# MSc/Diploma Cognition and Ageing

Awarding Institution: The University of Reading
Teaching Institution: The University of Reading
Faculty of Science Programme length: 12 months (24 part-time)
For students entering in 2003 Date of specification: 15 January 2004
Programme Director: Prof Smith
Board of Studies: Prof Smith (chair), Drs Ellis, Kirkham, Schafer

**Summary of programme aims**

The purpose of the course is to prepare graduates in Psychology and allied disciplines for academic, clinical, educational, health, and research careers where knowledge of the impact of ageing on the human cognitive system is required, or desirable. The course introduces students to topics of relevance to the impact of ageing on the human brain, and in particular the effects on the cognitive system, and the implications of these effects for the understanding and care of the elderly. These topics are covered in more depth, and with greater emphasis on current research, than is typically possible in the course of an undergraduate degree in psychology. Students are exposed to a variety of teaching methods, culminating in the completion of a piece of original research. It is intended that graduates of the course will go on to work in fields which require and understanding of the ways in which ageing can affect cognitive functioning in human adults.

**Transferable skills**

By the end of the course, students will have developed the following transferable skills:

- Ability to use computers for statistics, data analysis, and communication.
- Ability to use database/library resources.
- Writing skills: writing of papers, abstraction of others' work from written and oral material, reviewing of work of peers.
- Ability to make oral presentations.

**Programme content**

| *Compulsory Modules* | | *Credits* | *Level* |
|---|---|---|---|
| EDMES1 | *Essentials of Research Methods for the Social Sciences* | 20 | M |
| EDMES2 | *Research Transferable Skills for the Social Sciences* | 10 | M |
| PYM0TI | *Theoretical Issues for Psychologists* | 10 | M |
| PYM0S1 | *Data Collection & Analysis 1* | 10 | M |
| PYM0S2 | *Data Collection & Analysis 2* | 10 | M |
| PYM0QQ | *Qualitative, Survey, and Psychometric Methods* | 10 | M |
| PYM0CC | *Methods in Cognitive Psychology* | 10 | M |
| PYM2CM | *Cognitive Neuropsychology of Memory* | 10 | M |
| PYM2PA | *Psychology of Ageing* | 10 | M |
| PYM0EP | *Empirical Project (MSc only. Must be undertaken in a relevant field)* | 60 | M |

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*Optional Modules*
*Modules totalling 20 credits may be selected from a list such as the following:*

| | | *Credits* | *Level* |
|---|---|---|---|
| PYM0RD | *Research Design and Data Management* | 10 | M |
| PYM0CP | *Methods in Clinical Psychology* | 10 | M |
| PYM0DP | *Methods in Developmental Psychology* | 10 | M |
| PYM0SP | *Methods in the Study of Perception* | 10 | M |
| PYM1CD | *Cognitive Development* | 10 | M |
| PYM3D1 | *Development of Psychopathology 1* | 10 | M |
| PYM3D2 | *Development of Psychopathology 2* | 10 | M |

**Part-time/Modular arrangements**
The course may be undertaken over two years on a part-time basis. Selection of modules between the two years will be agreed between the student and the Board of Studies, at the commencement of the course. It is anticipated that students will normally complete at least 80 credits' worth of modules in Year 1. Modules be assessed in the year that they are studied. The Empirical Project (PYM0EP) must be undertaken in Year 2.

**Progression requirements**
Acceptance onto any module is conditional on the student having attempted all assessments set in previous modules. The Empirical Project will normally be the last piece of work to be submitted for assessment (by Dissertation).

**Summary of teaching and assessment**
Teaching is by a variety of methods, including lectures, small group seminars, web-based work-throughs, self-paced workshops, individual feedback on written work, and one-on-one supervision. Assessment mirrors this diversity of methods, with methods including written assignments and other coursework, portfolio, unseen essay- and multiple-choice-based examinations, open-book test, submission of practical reports, oral presentations, and submission of project dissertation.

The University's taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

| Mark | Interpretation |
|---|---|
| 70 – 100% | Distinction |
| 60 – 69% | Merit |
| 50 – 59% | Good standard (Pass) |
| Failing categories: | |
| 40 – 49% | Work below threshold standard |
| 0 – 39% | Unsatisfactory Work |

***For Masters Degrees***
To pass the MSc students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation (PYM0EP) and have a mark of 40 or better in module PY3DP. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 70 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

***For PG Diplomas***
To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more and have a mark of 40 or better in module PY3DP. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

***NOTE** The provision to permit a candidate to be passed overall with a profile containing marks below 40 is made subject to the condition that there is evidence that the candidate applied his or herself to the work of those modules with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

**Admission requirements**
Entrants to this programme are normally required to have obtained an Honours degree in psychology or related discipline (e.g., cognitive science, linguistics, philosophy). Applicants should have gained, or expect to gain, a class mark of 2(1) or better (i.e., 60%+ [or international equivalent, e.g. B+ US letter grade]). Applicants holding 2(2) degrees may apply and each case will be considered on its own merits. Applicants whose academic qualifications do not meet these formal standards may in the first instance be admitted to the Diploma course; they may then transfer to MSc status subject to satisfactory performance in their first two terms. We discourage applications from holders of Third Class degrees. The Admissions Tutor for this course is Dr. Schafer.

**Support for students and their learning**
University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. (1) Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. (2) Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

Support for graduate students in the Department of Psychology is similarly aimed at both learning and pastoral support. Learning support includes use of workrooms dedicated to MSc students with networked PCs and printer, access to the departmental library, a specially selected and maintained reprint collection, provision of photocopying cards, and ready access to members of staff who are all respected scholars in the fields taught. Pastoral support augments the University's care systems, with each student being allocated a Personal Tutor from the Board of Studies.

