not satisfied that up-to-date sources are sufficiently included across all modules.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that reading lists be updated across all modules to ensure that contemporary, up to date sources are included, for example Neuroscience Module and Advanced Research Methods.

Criterion 6. **There are sufficient qualified and capable programme staff available to implement the programme as planned**

a)	The specification of the programme's staffing requirements (staff required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme and its defined purpose. The specifications include professional and educational qualifications, licences-to-practise where applicable, experience and the staff/learner ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 c).	
b)	The programme has an identified complement of staff[12] (or potential staff) who are available, qualified and capable to provide the specified programme in the context of their existing commitments.	
c)	The programme's complement of staff (or potential staff) (those who support learning including any employer-based personnel) are demonstrated to be competent to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes and to assess learners' achievements as required.	
d)	There are arrangements for the performance of the programme's staff to be managed to ensure continuing capability to fulfil their roles and there are staff development[13] opportunities[14].	
e)	There are arrangements for programme staff performance to be reviewed and there are mechanisms for encouraging development and for addressing underperformance.	
f)	Where the programme is to be provided by staff not already in post there are arrangements to ensure that the programme will not enrol learners unless a complement of staff meeting the specifications is in post.	

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	

The panel was advised that teaching staff are qualified to a minimum of NFQ Level 9 with many qualified to doctoral level.

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[12] Staff here means natural persons required as part of the programme and accountable (directly or indirectly) to the programme's provider, it may for example, include contracted trainers and workplace supervisors.

[13] Development here is for the purpose of ensuring staff remain up-to-date on the discipline itself, on teaching methods or on other relevant skills or knowledge, to the extent that this is necessary to ensure an adequate standard of teaching.

[14] Professional or vocational education and training requires that teaching staff's professional/vocation knowledge is up to date. Being qualified in a discipline does not necessarily mean that a person is currently competent in that discipline. Therefore, performance management and development of professional and vocational staff needs to focus on professional/vocational competence as well as pedagogical competence. Professional development may include placement in industry, for example. In regulated professions it would be expected that there are a suitable number of registered practitioners involved.

The panel was informed that many lecturers in the department are actively undertaking research in the area of psychology. There were potential opportunities to publish in DBS's in-house journal as well as other outlets, it was stated. It was noted that DBS provides a number of research scholarships every year and that staff on this programme may apply to avail of them. It was stated that, as many staff are involved in the professional body, The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), they have further opportunities through this affiliation for CPD, in addition to upskilling and training provided through DBS.

At the review, staff provided examples of continuous development they had recently undertaken, including developments in Trauma-Informed Care, recorded lectures on use of teaching software and upskilling in use of R techniques in statistical computing; all of these had contributed to the development and delivery of the proposed programme, it was concluded.

Criterion 7. **There are sufficient physical resources to implement the programme as planned**

a) The specification of the programme's physical resource requirements (physical resources required as part of the programme and intrinsic to it) is precise, and rigorous and consistent with the programme, its defined purpose and its resource/learner-ratio requirements. See also criterion 12 d).

b) The programme has an identified complement of supported physical resources (or potential supported physical resources) that are available in the context of existing commitments on these e.g. availability of:
   (i) suitable premises and accommodation for the learning and human needs (comfort, safety, health, wellbeing) of learners (this applies to all of the programme's learning environments including the workplace learning environment)
   (ii) suitable information technology and resources (including educational technology and any virtual learning environments provided)
   (iii) printed and electronic material (including software) for teaching, learning and assessment
   (iv) suitable specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen, laboratory, workshop, studio) – if applicable
   (v) technical support
   (vi) administrative support
   (vii) company placements/internships – if applicable

c) If versions of the programme are provided in parallel at more than one location each independently meets the location-sensitive validation criteria for each location (for example staffing, resources and the learning environment).

d) There is a five-year plan for the programme. It should address
   (i) Planned intake (first five years) and
   (ii) The total costs and income over the five years based on the planned intake.

e) The programme includes controls to ensure entitlement to use the property (including intellectual property, premises, materials and equipment) required.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	

The review by the panel took place via Zoom, as public health restrictions were in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was not possible therefore for the panel to view the facilities provided on campus or virtually. The panel was informed that had sufficient resources in place to undertake the proposed programme. Facilities available include 12 laboratories, 400 mobile labs and sufficient licences for Zoom to provide online delivery as appropriate. A number of soundproof learning pods on campus were being planned. These would enable groups of learners to maintain social distancing guidelines in line with public health guidance.

