

# Guidelines for the National Psychology Examination

April 2016

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## 1. Overview of the examination

These guidelines have been developed by the Psychology Board of Australia (the Board) to assist candidates preparing for the National Psychology Examination (the examination). This is the March 2016 version of the guidelines approved by the Board. These guidelines will be reviewed as required; this will generally be at least every five years.

The National Psychology Examination supports the Board's [General registration standard](#).<sup>1</sup> The Board has determined that the qualifications and supervised practice that lead to [general registration](#) are:

- a) a four-year accredited sequence of study in psychology, or
- b) an overseas qualification that is substantially equivalent to a)

plus:

- a) an approved postgraduate qualification accredited as a fifth and sixth year of study or higher (such as an accredited Master's degree), or
- b) an approved postgraduate qualification accredited as a fifth year of study followed by a one-year Board-approved internship (5+1), or
- c) a two-year Board-approved internship (4+2), or
- d) an overseas qualification and supervised practice assessed by the Board as substantially equivalent to either a), b) or c).

In addition to successfully completing an approved qualification, groups of psychologists (see below) are required to pass the examination from 1 July 2013 before applying for general registration.

### Purpose of the examination

The examination makes an important contribution to ensuring a consistent professional standard of psychologists nationally. [Attachment A](#) provides a background on planning to implement the National Psychology Examination until 1 July 2013.

An examination pass is required to gain general registration.

The examination assesses applied psychological knowledge, which forms a significant basis of competence in the profession. The examination helps demonstrate that internship training has produced a practitioner with an appropriate level of applied professional knowledge and competence, which will more effectively protect the public.

The examination should never be used as the sole test of a practitioner's competence to practise psychology. Passing the examination is not a substitute for a period of provisional registration under supervision.

### Who needs to sit the examination?

The following groups must pass the examination before applying for general registration as a psychologist:

1. provisionally registered psychologists undertaking a five-year accredited sequence of study followed by a one-year Board-approved internship (5+1)
2. provisionally registered psychologists undertaking a four-year accredited sequence of study followed by a two-year Board-approved internship (4+2)

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<sup>1</sup> The *General registration standard* is published on the website at [www.psychologyboard.gov.au/](http://www.psychologyboard.gov.au/). Registration standards are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council pursuant to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

3. individuals intending to return to practice as psychologist who have not practised for more than 10 years, and
4. overseas-trained psychologists seeking general registration in Australia.

Additionally, passing the exam is required for individuals who are directed to sit it by the Board, or by a panel or tribunal, in relation to an application for registration under Part 7 of the National Law or a notification about their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.

### Transition provisions

The [General registration standard](#) includes the option for the Board to require the passing of an examination before accepting an application for general registration, and has been in force since 1 July 2010. The Board approved several transition provisions for implementing the national psychology exam allowing a stepped roll out of the examination, as follows:

- On 1 July 2013, overseas-trained applicants for general registration as a psychologist in Australia were first required to pass the national psychology exam.
- On 1 July 2013 passing the exam was required for individuals who are directed to sit it by the Board, or by a panel or tribunal, in relation to an application for registration under Part 7 of the National Law or a notification about their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.
- On 1 July 2014, applicants for general registration who completed an internship pathway (4+2 or 5+1) were first required to pass the national psychology exam before applying for general registration.
- On 1 July 2014, individuals who were previously registered as a psychologist wished to resume practice after an absence of 10 years or more were first required to pass the national psychology examination before applying for general registration.

To check your eligibility for the various transition provisions please see [Table 1](#) below.

### Exemptions

Not all applicants for general registration are required to pass the national psychology exam. There are currently two exemptions in force. The exemptions are as follows:

- All applications from New Zealand psychologists applying for general registration under the [Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition arrangements](#) are exempt from sitting the examination.
- Applicants for general registration who complete the higher degree pathway and apply for general registration before 1 July 2019 are exempt. The higher degree pathway includes graduates who apply for general registration with a Board-approved postgraduate qualification accredited as a fifth and sixth year of study in psychology. This includes:
  - an accredited six-year professional Masters qualification, or
  - an accredited doctorate, or
  - a combined Masters/PhD qualification.

