

# **Supporting the Transition From HND Social Sciences into BPS Accredited Second Year Psychology Degrees.**

Report from a Joint Further Education and Higher Education Psychology Working group, Facilitated by the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network and funded by the Scottish Funding Council (October September 2006).

## **Contents**

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Part 1 : Mapping and Comparing Psychology Content in First Year HEI with Relevant Provision in the HND Social Sciences Curriculum.</b>	<b>6-16</b>
<b>Part 2 : A Comparison of the Quality Assurance Processes Used in HEI &amp; Scotland's Colleges.</b>	<b>17-18</b>
<b>Part 3 : Recommendations to Institutions &amp; Students to Facilitate Second Year Undergraduate Admission for HND Social Sciences Students.</b>	<b>19-20</b>
<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>21</b>
Appendix 1 BPS Regulations With Regard to Second and Third Year Entry to Psychology Degrees.	<b>22</b>
Appendix 2 Details of Survey Sent to all Scottish Universities Currently Offering an Undergraduate Degree in Psychology.	<b>23</b>
Appendix 3 Content of the First Year (SCQF Level 7 and Second Year (SCQF Level 8) Psychology Curriculum in Scotland's Colleges.	<b>24-28</b>
Appendix 4 Relevant Topics and Subtopics Studied in the HND Social Sciences Between Years One and Two	<b>29</b>
Appendix 5 Comparative Quality Assurance Processes for Level 8 Psychology in HEIs & Scottish Colleges.	<b>30-35</b>
Appendix 6 Advice to Students and Scotland's College Regarding the UCAS Application	<b>36-37</b>
Appendix 7 Ten FAQs from HND Students interested in Studying Psychology at University.	<b>38-40</b>

## Executive Summary

Under the auspices of the Higher Education Academy Psychology Network, and supported by the Scottish Funding Council, a small Colleges/ HEI working group was set up with the objective of investigating any pedagogical objections which could be a barrier to transition for students with a HND in Social Sciences articulating to second year BPS accredited degrees in Psychology.

To investigate possible gaps in curriculum between Psychology content in the newly validated HND Social Sciences and that of first year undergraduate in HEIs, a survey of the course content, delivery and assessment methodology of undergraduate Psychology courses were undertaken. The findings were then compared to those in the Psychology component delivered in the newly validated (May 2006) HND Social Sciences. The survey showed that there was a communality of curriculum between the Psychology content of the HND and the first year undergraduate in Scottish HEIs, and that the delivery and assessment methods needed for the successful completion of the HND were comparable.

To order to assess the likely consistency of delivery between Scotland's Colleges and the HEI sector a comparison of the main Quality Assessment procedures were undertaken with the parallel processes in place for colleges by the SQA and HMIE. Information from the following four areas was examined.

- Resource review
- Content review
- Assignments – setting, undertaking and grading
- Recording processes

The exercise showed clearly that there were rigorous Quality Assurance mechanisms in place in colleges which compared well to those present in HEIs.

**The report concludes that there are no pedagogical barriers to second year entry to Psychology courses for HND Social Science students qualified under the newly validated format.**

Several recommendations to improve HND/HEI transition into second year Psychology degrees, including;

- Provision of SPSS Licence and tutor training across the Scotland's Colleges
- Matching of optional topics by Course Leaders in colleges to those widely used in Universities
- Wide distribution of this report to all interested parties

To assist greater transparency and clarity with regard to UCAS applications and admission to HEIs, a number of short advice/recommendation documents to assist students, college tutors and HEI admission officers are attached.

## Background

The Higher Education Academy was established in 2004 to enhance the quality of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. There are 24 subject centres, including a Psychology subject centre, whose aim is to develop support networks and improve the learning experience of Psychology students in Higher Education. (HEAPN-Higher Education Academy Psychology Network<sup>1</sup>). The HEAPN has a Scottish presence to provide regional support, and to provide a focus for learning and teaching issues.

Recognising that the institutional landscape for education in Scotland is considerably different from the rest of the UK, HEAPN carried out a review of access to Psychology in Scotland's Colleges with the aim of extending additional support for Psychology taught in the Social Science HNC/D<sup>2</sup>. This review established that there appear to be issues surrounding the transition of HND qualified Social Science students entering second year undergraduate study with a number of universities not permitting direct entry into second year. The blockage appears to be where the HND Social Science students wish to articulate to single honours/BPS accredited degrees in Psychology.