The panel was also informed that DBS has in place a dedicated AV studio which produces on-demand, asynchronous material for learners. Training has been provided to lectures and tutors to

become more skilled in these delivery methods, with assistance provided by specialist script writers to assist them.

The library has sufficient online resources, including two data bases which make up to 25,000 psychology-related academic articles available to learners. It was also noted that the library staff are involved in providing learner supports such as short courses in academic writing and in using the library facilities to conduct academic research.

The panel is satisfied that there are sufficient resources in place, both on campus and online to deliver the programme as planned.

Criterion 8. **The learning environment is consistent with the needs of the programme's learners**

a)	The programme's physical, social, cultural and intellectual environment (recognising that the environment may, for example, be partly virtual or involve the workplace) including resources and support systems are consistent with the intended programme learning outcomes.	
b)	Learners can interact with, and are supported by, others in the programme's learning environments including peer learners, teachers, and where applicable supervisors, practitioners and mentors.	
c)	The programme includes arrangements to ensure that the parts of the programme that occur in the workplace are subject to the same rigours as any other part of the programme while having regard to the different nature of the workplace.	

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Partially	See condition set below.
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	This condition does not apply as a capstone project/placement is not undertaken by learners for the exit award.

The panel noted that DBS had put resources in place in response to meet the difficulties and constrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These included developing online classes and tutorials for learners. See Criterion 6 above.

It was stated that there was generally a culture of open communication between lectures, tutors, supervisors and admin and support staff, whether that was in relation to timely feedback on assignments, requests for reschedule of assignments, or flexible support for the well-being of the learners, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was confirmed to the panel by the learners and graduates met at the review. The panel commends DBS on their responsiveness which meets many of the needs of the learners.

Commendation:

The panel commends DBS for its responsiveness to feedback from learners.

At the review visit, there was considerable discussion with the programme team on the role of the placement in the final year, linked as is it to the Capstone 1 option for the final project. The panel is not satisfied that the placement module as described reflects the contents of the module and has set a condition for revalidation that the descriptor and name be changed to reflect the content more clearly. This condition is set out in more detail in Criterion 5 above.

 It was not clear to the panel what tasks or precise role the learner might be asked to undertake during their time on placement in the organisation in addition to conducting research and, consequently, what key competences for learner performance in placement were in place.

It was stated by the programme team that currently, work was underway in developing clear guidelines in relation to placement for this and other programmes in DBS where placement is a key component. The panel stated that it is a condition that such guidelines be in place for the MSc in Applied Psychology and outlined in the Placement Handbook providers for learners in time for the first intake in September 2021 in order to satisfy Criterion 8 (c).

Condition

It is a condition that the key competences for learner performance in placement, which are under development, are in place for the first intake in September 2021.

See also Criterion 5 for further comment and conditions set in relation to Capstone Module (1).

Criterion 9. **There are sound teaching and learning strategies**

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a) The teaching strategies support achievement of the intended programme/module learning outcomes.
b) The programme provides authentic learning opportunities to enable learners to achieve the intended programme learning outcomes.
c) The programme enables enrolled learners to attain (if reasonably diligent) the minimum intended programme learning outcomes reliably and efficiently (in terms of overall learner effort and a reasonably balanced workload).
d) Learning is monitored/supervised.
e) Individualised guidance, support[15] and timely formative feedback is regularly provided to enrolled learners as they progress within the programme.
</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)**</td><td>**Comment**</td></tr>
<tr><td>MSc in Applied Psychology</td><td>Yes</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology</td><td>Yes</td><td></td></tr>
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It was stated that, as this is an applied psychology programme, there is an emphasis in the teaching and learning strategies of combing theory and practice with developing the capacity of learners to apply the knowledge gained, particularly in the domains of organisational psychology and health psychology. Overall, the modules in the programme and the manner in which they are integrated and build on each other, reflect this approach, the panel concluded.

