



APAC Accreditation Assessment Summary Report

Higher Education Provider	RMIT
Date of determination	30 October 2017
Standards version	June 2010 (Version 10); Rules March 2014, amendments May 30 2016
Programs of Study Assessed for Accreditation	Three year programs: Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) Bachelor of Social Work/ Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) Bachelor of Criminology and Psychology Fourth year program: Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) (Honours) 5th and 6th year program: Master of Clinical Psychology

This is a summary of the outcomes of an Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC) accreditation site visit to the Discipline of Psychology at RMIT. This summary highlights selected key features of the assessment. Comprehensive analysis of the assessment is contained in the full APAC Assessment report.

RMIT has campuses at Bundoora and in the Melbourne City centre and the Discipline of Psychology offers programs at both campuses. Since the last accreditation visit, RMIT has undergone a re-structure. The Discipline of Psychology resides in one of four Schools, the School of Health and Biomedical Science, within the Science, Engineering and Health College. The Discipline is designated as the Psychology AOU. Administrative support to the AOU is by means of centralised administration in the School.

All three years of the Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) are offered at the City campus with just the first year of this program offered at the Bundoora campus. The Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) (Honours) and the Master of Clinical Psychology are offered at the Bundoora campus only. Three other programs that include the 3-year undergraduate sequence in psychology are the Bachelor of Social Science, the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours)/Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology) and the Bachelor of Criminology and Psychology. While the 12 units (11 core and one psychology elective unit) are all taught by psychology staff, these three programs are managed by another School in a separate College (the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies (GUSS) in the College of Design and Social Context). These three programs are only offered at the City campus.

The majority of the psychology staff is based at the Bundoora campus. Four academics are based at the City Campus full time, with most Bundoora-based staff teaching at the City campus and spending at least one day per week there. The Head of the Psychology AOU also spends one day per week at the City campus. Other staff travel between the two sites (approximately one hour driving distance apart) to teach units in the undergraduate sequence.

There are 21.5 FTE academic staff in the Discipline of Psychology. There are also 4.87 FTE casual staff (tutors, markers and casual staff teaching into the clinical program). It became apparent that not all of the psychology teaching had been factored into the student : staff ratio, therefore depending on which student figures are used, a different ratio is obtained. Discrepancies in the figures meant that an accurate student: staff ratio could not be calculated although it was estimated to be higher than the 22:1 required by Standard 2.4.3.

The three staff members holding endorsement to practice in the area of Clinical Psychology appear not to be making a substantial contribution to the Masters program as they also co-ordinate and teach large units in the undergraduate program and provide Honours supervision. Other non-clinical staff contribute to the teaching and research supervision and a number of appropriately qualified clinical psychologists have been hired on a casual basis to provide guest lectures into the program. Additional clinical staff are required to provide a quality clinical psychology program.

The Discipline does not have its own dedicated administrative, technical and IT resources nor dedicated labs or teaching spaces. Staff reported that there are some difficulties with the centralised administration system at RMIT. They reported they had adequate access to lecture theatres, tutorial rooms and other spaces and it was noted that the City campus is currently undergoing extensive refurbishment and the Bundoora campus has recently been refurbished extensively.

There is adequate access to computer laboratories for undergraduate classes. Staff research is both laboratory based as well as field and applied and while research spaces such as labs are spread across the Bundoora campus, these facilities are very well resourced. Staff and students report access to more than adequate facilities for the conduct of their research.

Teaching is generally, though not exclusively, face-to-face lectures and tutorials/laboratories complemented with some on-line materials. Staff are being encouraged to develop more blended learning resources and there is a very successful wholly on-line non-accredited 1st year Introduction to Psychology unit being offered. Laboratory training is conducted both in laboratories (both computer supported and without computers) and, more often, in interactive tutorials.

The teaching and assessment of the psychology graduate attributes were examined carefully. The unit outlines were somewhat dated and some still referred to APS accreditation. In addition, a number of the outlines indicated that there were no required readings. While the staff reported that additional readings/resources were available on the Blackboard site, these were not visible to the assessors. Students did not report accessing readings through the Blackboard site. The assessors noted that some of the core content appeared to be very light in that learning was covered very minimally and there was little content relating to intercultural diversity and indigenous psychology, unless students enrolled in the elective, Cross Cultural and Organisational Psychology unit. While the staff on the City campus reported that there was currently a review of the

undergraduate content and the scaffolding of learning outcomes and assessment occurring, the Standards related to the teaching of core psychology graduate attributes are currently not met and should be attended to during the review of teaching and learning in the undergraduate program.

Formal practical work took many forms, often in what are called tutorials rather than laboratories, including computer based experiments, non-computer-based experiments, work requiring student preparation and their knowledge and understanding checked often in quizzes at the beginning of classes.

A range of different assessments are undertaken by the students, including lab reports, essays, quizzes, multiple choice and short answer exams. There appears not to have been any external moderation of the undergraduate program and since the AOU is undergoing a review of the undergraduate program, this could provide an opportunity for the AOU to benchmark its assessment practices.

The Bachelor of Applied Science (Psychology) (Honours) is offered on the Bundoora campus. There are around 40 students in the program.

The team met with a small number of students who reported satisfaction with the processes of getting into Honours, being allocated a research supervisor and the support and supervision they receive.

Students complete advanced study in Psychological Assessment and Intervention, Professional Issues and Research Methods as well as selecting two of three electives, Psychopathology, Advanced Topics or Advanced Research Methods (also currently completed by postgraduate students). The thesis component, 50% of the 4th year, comprises a 2000 word proposal, a poster, a 6000 word literature review and a 5000 word manuscript formatted for a journal article – four pieces of assessable work – the first two marked internally by two independent assessors, and the final two pieces are each marked by one internal and one external examiners. The external examiners have on-going associations with universities (not just RMIT) in Melbourne often through research collaboration and each examines between six to 10 theses so that rankings can be evaluated and relativities considered. This is considered equivalent to benchmarking.