In addition, the structure of the SQA HNC/HND has changed, with many subjects, including Social Sciences being restructured and re-validated. This restructuring designed around the principle of SCQF credit points, makes comparison between subjects taught in Scotland's Colleges and in Universities more apparent, removing at least some of the difficulties in HND/HEI transition.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there are many factors which influence university admission policies, a major issue for universities is parity of curriculum, both in course and level content. In order to look at this issue, a small Scotland's Colleges/HEI working group was set up with the objective of investigating pedagogical objections which are a barrier to transition for students with a HND in Social Sciences articulating to BPS accredited degrees in psychology.

This report details the findings of the group, along with recommendations for change. It has been facilitated by the HEAPN, and supported by the Scottish Funding Council.

Members of the group include the following;

HEAPN representatives	Dr Deirdre Kelly (Regional Co-ordinator) Dr. Siobhan MacAndrew (HEAPN Scottish Director)
HEI representatives	Dr. Tony Anderson (Strathclyde University) Dr Maire Brennan (Napier University)
Scotland's Colleges representatives	Ms Carolyn Laird (Motherwell College) Mr Gerry Keegan (Kilmarnock College)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.psychology.heacademy.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> HEAPN Survey July 2005 (unpublished).

## **Introduction**

### **Objectives**

The primary objective of the group was to; produce a report which investigates any pedagogical objections which could be a barrier to second year undergraduate entry in Psychology by qualified HND applicants, making recommendations for change where appropriate. The group identified that differences in curriculum content and potential inconsistency of delivery by Scotland's Colleges as potential issues mitigating against second year entry, and consequently these were the focus of the investigation;

During the course of the workgroup review however, a secondary objective emerged which was to make the content and assessment methodologies of the first year Scottish undergraduate Psychology courses more transparent to HND students and their tutors, enabling wider understanding of the HEI requirements for second year entry.

There are, therefore, three separate but related elements to this document;

**Part 1 : Mapping and Comparing Psychology Content in first Year HEI with Relevant Provision in the HND Social Sciences Curriculum**

**Part 2. A Comparison of the Quality Assurance Processes Used in HEI and Scotland's Colleges.**

**Part 3. Recommendations and Advice to Institutions and Students to Facilitate Admission for HND Social Science Students to Second Year Degree Courses.**

# Part 1 : Mapping and Comparing Psychology content in first Year HEI with Relevant Provision in the HND Social Sciences Curriculum

## 1. Background issues

### ***Role of The British Psychological Society (BPS) in Degree accreditation***

The BPS is the representative body for Psychology and psychologists in the UK. The Society's main aims are to:

- To encourage the development of psychology as a scientific discipline and an applied profession
- To raise standards of training and practice in the application of psychology
- To raise public awareness of psychology and increase the influence of psychological practice in society

As such, the society sets and monitors the standards of training and qualification in the UK. There appears to be some confusion by what is required by the BPS for accreditation, with some universities citing the BPS accreditation rules to support refusal to direct entry into second year. However, the BPS gives very explicit guidelines on this issue. Appendix 1 outlines the extracts from the BPS undergraduate accreditation documents which stipulate relevant conditions, and it can be seen that accreditation is possible for all students gaining direct entry into University with HNDs *up to the third year*.

However, in discussion the working group determined that the barriers to HND Social Science students for second year entry should be the focus of this document, as the majority of students tend to apply for second year, with applications for third year occurring by exception only.

## 2. Mapping HEI curriculum content

An on-line questionnaire was sent out to all accredited undergraduate psychology courses in Scotland to ascertain what they deliver in year one of the university course (therefore highlighting what typical second year students need to have covered), and this was compared with the content in the HND in Social Sciences. This covered;

- Teaching time per topic (Lectures, tutorials,)
- Depth of topic coverage
- Practical work per topic
- Assessment methodology

Since many universities have different course descriptors for similar curriculum content, it was decided to map Scottish first year course content by the titles contained in the BPS compulsory curriculum, broken broadly into six main categories, Research Design and Statistical Analysis, Cognitive Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Social Psychology, Personality and Individual Differences, Psychobiology. In addition, the survey asked for a breakdown of sub-topics within each broad subject heading, as well as details about content delivery time and assessment methods.

Fourteen institutions in total were contacted by email and asked to complete the curriculum pro-forma for first year. These included; University of Aberdeen, University of Abertay, University of Dundee, University of Strathclyde, University of St. Andrews, Glasgow Caledonian University, Heriot-Watt University, University of Stirling, Napier University, Paisley University, Queen Margaret University College, Open University, University of Edinburgh, and the University of Glasgow.

Of those contacted 13 responded, with 10 universities returning the questionnaire in full, with three universities felt unable to fill in the questionnaire explaining that their first year Psychology was of a very general introductory nature. Of the 10 universities who filled in the questionnaire, there is a range of topics and subtopics delivered. This information is detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in table 1 and table 2 overleaf.