

The logo of The University of Manchester, featuring the word "MANCHESTER" in white serif font and "1824" in yellow serif font, both on a purple rectangular background.

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Bringing applied practice into the classroom through authentic assessments in Forensic Psychology

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Context: Forensic Psychology



Forensic Psychology: interface between psychology and the law and justice system.

Postgraduate training in Forensic Psychology requires students to identify how psychology can assist disciplines in the legal profession.

Based on apprenticeship model in two stages (academic *before* applied practice).

Key components of apprenticeships in professional education (Day & Tytler, 2012)

- Development of knowledge, skills and research
- Learning to make **judgements under uncertain conditions** so that learning occurs from experience
- Introduction to **values** within the professional community



Context: MSc Forensic Psychology and Mental Health

Students have **little experience** of the law and legal system prior to engaging in their MSc studies.

Most engagement with legal system once **qualified and experienced**.

Authentic assessments closely mirror real-world professional activities, requiring students to apply their knowledge and skills in practical, meaningful and safe contexts.

Employability skills and more **prepared** for the workforce

Background



2022: Programme level assignment review considering employability skills, inclusivity and academic burden identified an over-reliance on essays



Consulted current and former students, employers, academics and external examiners



Revised strategy: variety of assessment formats

| Topic/area | Previous assessment format | New authentic assessment |
|--|----------------------------|---|
| Consultancy in forensic settings | Essay | Analysis of policy; materials include fictional policy document and video of stakeholder (using actors) outlining concerns in setting with staff burnout |
| Personality disorder | Essay | Formulation based on recorded simulated interview (using actors) and fictional case report |
| Psychology applied to the legal system | Essay | 3x active reflections (including one formative) reflecting on observation of court, police use of psychological research evidence, presentation of opinion of alternatives to justice in the criminal justice system. |
| Offending behaviour interventions | Essay | Evidence summary and recommendations report for stakeholders |
| Research analysis skills | Essay | Data analysis plan |

Assignment review

Method

Aim: To explore student perceptions of authentic assessments in relation to employability, skills development, and learning support.

Seven participants

Qualitative: semi-structured interviews and focus group

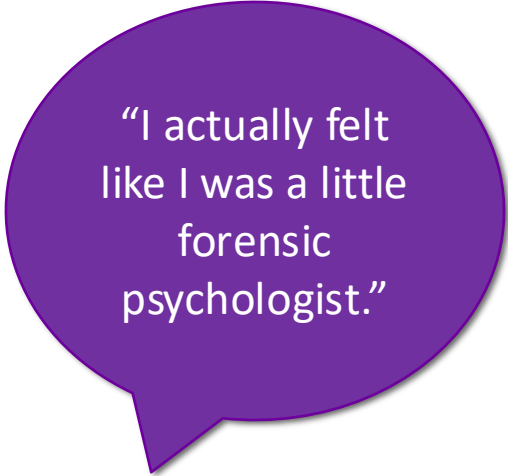
Thematic analysis (hybrid approach)

Findings




1. Developing Identity as a Professional

- Real-world relevance increased motivation
- Stronger sense of role preparedness



“I actually felt like I was a little forensic psychologist.”

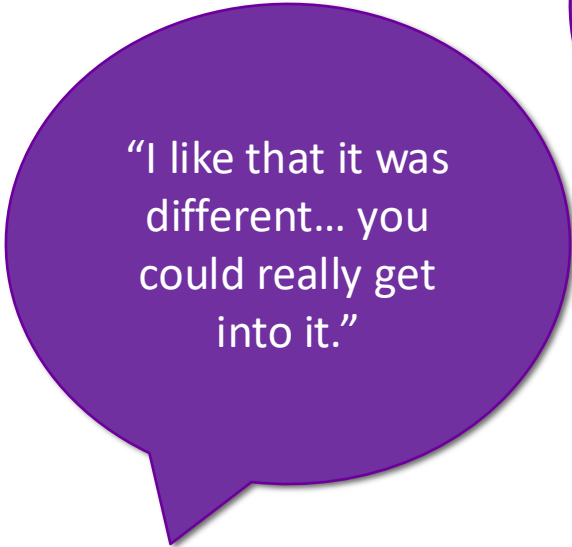


“You can go off into a job or a job interview and say [I’ve not worked] as a professional before, but I’ve done things similar... that’s more helpful than just learning what it is.”

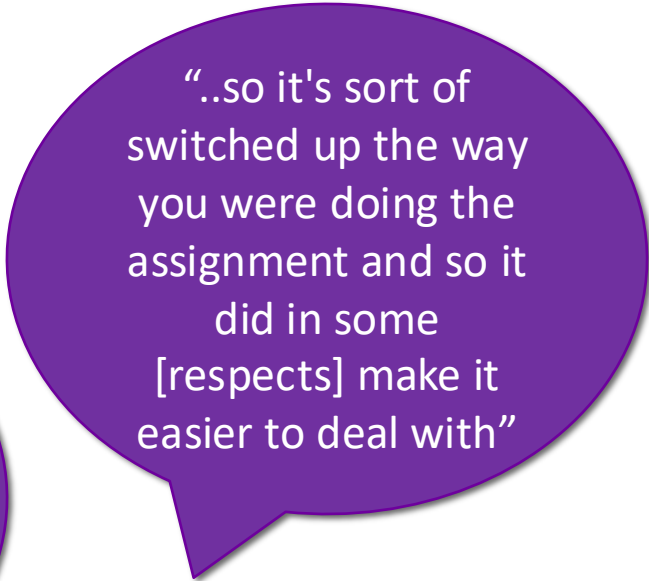
2. Embracing Challenge and Easing the Load

Preferred variety over traditional essays

Lowered cognitive overload



"I like that it was different... you could really get into it."

