Background & Summary

The Lancaster University DClinPsy is a pre-registration qualification funded by Health Education North to train clinical psychologists for the National Health Service. It is accredited by the British Psychological Society and approved by the Health & Care Professions Council, both of whom issue revised guidance regarding the required learning outcomes of pre-registration programmes at intervals.

To obtain the award students are required to complete all three elements of the programme. These currently comprise:

(i) A minimum of five clinical placements

(ii) A doctoral thesis, and

(iii) Submission (and if failed, resubmission) of all six coursework assignments (of which they must pass five)

The proposed changes relate to the latter of these elements. The programme’s current coursework assignment marking criteria and the assignments themselves were originally designed to work with older versions of the BPS and HCPC learning outcomes, as well as with an older version of the national clinical psychology job analysis. Whilst some assessment criteria have been adjusted to account for the changes and some individual assignments have been changed or replaced, the programme has reached a stage where a fresh set of assessment criteria and assignments is needed in order to ensure the programme continues to meet current criteria.

Key features of the proposed new assessment system are as follows:

- Assignments will be assessed against a new system of ten ‘domains’ which is a codification of the most recent BPS & HCPC prescribed learning outcomes for DClinPsy programmes nationally (BPS, 2014; HCPC, 2015), and which also maps onto the latest UK Clinical Psychology job analysis (Baron & O'Reilly, 2011; 2012).
- Using this system the new assignments will provide comprehensive coverage of the learning outcomes and also assess skills relevant to other guidance documents such as the BPS leadership framework (BPS, 2010).
- The new assessment system will require students to reach a passing standard on all assessed areas in all assignments; ensuring graduates are not lacking any key skills and will be fit for purpose and practice in the NHS.
- The new assignment suite is streamlined in order to make it rigorous whilst making maximum use of existing activities students on the programme are already required to engage in. In this way it aims to make the most efficient use of student, staff and stakeholder time. It also makes use of a broad range of established assessment forms.
- The new assignment suite places a greater emphasis on direct assessment of clinical and other ‘live’ skills (a requirement in the latest accreditation standards) whilst simultaneously allowing students an extended timeframe within which to work on their doctoral research thesis.
Consultation

These proposals were developed by working groups comprising staff members and made use of a series of development and stakeholder consultations at numerous stages in their development. Table 1 provides a brief chronology of this process.

Table 1: Chronology of consultation in developing this proposal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Consultees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Autumn 2016 | Initial ideas and direction for redesign created at DClinPsy whole staff Away Day | • DClinPsy staff  
• Service Users (LUPIN members) - present at away day                        |
| Spring 2017 | Draft Assessment Domains consulted on          | • DClinPsy staff - staff meeting; email  
• Current DClinPsy trainees - email                                             |
| Autumn 2017 | Assignments and assessment system consultation | • DClinPsy staff – staff meeting; email  
• Current DClinPsy trainees - focus groups; email  
• Service Users (LUPIN members) – focus group; presentation and discussion at meeting; email  
• Qualified clinical psychologists in NW region – email  
• DClinPsy programme marking team – email  
• DClinPsy External examiners – email and phone                                |
| Winter 2017 | Developing assignment and assessment system detail | • DClinPsy staff – all staff invited to join working groups to develop the assignments and new assessment system. 19/23 permanent staff participated.  
• DClinPsy Programme Board (this body includes the Dean of FHM, Clinical Psychology lead for NHS employer of trainees, service user and trainee representatives) – Presentation and discussion at meeting |
| Early 2018  | Assignments and assessment system second consultation | • DClinPsy staff – staff meeting; email  
• Current DClinPsy trainees - email  
• Service Users (LUPIN members) – email  
• Qualified clinical psychologists in NW region – email  
• DClinPsy programme marking team – email  
• DClinPsy External examiners – email and phone                                |