In discussion with learners and graduates, the panel found that learners had sufficient opportunities to consider the theme and scope of their Capstone projects well in advance of conducting the actual fieldwork and received considerable support from their designated supervisors from the beginning. As stated under Criterion 8 above, further consideration needs to be given to the key competences for learner performance on placement. See also Criterion 5 in relation to the approach to Capstone 1-research conducted through placement.

 It was noted that considerable weight was given by the programme team and the internal Ethics Committee to ensure that any project was conducted in an ethical manner and that feedback in relation to ethics was provided in a timely manner for learners on research project proposals.

Commendation

The panel commends the way in which research ethics are supported across the programme.

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[15] Support and feedback concerns anything material to learning in the context of the programme. For the avoidance of doubt it includes among other things any course-related language, literacy and numeracy support.

As noted in Criterion 5, the panel is recommending that further consideration be given to the approach to teaching the modules in Advanced Qualitative Research Methods and Analysis to ensure that the content meets the needs of learners, taking account in particular of their prior learning. See Criterion 5 for further comment on this point.

Criterion 10.   **There are sound assessment strategies**

a)	All assessment is undertaken consistently with *Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards*[16]
b)	The programme's assessment procedures interface effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures.
c)	The programme includes specific procedures that are fair and consistent for the assessment of enrolled learners to ensure the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are acquired by all who successfully complete the programme.[17]
d)	The programme includes formative assessment to support learning.
e)	There is a satisfactory written **programme assessment strategy** for the programme as a whole and there are satisfactory module assessment strategies for any of its constituent modules.[18]
f)	Sample assessment instruments, tasks, marking schemes and related evidence have been provided for each award-stage assessment and indicate that the assessment is likely to be valid and reliable.
g)	There are sound procedures for the moderation of summative assessment results.
h)	The provider only puts forward an enrolled learner for certification for a particular award for which a programme has been validated if they have been specifically assessed against the standard for that award.[19]

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendations below.
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	See recommendations below.

In general, the panel is satisfied that there are sound assessment strategies for the programme.

It was noted that reflective practice was integrated in the programme and this approach was welcomed by the learners the panel met.

 It was not clear to the panel if the theories underlying reflective practice were used in in the programme and considered that there was an opportunity to introduce these as appropriate, including as part of an assessment strategy, and that these might be integrated across the curriculum. This was considered to be an area for further consideration and review by the programme team.

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[16] See the section on transitional arrangements.

[17] This assumes the minimum intended programme/module learning outcomes are consistent with the applicable awards standards.

[18] The programme assessment strategy is addressed in the Assessment Guidelines, Conventions and Protocols for Programmes Leading to QQI Awards. See the section on transitional arrangements.

[19] If the award is a QQI CAS compound award it is not necessarily sufficient that the learner has achieved all the components specified in the certification requirements unless at least one of those components is a capstone component (i.e. designed to test the compound learning outcomes).

Recommendation:

It is recommended that, to support reflective practice, that there is an integration of theories of reflective learning throughout the curriculum.

The panel found that there was a range of assessments across modules, with some modules requiring a greater number of assignments to be completed. It was stated in response that the programme team was aware of the potential for over-assessment and a possible imbalance in the workload for learners. The team indicated that the overall intention of the assessment strategy was to capture how well the learning outcomes had been achieved by learners and that, overall, the assessments were spread out over the course of the modules and semester to address this. The panel recommended that this overall approach be reviewed to ensure greater equity in workload across modules.

Recommendations

It is recommended that DBS carry out continued review of assessment to ensure greater equity in workload across modules.

The panel considered that, in reviewing the procedures on assessment retakes, it was not sufficiently clear whether learners retaking assessments had more of an opportunity to gain a higher grade than their counterparts who had already passed and been awarded a particular grade. The panel recommends that these procedures be reviewed to ensure that there is equity between learners.

Recommendation

It is recommended that DBS carry out a review of the current procedures on assessment retakes in order to ensure equity for all students as appropriate.