In 2017, Research Methods was taught in second semester, with students having the additional option of Advanced Research Methods (also in semester 2). This meant that some students had begun data collecting prior to completing the research methods and ethics training and the Discipline may consider moving the research unit back to semester 1 to ensure that students are sufficiently prepared for undertaking their research.

RMIT currently offers one postgraduate professional program, the Master of Clinical Psychology. While the actual student : staff ratio is satisfactory, this is because there are very few students in the program, there are only three clinically qualified staff one of whom is currently seconded on a half time basis out of the AOU. Another of the clinical team teaches quite substantially into the undergraduate program and the newest clinical staff member is listed as only 50% in the program. As indicated earlier, without the casual staff teaching into the postgraduate program, the student staff ratio would not be met. While those staff members responsible for any student supervision hold clinical endorsement with the Psychology Board of Australia, the availability of these staff for

the students is very limited.

While there is a Staff Student Consultative Committee which meets biannually, this committee does not meet the requirements in Standard 5.1.4. This is an issue raised in the 2012 report and thus it appears that it has never been addressed.

The Psychology Clinic is based in a separate building at the Bundoora campus. A new, purpose built large multi-disciplinary facility houses Psychology, Chinese Medicine, Osteopathy and Chiropractic clinics. Students complete training in the Psychology Clinic with four internal placements that begin in first year and continue into the second year of the training. The facilities include four clinical psychology interview/therapy rooms and while these are adequate for training students in interviewing, testing and assessment and have DVD recording equipment, should the numbers of students increase, there will not be sufficient space. At the time of the site visit, there were 15 students across the two years of the program. The four rooms are suitable for client work and they are appropriately furnished, including for working with children, however there is no space for conducting groups. There is no provision for any of the clinical supervisors to be based in the Clinic. This results in students seeing clients in the Clinic in the absence of a registered psychologist and raises questions regarding the safety of their practice.

There appears to be sufficient resources in the Test Library and the institutional library and students report having sufficient access to computers and the internet. Students in the Masters program have access to a dedicated room with three computers; however they often work in a therapy room with their own laptop and use the campus-wide Wi-Fi access to the Internet.

The core capabilities were explored during discussions with the staff teaching the program. The types of assessment were described and, like the undergraduate assessments, a variety of assessments were found to be used by staff in different units. No formal structured OSCEs are completed and while the examples of student work that were inspected appeared satisfactory, there were some areas of core capability that did not appear to be met. For example, students reported that they were only required to undertake either an adult or a child cognitive assessment and that there was limited teaching of tests other than the WISC and the WAIS. Furthermore the unit outlines also suggested that few CBT interventions were taught, and since students do not observe their clinical academics or supervisors doing therapy, their education and training in interventions seem to be minimal.

The research methods unit in the Masters program is identical to that of the Honours program and both Honours and Masters students attended the same classes. The students completed the same assignments with the only difference being that Masters students were required to obtain a higher mark to pass. This means that students who had completed their fourth year at RMIT were repeating a unit that they had already passed, while the others were repeating material that they should have covered in their fourth year programs.

It is difficult to see how the assessment practices meet the *APAC Standards* in that at least three of the capabilities in Standard 5.1.12 are not met.

Practical placements in the Clinic and in suitable external settings are completed. Students are not required to construct a single log book that documents the 5th and 6th years of training as

required in the *APAC Standards*. Students reported difficulty in achieving their required client hours in the first year of their training and a solution to this is that students continue to see clients in the Clinic during the second year of their training. This results in students beginning their external placements prior to completing their internal placement and before being assigned a pass for the internal placement.

The assessors were able to view some individual folders of student work and log books which are held electronically, but there did not appear to be a single place where documentation of an individual student's progress through his or her training was retained. Where available, log books outlining the clinical experiences and supervision, as well as client progress notes, were inspected and were signed appropriately. It was noted that the staffing shortage and the recent departure of one of the clinical staff meant that the documentation was in several different places and it was acknowledged that a system of recording students' work was needed. No external folios or log books were sighted and it was evident that the University supervisors are at times providing supervision for students in the Clinic and in external placements

The Clinic is situated a reasonable walking distance from where the supervising academics are located. The Clinic does not employ a supervising psychologist who is present when the students are seeing clients, but instead has two clinic assistants (current advanced postgraduate students) who between them manage the Clinic on four days a week, taking phone calls, assisting in the allocation of cases and generally overseeing the work in the Clinic. This situation is not ideal and has the potential to create problems associated with boundaries and dual roles for the students. In addition, the availability of supervisors is currently limited as a result of the shortage of staff, and therefore the support available to students while seeing clients is limited. It was suggested that some consideration be made to locate the Clinic Director in the clinic.

The external placements listed appear to be suitable and the assessors met with two external supervisors and had a telephone call with one other previous supervisor. While the two external supervisors were very positive about the program and the students, they acknowledged having very limited experience as a supervisor for RMIT. One of the assessors was able after the visit to have telephone conversations with two more external supervisors who have supervised between them six RMIT students over the past five years. Both of these supervisors spoke highly of the RMIT students and while one of these indicated good support provided by the University when dealing with a difficult student situation, the other indicated that the support could be improved.

The assessment team is concerned that the current lack of staffing is likely to impact the quality of teaching and learning, as well as clinical training, and the staffing situation needs to be addressed urgently.

The accreditation outcomes are summarised in the attached Accreditation Summary Checklist.