New students undergo an induction programme in the week before they start the course. A comprehensive handbook is available for the course; this is available on-line, as are a wealth of other resources via the department's intranet. Teaching is usually in small groups with much opportunity for students to discuss matters and support one another. There is an active Student-Staff Committee with postgraduate representation.

**Career prospects**
Graduates will have good prospects in careers which involve the understanding of the effects of ageing on the human cognitive system, in a variety of academic, clinical, educational, health, and

research fields. It is anticipated that approximately half of graduates will to into careers involving research (interpreted broadly). The remainder will be able to use skills and insights gained on the course in areas as diverse as health care, health policy, education, and counselling.

**Opportunities for study abroad or for placements**
None at present. However, the Department has a links with a number of Universities in Europe and is actively considering a placement scheme.

**Educational aims of the programme**
Students are required to operate at a more advanced level than in an Honours degree, with emphasis on the psychological issues which arise with particular prominence in this field of enquiry.

**Programme Outcomes**

***Knowledge and Understanding***

| **A. Knowledge and understanding of:** | **Teaching/learning methods and strategies** |
|---|---|
| 1. Advanced concepts, theories, and evidence in the core domains of: research methods, theoretical issues for psychologists, cognitive changes in human adults.<br>2. A broad variety of methods and approaches in the psychological understanding of cognition and memory in adults.<br>3. Applications of psychological and neuropsychological understanding of the human cognitive system, and how it is affected by ageing .<br>4. Particular difficulties inherent in the psychological study of, and care of, adults with dementia.<br>5. Ethical issues in the psychological study of human ageing. | 1-5 are covered in lectures and seminars. 2, 4 and 5 are further supported by practical experience, most notably in the completion of an empirical project.<br>1 and 2 are supported by the requirement to attend a number of departmental seminars given by visiting speakers, who are generally leaders in their field.<br><br>*Assessment*<br>1-4 by coursework essays and unseen examinations.<br>1, 3, 4, and 5 are assessed directly in the empirical project, and 2 is assessed indirectly (through the rationale for the methods actually deployed by the student).<br>Students with a particular interest in practical issues can offer an optional assessment (in PY0RD) of a 'hands-on' nature. |

## *Skills and other attributes*

**B. Intellectual skills** – able to:

1. Use advanced evidence-based reasoning to argue or evaluate a claim about cognitive psychology pertaining to the later life.
2. Apply multiple perspectives and levels of explanation to understand behaviour and cognition in human adults, especially those at the end of the lifespan.
3. Critically evaluate the design and conduct of psychological research into ageing.
4. Write well-structured and well-argued essays.
5. Abstract complex orally presented material.
6. Understand the theoretical framework(s) in which psychological research is conducted.

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**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

1-3, and 6, are explicated in seminars.
6 is supported by self-paced study using web-based teaching.
Coursework essays give opportunity for formative feedback.
Feedback to students on coursework in 'Methods' modules (one of which is compulsory) assists students in the deployment of their intellectual understanding to practical research related issues, supporting 1-4, and particularly 3.

*Assessment*

1-4 and 6 are assessed in coursework essays, and, in the case of 'Methods' modules (one of which is compulsory) other assignments (e.g., critical evaluation, literature review, and project planning). and unseen examinations.
5 is assessed by students handing in a number of abstracts of departmental seminars.
6 is assessed by portfolio.

**C. Practical skills** – able to:

1. Perform advanced searches for information relevant to specific topics.
2. Choose and apply appropriate data analytic techniques.
3. Plan and carry out, with supervision, psychological research relevant to the understanding of ageing.
4. Write up empirical research relevant to the understanding of the ageing of the human cognitive system.
5. Make an application for ethical approval.

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**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

Dedicated seminars, practical classes, and exercises deliver 1 and 2.
A dedicated library and resources session supports 1.
3 and 4 are initially explicated as part of the compulsory module PYM0CC Methods in Cognitive Psychology; they are then consolidated by direct supervision of a research project and associated dissertation.
Support for 5 is delivered by special seminar.

*Assessment*

1 and 2 are assessed by the requirement to undertake a project planning assignment.
1-5 are assessed in the main by the student undertaking an empirical research project relevant to the understanding of human infants and/or young children, and then writing this up as a dissertation.

**D. Transferable skills** – able to:

1. Communicate concisely or at length in writing.
2. Give oral presentations.
3. Work with a group.
4. Plan and implement a project.
5. Solve practical problems.
6. Use IT to write, to present information visually, to manage and analyse numeric data, to communicate, and to find information.
7. Manage time.
8. Condense complex orally delivered information.

**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

Transferable skills are integrated in subject-based teaching. 1 is learned, with formative feedback, through essays and other written assignments.
2 is included in seminars.
3 forms a natural part of the compulsory modules PYM0S1 Data Collection and Analysis 1 and PYM0QQ Qualitative and Quantitative Data, and is additionally a major component of the optional Methods courses viz. PYM0CP, Methods in Clinical Psychology; PYM0DP, Methods in Developmental Psychology; and PYM0SP, Methods in the Study of Perception.
4 and 5 are explicated in the compulsory module PYM0CC Methods in Cognitive Psychology,, and further consolidated by the supervised empirical project.
6 and 7 pervade all aspects of the course.
8 is supported by formative feedback on research seminars written up by the student.

*Assessment*

1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 are formally assessed as coursework.
An adequate standard in 3, 5, and 7 is required to pass the course.

*Please note:* This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.