These qualifications can lead to an area of practice endorsement (including those applying under provisions for Doctorate students included in the statement of assessment for provisional psychologists in the [PDEC-76](#) form).

This exemption was initially in place until 1 July 2016. This exemption was extended for another three years as a result of [Consultation Paper 25](#). The Board will review this exemption before 2019, and will consult widely with the profession and the community.

Further details about when to sit the exam are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Who needs to sit the examination and when

Applicant	When you need to sit examination	Date you need to have passed the exam to apply for general registration
Provisional psychologist in 4+2 internship	During 6th Year (after 1,500 hours of supervised practice internship)	1 July 2014
Provisional psychologist in 5+1 internship	During 6th Year (within approved supervised practice internship)	1 July 2014
Person returning to psychology practice after 10 years	As directed by the Psychology Board of Australia in response to application	1 July 2014
Provisional psychologist in Masters/DPsych/PhD	During 6th Year (within accredited training program)	1 July 2019
Person with overseas qualifications in psychology who meet other requirements	During approved supervised practice internship (usually this is a 3-month program)	1 July 2013
Person required to do so by board or panel or tribunal	As directed by authority	<b>As directed by authority</b>

## 2. Content of the examination

### Curriculum

Candidates are required to be familiar with the examination curriculum, which is published on the Board's website under *Registration > National Psychology Exam*.

The examination questions are derived from the curriculum. They test candidates' applied knowledge of the areas of psychology described in the curriculum.

The responsibility to prepare for and pass the examination rests with the candidate. The Board expects all suitably prepared applicants for registration to be able to pass the examination. Examination preparation should reinforce existing knowledge and learning and is not expected to require new knowledge, or to change or add to the existing training requirements.

Candidates are expected to develop a broad strategy for preparing for the examination. This preparation should include private reading and study, seeking advice and assistance from supervisors, training institutes, and workshop providers, and seeking appropriate structured and unstructured learning opportunities.

The examination is designed to test applied knowledge appropriate for the fifth and, in particular, the sixth year of psychology training. The curriculum is not designed to test foundational knowledge of the discipline obtained during the first four years of psychology at university. The examination is designed to test the application of this knowledge to practice, and is therefore based on actual case studies and professional issues.

This examination does not test all the competencies of a practising, generally registered psychologist. Some of the other competencies not tested by the examination are currently assessed during the fifth and sixth years of internship training by methods that include:

- direct observation
- case studies, and
- assessment by approved supervisors of an intern's performance while engaged in professional practice.

The examination curriculum does not relate to area of practice endorsements. Area of practice endorsement is a notation on the [National Register](#) for psychologists who have completed accredited postgraduate training and supervised experience in one or more of the approved areas of practice. General registration is required before a psychologist can apply for admission to a registrar program leading to an area of practice endorsement. The areas of knowledge of psychologists with an area of practice endorsement would be expected to be at a greater depth in a specific area of practice than that assumed in a newly registered psychologist.

### **Recommended reading**

The Board has published a recommended reading list to guide candidates preparing for the examination on its website under *Registration > National Psychology Exam*. The reading list is recommended but not mandatory. The applied psychology field has extensive literature covering the curriculum domains, with many more resources that complement those in the list.

Candidates preparing for the examination should use their judgement about how to prepare, and consult their supervisor in designing a plan of study based on the curriculum. The recommended reading list is updated from time to time as new editions, other journal articles, and improved monographs become available. Supervisors and examination candidates should check the website regularly for updates.

### **Examination format**

The examination is multiple choice, which is deemed suitable to test applied knowledge. The exam allows candidates to demonstrate psychological reasoning. Although the questions can rely on a factual knowledge base, the examination relies more on the application of that knowledge to actual psychological cases.

The questions are designed to test the application of psychology knowledge appropriate for candidates in the sixth year of training preparing for general registration. The examination assumes the foundation knowledge of the first four years of training (that is, in the undergraduate curriculum), but does not specifically test that knowledge.

The examination examines skills in:

- assessment approaches
- intervention selection and implementation
- communication and reporting skills, and
- applied ethical and professional reasoning.

