# Psychology Student Projects

BSc students complete a final-year empirical dissertation that involves carrying out an extensive piece of empirical research, under the supervision of an assigned academic. It requires the student to individually demonstrate a range of research skills including planning, considering, and resolving ethical issues, and the analysis and dissemination of findings (British Psychological Society (BPS), 2016). This empirical project typically involves the collection of original data, or equivalent alternatives such as secondary data analysis, and forms a substantial proportion of the final grade – 45 credits at Exeter (BPS, 2016). At Exeter, students work in groups of 2-6 on a common research project but can adapt it to include individual research questions. The MSc research project is similar in its requirements and weighting – it contributes 90 credits to the MSc – but is more often carried out individually.

**Timeline**

BSc Students are given a list of all available project themes (2024/25 list is attached) over the Summer before their third year and rank their preferences. They are assigned to a supervisor within one of their chosen themes by the start of their 3rd year (in September). A few students can ‘nominate’ a specific supervisor they wish to work with earlier in their second year which gives more time for advanced planning. Students meet with their supervisor and other students at the start of their 3rd year and work up a research proposal. This often involves selecting a project from ones ‘prepared earlier’, such as ongoing research by the supervisor. As mentioned, students work in small groups (2-6 students) on a common project but also develop the proposal to fit their interests – e.g. adding an extra set of questions that they will focus on in their dissertation in addition to the main research question. The final-year dissertation project then commences in October through to the dissertation (a 6000 word research report like a journal article) deadline in early May. Data collection should be completed by the end of February and analysis completed by the end of March.

For MSc projects, students rank supervisors/projects in October and meet with their supervisor in November to develop individual research proposals, which are submitted in February. They have to submit their MSc dissertation (8000 word research report) in early September. Most students collect data from April-June and write their dissertation in July/August.

**Ethics and resources**

The supervisor ensures the projects have ethical approval – sometimes this requires a new ethics submission or an amendment to an existing approved project. Supervisors seek this approval as soon as possible so that students can begin collecting data from December (BSc) and March (MSc).

**Types of projects**

Many students now undertake research projects online, using Qualtrics for surveys or Gorilla for cognitive (e.g. reaction-time) tasks. Most complete quantitative projects using validated questionnaires or cognitive tasks but quite a few also complete qualitative projects involving interviews or focus groups (these are usually conducted online nowadays). Some studies are run in our human testing labs in washington-singer and others are run as field experiments in humans and animals (we have a large animal behaviour group).

**Expectations of the partner organisation**

* The partner would feed into the design phase of the project
* Organisations/community partners could give as little or much time as they would be happy with. One meeting at a minimum which could be online would be great but there could be more.
* There would probably not be funding to pay organisations for their time but students do get £50 each towards project consumables/costs. If they work as a team of 4 that means the dept can contribute £200 towards a project (e.g. paying participants for their time or covering travel for students).
* The academic supervisor is the main supervisor and community partners would not be expected to formally supervise students but they may want to join supervision meetings about project development if they are interested in doing so

**Would the partner organisation need to agree to share (anonymised) data?**

* This depends on the project – some students undertake secondary data analysis of existing data (e.g. already collected by an organisation) and that is usually anonymised before being shared with the student. If the student wants to collect new data (with the approval of the organisation) that may need ethical approval and this data would be made anonymous in line with ethical guidelines for that project.
* The organisation staff members would not have to take part, and all participation would be voluntary. Only anonymised/written up findings would be shared by the student with the organisation.

**Output**

* The final report would need to be written up by the student as a 6000 word (or 7000 for qualitative research) academic research report and presented in a 10 minute video (powerpoint presentation). There is scope for the student to develop dissemination materials in line with what would be useful to the organisation but they would need to prioritise their summative work. An infographic could be presented in the 10 minute presentation (a student talking through it, perhaps explaining how input from the partner was incorporated etc) so there may be scope for overlap between outputs that partners may want and that students are ‘invested’ in working on. The student could also include a more creative output in their appendix and mention this in their discussion to get more recognition of such work in their dissertation mark.

**The sustainability-related projects that were offered this year and will likely be offered this coming Summer to next year’s third year mostly fall under grouping 5 and 37**

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| **5. Climate change and biodiversity** |
| ***Tim Fawcett; Mete Sefa Uysal; Jennifer Lay; Paul Rose; Gemma Sharp; Doretta Caramaschi; Natalie Hempel de Ibarra, David Francis Hunt; Natalia Lawrence, Luke McGuire, Helen Foster-Collins*** |
| **These projects will apply psychological science to address issues relating to climate change and/or biodiversity loss, as part of a wider initiative across several UK universities (**[**www.1in5project.info**](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.1in5project.info%2F&data=05%7C02%7CL.J.Anderson%40exeter.ac.uk%7Cdd940a6e06144765162808dd5826f276%7C912a5d77fb984eeeaf321334d8f04a53%7C0%7C0%7C638763646528875935%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Iu1uNYt8Vw6DkTqGEFfIricTinYhQVdQMGKRbiKY00w%3D&reserved=0)**). Example projects include:**   * **What is the most effective way to communicate trends in climate change and species loss?** * **What motivates people to engage in climate activism?** * **What influences people's support for unconventional/radical methods in the climate movement (e.g., eco-vandalism, blocking traffic, civil disobedience etc.)?** * **How does ageing affect how people cope with extreme hot temperatures? (age differences in thermal perception/interoception, heat-protective behaviours, etc.)** * **How does behavioural data support species conservation work?** * **How do we best promote and explain biodiversity conservation messaging?** * **How do concerns about climate change affect people’s decisions about whether or not to have children, and how many children to have?** * **Do climate/environmental concerns affect people’s choices around menstrual health management?** * **How do concerns about climate change correlate with sustainable behaviours?** * **How does neurodivergence affect engaging in pro-environmental behaviours?** * **What are the effects of heat on bee behaviour?** * **How can we encourage people to eat more sustainable diets? (Projects can focus on different interventions, such as cognitive modification, social media/campaigns (e.g., Veganuary) or environmental ‘nudge’ interventions, such as changing default options or menus).** * **How do young people think about the relation between eating animals and climate change? How can we leverage children and adolescents’ prosocial tendencies to encourage uptake of sustainable diets?** * **How do factors such as gender or political affiliation influence adoption of/resistance to adopting vegetarian or plant-based diets?** |

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| **37. Environmental Psychology** |
| ***Kat Ashbullby, Helen Foster-Collins, Mat Owens, Joanne Smith, Kim Wright, David Hunt; Jennifer Lay*** |
| **Environmental psychology explores the relationships people have with their environments, whether those be built, social, natural or virtual – how we interact and engage with our surroundings, how we influence and change our environments, as well as how our environments impact upon us.**  **Projects in this area might relate to**   * **Relationships between spending time in natural environments and human wellbeing** * **How our built and urban environments can affect behaviour, learning and health** * **The psychology of pro-environmental behaviour and sustainability** * **Perception of environmental risks.** * **The development of nature-based interventions (including clinical psychology) for mental health and wellbeing.** * **How do older adults experience and mitigate the health impacts of hot temperatures due to climate change?** * **Can differences in thermoregulation, interoception, and health behaviours explain age differences in adaptive coping with climate change?**   **You may explore these topics through the use of quantitative or qualitative methodologies.** |