

Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (HODSPA)

27 January 2012
Assoc Prof Brin Grenyer
Psychology Board of Australia

Re: Psychology Board of Australia Consultation Paper 13: *National Psychology Examination Curriculum.*

The following is the response from HODSPA (Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association) to the Psychology Board of Australia Consultation Paper 13 *National Psychology Examination Curriculum.*

HODSPA is pleased to note that graduates of Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree programs will not be required to sit the proposed National Examination (at least until 2016). In relation to this decision, HODSPA wishes to raise the following points:

1. In this and other matters (e.g., Consultation Paper 12), the Board appears to want to treat the various 6-year training sequences as essentially equivalent. As a consequence, remedies for perceived inadequacies in one or more pathways are applied to all without due consideration of their appropriateness and relevance. In this respect, it is clear that a National Psychology Exam would be both redundant and an unnecessary burden for graduates of current Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree programs. In these matters, it may be more useful for the Board to treat such programs as providing a “gold standard” for professional psychology training and to determine whether other pathways meet this standard and, if they do not, to propose appropriate improvements.
2. Considerations that apply to two-year Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree programs (e.g., MPsych, DPsych) may also apply to the 5th year of the 5+1 pathway. Such students are also completing an accredited program designed to develop and to assess many of the same competencies that form part of the two-year postgraduate program. In fact, APAC does not make a distinction between the 5th year program and the two-year Masters in terms of core capabilities and attributes – they are all included under section 5.1 – and states that the 5th year students are required be as competent as Masters graduates in ethics and legal matters, and “to have covered all the others in less detail” (p. 48). HODPSA believes that, given the level of competencies achieved by students in their 5th year of 5+1 pathway, consideration should be given to allowing exemptions for these students from the relevant parts of the National Examination.

In relation to more general matters, HODSPA wishes to make the following comments:

3. As noted previously, the proposed curriculum appears to be heavily biased towards specific clinical areas of work. It is arguable that the assessment and intervention sections of the proposed curriculum more fittingly describe the work of a psychologist with an endorsed area of practice in clinical psychology than that which might be expected of a general registered psychologist. HODSPA suggests that the Board, in consultation with relevant stake-holders, establish a set of broadly-defined competencies that the public may reasonably expect of a general registered psychologist bearing in mind that referral to more specialised practitioners is an option. Such a demarcation will assist relevant colleges to determine the nature of training for endorsed areas of practice and assist tertiary education providers to determine the nature of essential training in postgraduate programs.
4. HODSPA questions whether a multiple-choice examination of knowledge of particular areas is the most appropriate way of measuring the required set of skill-based competencies. Further to our previous point 1, it is hoped that the National Examination will form part of an integrated supervisor-based assessment of relevant skills as currently forms part of Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree programs.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. John C. Dunn
Chair, HODSPA