Examination questions will be mostly in the format of:

- a vignette or scenario
- a lead-in question, and
- a set of five options, of which one is the correct answer and four are distracters.

Correct answers are determined by the National Psychology Examination Committee. The correct answer is the best, or most correct, option in the view of the Examination Committee.

The exam questions have been developed by senior practitioners and the best answer is their consensus view. Questions are developed to test core components of the published examination curriculum, as described in the professional and scientific literature and the recommended reading.

The Board, in conjunction with the Examination Committee, reviews all questions for the examination for content and validity, and analyses their statistical reliability. This provides the basis for further question development and improvement.

## Duration

The duration of the examination is 3.5 hours (210 minutes).

Candidates are required to allocate a total of four hours to complete registration procedures, a pre-testing phase, and post-examination administration activities.

## Number of questions

There are 150 questions in the examination. All questions are of equal value and there is no deduction of marks for incorrect answers. Candidates are encouraged to attempt all exam questions.

Test questions are changed regularly so candidates who repeat the exam will get a different set of questions.

## Proportion of questions testing each domain of the curriculum

The examination will comprise questions testing the four components of the curriculum:

1. ethics
2. assessment
3. intervention, and
4. communication.

As the first three components incorporate greater content, they have a greater number of questions than the fourth component. Refer to Table 2 for details.

Table 2 Number of questions testing the domains of the examination

Exam Domain	Number of questions	Percentage
Ethics	45	30
Assessment	45	30
Intervention	45	30
Communication	15	10
Total questions	150	100

## Pass grade

The Board has applied a scaled passing score of 70%.

The scaled passing score is the Board's view of the minimum level of applied knowledge required for independent psychology practice.

As there are five options per question (a, b, c, d, or e), a candidate responding randomly is likely to achieve a score of 20% based on chance alone. Therefore, a passing score of 50% has been adjusted to 70% (50+20). 70% is the standard passing score for many tests of this type.

Raw scores (the total number of answers that were correct) will be arithmetically converted to a scale that ranges from 0 to 100 that takes into consideration differences in difficulty among different versions of the tests.

Adjusting scores will ensure that the passing score will remain the same, even if different versions of the test vary in difficulty. This ensures that candidates will not be penalised if a test is harder, or given an unfair advantage if a test is easier.

The examination and pass rates are moderated by the National Psychology Examination Committee of the Psychology Board of Australia. The pass rate only applies to the total score. Candidates are not required to pass all four curriculum components in addition to achieving a passing score on the overall examination.

### 3. Sitting the examination

#### Eligibility

To be eligible to sit the examination, candidates must have:

- completed the first four years of accredited study, plus 1,500 hours of supervised practice in the 4+2 pathway, or
- completed the first five years of accredited study, and have entered the sixth (+1) intern year in the 5+1 pathway and there is an approved plan and supervisor arrangements in place, or
- completed a course of study overseas that is assessed by the Board as substantially equivalent to a six-year accredited sequence of study in psychology, and be seeking general registration as a psychologist in Australia, or
- previously held general registration as a psychologist in Australia and are now intending to return to practice after more than 10 years without practising, or
- been directed to sit the examination by the Psychology Board of Australia, or a panel or tribunal in relation to an application for registration under Part 7 of the National Law, or a notification about their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.

If a candidate fails the exam, they must wait three months before re-sitting.

#### Applications from overseas-trained practitioners

Overseas-trained practitioners are included in the groups required to pass the examination before being eligible to apply for general registration. The examination will only be available in Australia.

Applicants from overseas need to ensure they meet the mandatory registration standards, including the [English language skills registration standard](#). The Board may apply additional conditions to an overseas-trained practitioner's registration to ensure they meet all registration standards.

Generally, the Board will require overseas-trained practitioners to be registered as a provisional psychologist and complete a minimum three-month [transitional program](#) in Australia before applying for general registration. This allows them to satisfy all competencies for general registration including knowledge of Australian ethical and legal requirements, and to ground their skills in an Australian socio-cultural context. Once an overseas applicant has been registered as a provisional psychologist, they become eligible to sit the examination.