New overall assessment scheme

The proposed new scheme focuses upon using assignments as tools to assess trainee progress on the ten domains of competence, which are a codification of the programme learning outcomes (see separate
document for details). In order to pass the programme, trainees will be required to pass each individual assignment. Each assignment has been designated a fixed set of assessment domains upon which it will be **actively graded** (positive and negative evidence is collected, as with the current assignment suite). The first seven of the ten domains are actively graded in this way by assignments in the new suite, with each of these domains being covered by between four and six assignments. A table showing which assignments actively assess which domains can be found in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Domains actively assessed by each assignment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive name</th>
<th>Domain name</th>
<th>Placement Assignment (x3)</th>
<th>Self-Assessment Exercise</th>
<th>Thesis Preparation Assignment</th>
<th>Service Evaluation Project</th>
<th>Service Improvement Poster Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering</td>
<td>L1. Collating information and knowledge</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing</td>
<td>L2. Critical analysis &amp; synthesis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding</td>
<td>L3. Strategy for application (deciding)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing</td>
<td>L4. Performance skills</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>L5. Responsive to impact &amp; learning from experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>6. Communicating information effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting</td>
<td>7. Interpersonal skills &amp; collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to pass an assignment, trainees are required to reach an acceptable standard in each of the **actively graded** domains for that assignment. However, an assignment may be failed if substantial negative evidence for **any** of the ten domains is identified in the course of marking. Assignments are not marked numerically, but rated pass, pass with conditions (usually used for presentational issues) or fail.

Trainees are required to complete and pass a total of seven distinct pieces of assessed coursework. Four of the assignments have a **live skills-focus**, and three have a **broader focus**. Trainees are permitted only two attempts to pass each of the live skills-focus assignments, in order to ensure fitness to practice and for reasons of practicality. The broader focused assignments additionally entail a process where trainees can submit an assignment for formative marking prior to the main summative submission. Fully drafted assignments will be marked at this stage, and detailed feedback provided. This will replace draft reading that would previously have been provided. If the assignment reaches an acceptable standard in all domains, the result will be converted to a summative pass without the trainee needing to do further work on the assignment (subject to any external moderation). However, if the trainee falls short in any required areas, they will receive feedback and have the opportunity to revise and make a fresh submission by the summative deadline. **In essence this means that trainees will be permitted three attempts at the broadly**
focused assignments. However, failing any assignment at both the summative and resubmission stages will normally lead to failing the programme.

At the formative stage at least 20% of the cohort’s submissions will be double marked. All work submitted at the summative deadline and all resubmissions will be double-marked and a sample moderated by external examiners as in our present system. Further detail of the overall assessment and moderation process can be found in Figure 1, which is appended to this document.

The proposed suite of assignments

The new assignments are specifically designed to make efficient use of a range of currently un-assessed activities which we already expect of trainees as part of their work on the DClinPsy programme. As part of this, the scheduling of the new suite of assignments is designed specifically to facilitate an early start to the thesis process within the first 200 training days (see ‘Thesis Preparation Assignment’ below). Under the new scheme we anticipate that more time could be spent on thesis work overall but that thesis submission would still be possible 35-75 training days earlier than is currently the case. As the current timing of the thesis leads to a consistent minority of trainees failing to complete the programme in their contracted time, we anticipate that this change will be of significant benefit.

The anticipated schedule of submission for a full time trainee appears in Table 3 which is appended to this document. An overview of the assignments proposed also appears below. Each assignment is also described in more detail in an individual document.

Broad focus assignments

1. Self-assessment exercise

The Self-Assessment Exercise has been designed to foster an adult learning approach to learning and self-development from the start of the programme. It consists of several stages. Trainees are first asked to appraise their starting point via a structured initial self-appraisal written in the first week of training of up to 500 words. In this they will identify the strengths they bring to training and areas they feel need developing or may be challenging for them. This is followed by trainees conducting and collating the results of a series of formative tasks to develop insight and understanding of their personal, professional and self-development challenges. These tasks for the most part comprise exercises that we currently already ask new trainees to engage in, and will include elements such as a critical writing exercise, a test of knowledge of statistical tests, a clinical roleplay, and feedback exercises from placement. Using information collated, trainees are then asked to provide a written narrative describing their strengths and complete a table which outlines their development needs and provides strategies to address these (up to 1000 words). Both written components are then submitted as one document to the programme, with the results of the

1 When developing this proposal we were mindful of part time training routes and that some trainees take bespoke pathways, and so described the point in training of events in terms of ‘training days’ (where 220 training days per year would be full time (taking into account annual leave and bank holiday entitlements) or relative to the position within a placement so that it can be seen how the system will work for all. Table 3 in the Appendix gives an example of how this would work for a full time trainee.
formative exercises appended. Finally, the trainee attends a ‘self-assessment viva’ with the tutor pair to review and discuss the written submission and the trainee’s development strategies going forward. The trainee’s individual clinical and research tutor pair will mark the assignment, and will provide grades on the basis of the written report and performance in the viva process. The outcome of the self-assessment assignment will form the basis of a self-development plan which will be considered (but not assessed) in future review meetings with the trainee.