Criterion 11. **Learners enrolled on the programme are well informed, guided and cared for**

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a) There are arrangements to ensure that each enrolled learner is fully informed in a timely manner about the programme including the schedule of activities and assessments.

b) Information is provided about learner supports that are available to learners enrolled on the programme.

c) Specific information is provided to learners enrolled on the programme about any programme-specific appeals and complaints procedures.

d) If the programme is modular, it includes arrangements for the provision of effective guidance services for learners on the selection of appropriate learning pathways.

e) The programme takes into account and accommodates to the differences between enrolled learners, for example, in terms of their prior learning, maturity, and capabilities.

f) There are arrangements to ensure that learners enrolled on the programme are supervised and individualised support and due care is targeted at those who need it.

g) The programme provides supports for enrolled learners who have special education and training needs.

h) The programme makes reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities[20].

i) If the programme aims to enrol international students it complies with the *Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students*[21] and there are appropriate in-service supports in areas such as English language, learning skills, information technology skills and such like, to address the particular needs of international learners and enable such learners to successfully participate in the programme.

j) The programme's learners will be well cared for and safe while participating in the programme, (e.g. while at the provider's premises or those of any collaborators involved in provision, the programme's locations of provision including any workplace locations or practice-placement locations).

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	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Post-graduate Diploma in Science in Applied Psychology	Yes	

The panel was advised that DBS uses a number of mechanisms to develop and implement supports for students including:

- Learner surveys
- Peer Mentoring Support (with training provided for mentors)
- Student representation on the Academic Board and Board of Studies

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[20] For more information on making reasonable accommodations see www.AHEAD.ie and QQI's Policies, Actions and Procedures for Access, Transfer and Progression for Learners (QQI, restated 2015).

[21] See Code of Practice for Provision of Programmes to International Students (QQI, 2015)

- Support for, and engagement with, an elected Student Union
- Student services for:
  - Accommodation
  - Counselling and referral services
  - Sports and societies, with many student-led events
  - Entertainment
  - Study and meeting spaces within the campus
  - Support for learners who need technology support due to Covid-19 pandemic

In discussion with graduates and learners at the review session, the panel noted that they confirmed that DBS was pro-active in taking on board feedback from learners and that issues arising were dealt with speedily.

Learners were aware of complaints and appeals procedures, and it was noted that, with small classes numbers and a culture of open communication by lecturers, tutors and other staff, that no formal complaints had been made during their time in the college.

The panel was informed that, for instance, the Psychology Society in DBS, played an active part in inviting guest lecturers and in organising events in Brain Awareness Week and that this extra-curricular activity enhanced their overall development as learners as well as providing opportunities for networking in relation to seeking placements or employment.

Criterion 12.   **The programme is well managed**

a) The programme includes intrinsic governance, quality assurance, learner assessment, and access, transfer and progression procedures that functionally interface with the provider's general or institutional procedures.
b) The programme interfaces effectively with the provider's QQI approved quality assurance procedures. Any proposed incremental changes to the provider's QA procedures required by the programme or programme-specific QA procedures have been developed having regard to QQI's statutory QA guidelines. If the QA procedures allow the provider to approve the centres within the provider that may provide the programme, the procedures and criteria for this should be fit-for-the-purpose of identifying which centres are suited to provide the programme and which are not.
c) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting persons who meet the programme's staffing requirements and can be added to the programme's complement of staff.
d) There are explicit and suitable programme-specific criteria for selecting physical resources that meet the programmes physical resource requirements, and can be added to the programme's complement of supported physical resources.
e) Quality assurance[22] is intrinsic to the programme's maintenance arrangements and addresses all aspects highlighted by the validation criteria.
f) The programme-specific quality assurance arrangements are consistent with QQI's statutory QA guidelines and use continually monitored completion rates and other sources of information that may provide insight into the quality and standards achieved.
g) The programme operation and management arrangements are coherently documented and suitable.
h) There are sound procedures for interface with QQI certification.

	Satisfactory? (yes, no, partially)	Comment
MSc in Applied Psychology	Yes	
Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychology	Yes	

The panel were satisfied that there are effective structures in place for the governance and management of the programme under review. The QAH contains the governance structures for the College and procedures for access, transfer and progression, learner assessments and supports, and teaching and learning.

It was noted that the QAH and associated policies and procedures have been developed in line with QQI statutory guidelines.

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[22] See also QQI's Policy on Monitoring (QQI, 2014)

Part 3.   Overall recommendation to QQI

3.1   MSc In Applied Psychology

Select one	
	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
Satisfactory subject to conditions set.	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (**minor**) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation
1. The criteria have been met, subject to conditions set.