If an overseas-trained applicant is exempt from the transitional program and required to sit the exam, they are required to wait three months before being able to re-sit the exam if they fail any attempt. These applicants may be required to register as a provisional psychologist and undertake a transitional program for the three months.

#### Examinations timetable

The timetable of examination dates will be published on the Board's website under *Registration > National Psychology Exam*, along with the closing dates for applications. Examinations will usually be scheduled at least twice per year and up to four times a year.

Exams will be made available in the capital city of each state and territory of Australia.

## Application to sit the examination

Candidates may only lodge one application to sit the examination per quarter period in any of the states or territories. Candidates are required to create a candidate account through the examination portal, accessible on the Board's website *Registration > National Psychology Exam*. The candidate account will grant access to the practice examination and enable booking and payment.

## Examination fee

Candidates are required to pay an examination fee for each sitting, payable online at the time a candidate registers for the exam. The Board has set the fee as low as possible to allow candidates from all parts of the country to attend regional testing centres. The fee is published on the Board's schedule of fees on the website.

## Changing the scheduled examination date

Candidates are permitted to change the date and time of their scheduled examination for any reason more than 72 hours before the scheduled examination date without forfeiting their examination fee. Candidates are only permitted to change the date and time within 72 hours of the exam if special circumstances apply – see the section on *Special considerations* in these guidelines.

Candidates can reschedule their exam through the examination portal or contact [nationalpsychologyexam@ahpra.gov.au](mailto:nationalpsychologyexam@ahpra.gov.au) for assistance.

## On the day

Candidates will be required to bring their booking receipt (which is provided by email once the examination has been booked and paid for) and two pieces of identification, including photo ID to the examination centre to be able sit the examination. Failure to do so may result in exclusion from the examination.

There are a variety of security processes in place at venues. For example, candidates will be required to turn out exterior pockets to verify they are either empty or do not contain any prohibited items. External eyewear will be inspected to ensure that it is not technology-enabled.

Candidates will not be permitted any reference material (electronic or hard copy) during the examination. Mobile phones and other equipment (including pens and paper) must not be taken into the examination. Access to the internet will not be permitted in the examination rooms or in the examination waiting areas.

Failure to comply with any rule or instruction by an adjudicator or supervisor will be regarded as a breach of discipline, and may lead to exclusion from the examination and the candidate deemed to have failed. More serious breaches of examination rules or security may result in disciplinary or criminal action.

Before sitting the examination, candidates will be required to agree to a set of terms and conditions for the examination, including keeping the content of the examination and questions confidential. This includes agreeing to a statement similar to the following:

*This exam is confidential and proprietary. It is made available to you, the examinee, solely for the purpose of assessing your proficiency level in the skill areas referenced in the title of this exam. To protect the integrity of the examinations, the examinee must adhere to strict guidelines. The examinee shall not disclose to any third party the contents of this examination, including but not limited to questions, form of questions, or answers, in whole or in part, in any form or by any means, verbal or written, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose. I have read and agree to the terms of the above statement.*

## Receiving results

Candidates will receive their examination results by email within four weeks of the close of the examination period. Results will not be given by telephone.

After the examination has finished, any communication about the examination must be addressed to AHPRA. Candidates must not communicate with the adjudication staff, members of the Psychology Board of Australia, or the Board's committees about the examination.

### **Additional needs**

Candidates with a disability are able to request support to provide appropriate assistance to allow them to sit the examination. Special needs requests need to be made in writing to the National Examinations Coordinator a minimum of thirty days in advance of the intended examination date.

Candidates with special needs will be provided with facilities to support the following.

- Mobility condition: all exam centres have wide passages, wheelchair access, accessible toilets and adjustable desks.
- Visual impairment: the examination can be delivered with larger fonts and higher contrasting colour, and reader assistance.
- Hearing impairment: site support can be provided to ensure that invigilators can communicate instructions in a satisfactory manner.
- Other mental or physical impairment: other impairments, supported by appropriate documentation, are addressed case-by-case.