2. Thesis Preparation Assignment

The Thesis Preparation Assignment is a theory and research based assignment undertaken in the first year of training that is intended to provide the foundation for the thesis. The assignment will consist of a 6,000 word report made up of two sections: a 4,500 word review of the research, clinical and theoretical literature on the topic which the trainee intends to research for their thesis; and a 1,500 word research proposal. The literature review element of the assignment should also include an audit trail of the search strategy adopted, including details of literature searches undertaken. It is expected that the trainee will build on the literature review when writing their thesis, but not reproduce it, as the focus of this assignment should be broader in scope than the introduction sections of the thesis. The research proposal element of the assignment will include a brief rationale for the research that the trainee intends to undertake for their thesis, followed by a description of the main elements of the study design. It is anticipated that the trainee will have identified a potential field supervisor and possible recruitment site(s) during the course of working on the assignment, though this is not assessed as part of the assignment.

3. Service Evaluation Project

This is a 3,000 word report documenting a small scale evaluation or audit of clinically or professionally relevant activity undertaken by the trainee on one of the latter three of their core placements during the first two years of full-time training, i.e. the placement in which the trainee does not complete a Placement Assignment. The project is completed as part of the trainee’s activity on placement, and is supervised by the placement supervisor. It can be either a clinical audit or a broader service evaluation, depending on the requirements of the service. A project proposal is submitted to the assignment co-ordinator within the first 24 placement days and must be approved by the assignment co-ordinator. The proposal should include a written statement of approval for the project from the relevant trust’s R&D office, including confirmation that the project does not constitute research and therefore does not require ethical approval. If necessary, the proposal should also include a back-up option in case the project does not go to plan (e.g. if an intervention to be evaluated does not go ahead).
**Live skills-focus assignments**

4. The placement assignments (x3)

These three new assignments all have the same format, and are based on elements of the current placement portfolio assignments. Each submission focuses on a piece of work which will typically have been conducted on one of the four core practice placements the trainee undertakes (child and family plus two others). The assignment comprises two elements: a 30 minute long live recording of the work being undertaken by the trainee, and a written component comprising three main sections. The first section outlines the presenting issue and what the trainee did within the work undertaken, and will include assessment, background history, formulation / psychological synthesis and intervention undertaken or planned. The second section contains a transcription of ten minutes from the recording alongside a line by line commentary. The third and final section offers critical evidence based perspective and critical reflections on the work undertaken. The recording and the written report are marked together. The exact standard that will need to be reached will be dependent upon the point in training at which the work was completed.

5. Service Improvement Poster Presentation

This assignment will take place between the second and third core practice placements. Over the course of four days trainees will work together in small groups to construct a proposal to address a service improvement issue (relevant to clinical psychology practice) that has been highlighted by local NHS Trusts/services. Each day will contain an assessed session, facilitated by one of the assignment markers, during which trainees will engage in a structured activity and will be individually assessed on competencies relating to leadership and effective group working. Each group will develop a written service development proposal which is summarised into an A0 sized poster. Following the group working days, there will be a presentation session during which the group will present their poster to, and answer questions from, examiners and an invited audience of stakeholders. Trainee grades for each domain will be assessed via evidence from: examiner ratings of the poster; individual trainee performance during the facilitated sessions, and individual performance during the poster presentation and Q&A session.

**References**


**Appendix: Details of proposed submission and assessment process**

**Table 3: Example of proposed submission points for a full-time training route**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Submissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First</strong></td>
<td>December</td>
<td><em>The self-assessment exercise (formative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
<td><em>The self-assessment exercise (summative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td><em>Thesis Preparation Assignment (formative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
<td><em>Placement Assignment #1</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
<td><em>Thesis Preparation Assignment (summative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From June</td>
<td>Start work on thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second</strong></td>
<td>September - October</td>
<td>Service Improvement Poster Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November</td>
<td><em>Service Evaluation (formative) or Placement Assignment #2</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td><em>Service Evaluation (formative or summative) or Placement Assignment (#2 or #3)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third</strong></td>
<td>September</td>
<td><em>Service Evaluation (formative or summative) or Placement Assignment (#3)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
<td><em>Service Evaluation (summative- only if done on placement 4)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Thesis submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May - July</td>
<td><em>Self-assessment exercise #2 (formative)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>N.B. this is a learning exercise with no summative component and as such is not detailed in these proposals</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. this is a learning exercise with no summative component and as such is not detailed in these proposals.
Figure 1 - Flow chart of proposed assignment submission and marking process