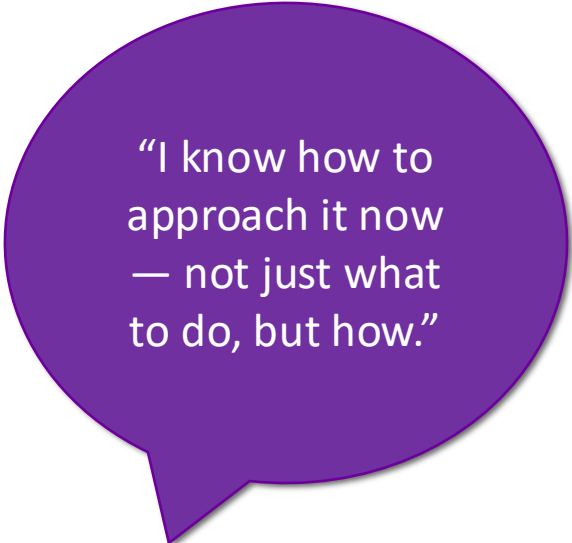


"..so it's sort of switched up the way you were doing the assignment and so it did in some [respects] make it easier to deal with"

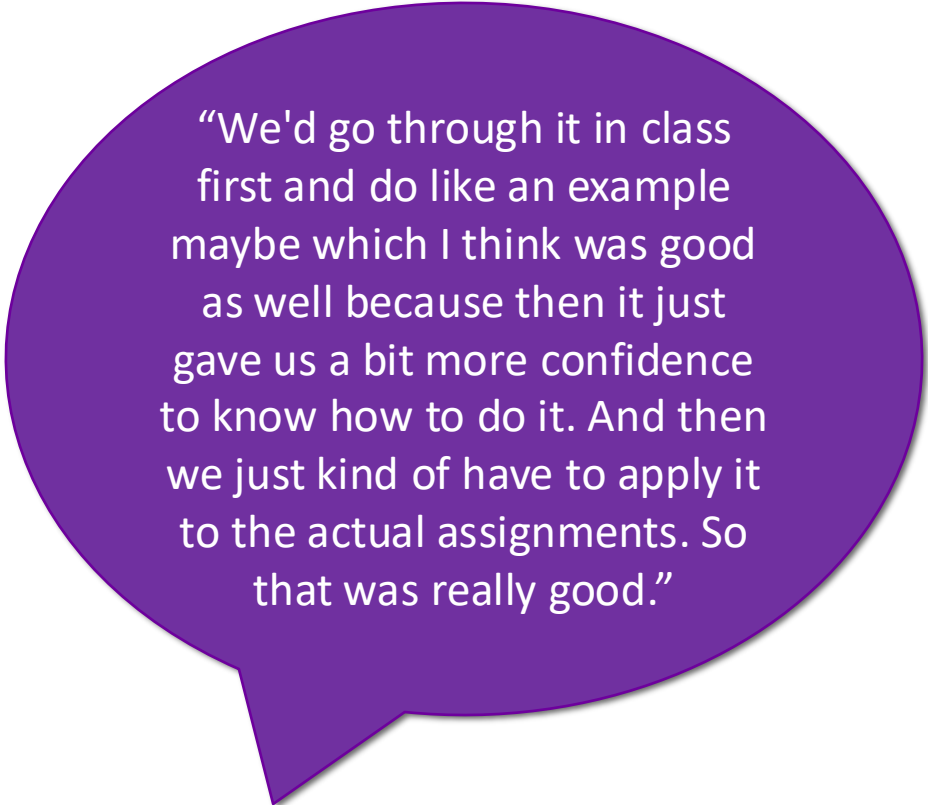
3. The confidence to know 'how'

Assessments as learning tools, not just evaluations

Helped students build approach strategies



"I know how to approach it now — not just what to do, but how."

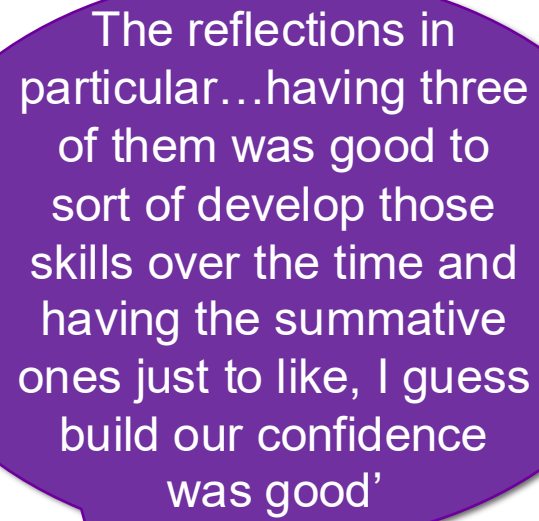


"We'd go through it in class first and do like an example maybe which I think was good as well because then it just gave us a bit more confidence to know how to do it. And then we just kind of have to apply it to the actual assignments. So that was really good."


4. Navigating feedback

Students valued feedback overall

Some concerns about rubric clarity
and marking



The reflections in particular...having three of them was good to sort of develop those skills over the time and having the summative ones just to like, I guess build our confidence was good'



I did much better because I'd been shown how to do it and given feedback on my first attempt.

So what?



Real world relevance = better preparedness for forensic roles



Transferable skills = increased employability



Diversifying the workload = more manageable



Assignments briefs considered very important but more detailed guidance needed



Feedback loops- how to utilise feedback



Limitations: student engagement (timing of recruitment)

Conclusion and reflection

Curriculum reform can enhance engagement and outcomes

Authentic assessments:

- Strengthen professional identity
- Build skills and confidence
- Support employability

Support is essential for student success; scaffold support

Next step: Evaluating assignment briefs



Thank you!

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