### **Special consideration**

#### **1. Exceptional circumstances**

Special consideration is available to candidates who are unable to sit or complete an examination due to exceptional circumstance beyond their control. Candidates may be given an opportunity to re-sit the examination at the next available date without incurring additional examination fees.

Applications for special consideration in exceptional circumstances:

- will only be accepted from eligible candidates
- will not be approved unless there are exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the candidate, such as:
  - acute illness (such as hospital admission, onset of serious illness)
  - loss or bereavement (such as death of a close family member)
  - hardship or trauma (such as being victim of crime, severe disruption to domestic life)
  - unforeseen call-up for service (such as military service, court appearance, jury service, emergency service)
  - work commitments and circumstances beyond their control (a letter on company/organisation letterhead from an employer confirming this must be attached to the application for special consideration)
  - religious convictions (a letter from a religious leader must accompany the application)
  - computer malfunction at the examination centre, or
  - bomb threat or similar such event necessitating the evacuation of the examination centre.
- must be supported by convincing evidence of the exceptional circumstances, such as:
  - medical certificate
  - death certificate
  - police report
  - statutory declaration
  - examination centre report, or
  - evidence of requirement to attend court, jury service, military service, emergency service.
- must be submitted in writing to the [National Examinations Coordinator](#) before or within 14 working days of the date of the examination (depending on the nature of the request).

## 2. Errors or deficiencies in examination process

Candidates who complete the examination are usually not eligible for special consideration unless there are special circumstances. The only special consideration mechanism available for candidates who fail the examination will be based on process.

No special consideration request will be considered based on the content of the examination. The special consideration procedure is not a means of circumventing the Board's usual examination process.

A candidate who believes that they have cause to apply for special consideration on the outcome of the examination must apply in writing to the [National Examinations Coordinator](#) attaching supporting documentation, no later than 14 days after receiving their result.

### Possible outcome of an application for special consideration

Requests are reviewed by the Board and assessed against the special consideration criteria (outlined above). The review will take place within 21 days of receiving the request.

When a request is granted, the usual outcome would be to allow the candidate to re-sit the examination as soon as possible at no additional cost to the candidate.

If the Board grants the request for special consideration, it will decide on how special consideration will take effect and let the candidate know in writing. Any special arrangement for consideration will be acted upon promptly. Failure to comply with the arrangement will mean the candidate will sit the examination during the next scheduled examination period published on the Board's web site.

The Board's decision is final.

### Examination failure

Registrants who fail the examination are permitted to re-sit the examination after completing a further three month period of supervised practice as a psychologist or provisional psychologist.

If a registrant fails three times, they will not be able to sit another examination until their registration renewal or a new application for registration is approved by the Board. At this point the Board may:

1. grant renewal or registration and allow the person to re-sit the examination up to three additional times
2. grant renewal or registration with conditions and on those conditions being met, allowing the person to re-sit the examination, or
3. propose to refuse the person's application or renewal. The Board has published the [Policy and procedure for candidates who fail the exam three times](#) and an associated [Statement and plan for professional development](#) (the [SPPD-76 form](#)). These documents provide further detail on the procedures to follow in the event that a registrant fails the exam three times, including the available options, the steps to take, and the evidence required by the Board to progress their plan to successfully re-sit the exam beyond three attempts.

### Further information

More information is available on the Psychology Board of Australia website: [www.psychologyboard.gov.au](http://www.psychologyboard.gov.au)

### Contact

All correspondence about the National Psychology Exam should be directed to the National Examinations Coordinator at [nationalpsychologyexam@ahpra.gov.au](mailto:nationalpsychologyexam@ahpra.gov.au).

## Review

**Date of issue** – 18 October 2013

**Last reviewed:** 26 February 2016

**Date of review** – these guidelines will be reviewed as required; this will generally be at least every five years.

## Attachment A: Development of the examination

### Background on the implementation planning of the National Psychology Examination prior to 1 July 2013

The planning for a national psychology examination has a rich history in Australia. This is a summary timeline showing the development of the exam, which began in 1986.