Commendations
1. The panel commends the way DBS conducted the review process across all elements of the process.
2. The panel commends the extent of engagement with stakeholders and how this has fed into the development of the programme.
3. The panel commends DBS on the extent of the engagement with stakeholders and how this has fed into the development of the programme.
4. The panel commends DBS for its responsiveness to feedback from learners
5. The panel commends the way in which research ethics are supported across the programme.

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)
1. It is a condition that the Capstone Module 1 (Placement) changes its name to 'Research in an Applied Work Setting' or 'Research Placement' to more clearly reflect the content of the module.
2. It is a condition that the focus and contents of Capstone Module and Capstone Module 2 are more clearly differentiated.
3. It is a condition that the key competences for learner performance in placement, which are under development, are in place for the first intake in September 2021.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that DBS give greater consideration to internationalisation of the programme to include increasing international learners; the panel recognises and supports the present engagement with QQI on this issue.
2. It is recommended that DBS ensure that applicants who do not have an accredited undergraduate degree, or equivalent, in psychology are made aware that the MSc in Applied Psychology does not meet the requirements for entry to some professional education programmes in psychology and further qualifications would be required.

3. It is recommended that DBS ensure that there is sufficient differentiation in the Advanced Research Methods to meet the individual needs of learners, to take into account their prior learning.
4. It is recommended that reading lists be updated across all modules to ensure that contemporary, up to date sources are included, for example Neuroscience Module and Advanced Research Methods.
5. It is recommended that, to support reflective practice, that there is an integration of theories of reflective learning throughout the curriculum.
6. It is recommended that DBS carry out continued review of assessment to ensure greater equity in workload across modules.
7. It is recommended that DBS carry out a review of the current procedures on assessment retakes in order to ensure equity for all students as appropriate.

3.2 Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychology

Select one	
Satisfactory	Satisfactory (meaning that it recommends that QQI can be satisfied in the context of unit 2.3) of Core policies and criteria for the validation by QQI of programmes of education and training;
	Satisfactory subject to proposed special conditions (specified with timescale for compliance for each condition; these may include proposed pre-validation conditions i.e. proposed (**minor**) things to be done to a programme that almost fully meets the validation criteria before QQI makes a determination);
	Not satisfactory.

Reasons for the overall recommendation
1. The criteria have been met: there are no conditions set for the exit award.

Commendations
1. The panel commends the way DBS conducted the review process across all elements of the process.
2. The panel commends the extent of engagement with stakeholders and how this has fed into the development of the programme
3. The panel commends DBS on the extent of the engagement with stakeholders and how this has fed into the development of the programme.
4. The panel commends DBS for its responsiveness to feedback from learners

Special Conditions of Validation (directive and with timescale for compliance)
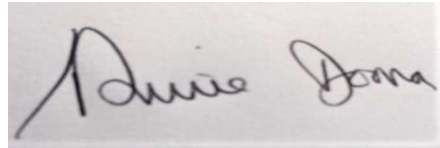1. There are no special conditions for the Postgraduate Diploma in Applied Psychology.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that DBS give greater consideration to internationalisation of the programme to include increasing international learners; the panel recognises and supports the present engagement with QQI on this issue.

2. It is recommended that DBS ensure that applicants who do not have an accredited undergraduate degree, or equivalent, in psychology are made aware that the MSc in Applied Psychology does not meet the requirements for entry to some professional education programmes in psychology and further qualifications would be required.
3. It is recommended that DBS ensure that there is sufficient differentiation in the Advanced Research Methods to meet the individual needs of learners, to take into account their prior learning.
4. It is recommended that reading lists be updated across all modules to ensure that contemporary, up to date sources are included, for example Neuroscience Module and Advanced Research Methods.
5. It is recommended that, to support reflective practice, that there is an integration of theories of reflective learning throughout the curriculum.
6. It is recommended that DBS carry out continued review of assessment to ensure greater equity in workload across modules.
7. It is recommended that DBS carry out a review of the current procedures on assessment retakes in order to ensure equity for all students as appropriate.

3.3 Disclaimer

This report has been agreed by the evaluation panel and is signed on their behalf by the chairperson.

Panel chairperson: Date: 25th June 2021

Dr Annie Doona

Signed:

3.4 Disclaimer

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