Year	Action
1986	All psychology registration boards in Australia (with their New Zealand counterpart) resolved to develop a national examination, with a particular focus on using it to test overseas psychologists applying for registration in Australia.
1987	Consideration was given to a budget to finance the development of a national examination system.
1990	A national examination system was approved in principle.
2007	<p>Determined to instigate a process to develop options for a national examination, including that a working party be established to explore a national examination proposal and report by March 2008.</p> <p>Ministers for Health determined to continue supporting the unaccredited two-year internship pathway to general registration.</p>
2008	<p>The New South Wales Psychology Board issued a consultation paper on the development of a national psychology examination for public comment.</p> <p>Feedback and further consultations with key stakeholder groups at that time indicated strong support for the development of the examination.</p>
2009	<p>An update on the examination project was presented and made subject to peer review by all state and territory boards, representatives from the Australian Psychological Society and the Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (HODSPA).</p> <p>An update on the status of the examination was published (Grenyer, B.F.S. (2009). Development of a national psychology examination. <i>InPsych: Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society</i>, 32 (3), 13).</p>
2010	<p>Early in 2010 the NSW Board, prior to the National Scheme, approved funds to help support the initial development of the examination.</p> <p>The registration standard for general registration (which includes that the Board may require the passing of an examination) was approved by Ministerial Council and came into effect on 1 July 2010 with the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.</p> <p>In September 2010 the Psychology Board of Australia approved the appointment process for a National Psychology Examination Panel.</p>

2011

In February the Psychology Board of Australia announced the National Psychology Examination Panel and that it had held its first meetings, in its communiqué, stating: *'the Board advises that the National Examination will be implemented on 1 July 2013 for applicants seeking general registration. The examination will be the final assessment before moving from provisional to general registration... In April 2011 the Board aims to publish for public comment, a consultation paper on the format and curriculum of the examination.'*

In March the Board announced in its communiqué: *'The National Psychology Examination is being developed to support applications for general registration, and to ensure a consistent professional standard of psychologists nationally. The Board advises that the National Examination will be implemented from 1 July 2013 for applicants seeking general registration.'*

In April the Board released the first public consultation papers on the development of the National Psychology Examination.

In November the Board released the *draft National Psychology Examination curriculum* for public consultation.

In November the Board also published its third newsletter to registrants which provided an update on the curriculum consultation process and stated: *'The Board has determined that from 1 July 2013 a National Psychology Examination will apply to provisional psychologists who are in the supervised practice pathway to general registration (4+2 and 5+1) to be sat in their sixth and final year of training, before being granted general registration. It is intended that the exam will also apply to overseas applicants and practitioners returning to practice after lengthy periods without practising, or where there are concerns about practice... Persons applying for general registration before 1 July 2013 will not be required to sit the examination.'*

Over the period of February to November, the Board held seven public consultation forums across states and territories that included information about the examination commencing 1 July 2013.

2012

Four further public consultation forums were held over 12 months.

In March the final curriculum for the examination, based on stakeholder feedback, was approved by the Board and published on the website.

In July the Board tested draft questions for the National Psychology Examination and undertook statistical analysis of their reliability and validity, which provided the basis for further question development and improvement.

In August 2012 the Board published its fifth newsletter to all registrants, which included the following information on the examination: *'General registration as a psychologist requires six years of training, but at present there are multiple pathways to achieve that training. The 5th and 6th years of training, during which professional practice skills of psychologists are required, are currently provided by both accredited and unaccredited training options. The proposed National Psychology Examination will test the application of psychological knowledge gained in these years and the focus will be on testing applied psychological knowledge and judgement which form the basis of competence in the profession. The National Psychology Examination is a mechanism for measurement of a minimum level of applied professional knowledge of psychology and competence that is acceptable for general registration in the profession in order to ensure the protection of the public.'*

In October the Board initiated a tender process for providers of computer-based testing to provide the platform for administering the examination within confidential test centres and environments in each state and territory. The successful tender was announced in December.

In December the Board appointed a new nine member National Examination Committee.

2013

In February the new National Examination Committee met for the first time.

In April, the Board released the *draft Guidelines for the National Psychology Examination* for public consultation.

Also in April, the Board made available new resources on the examination, including example examination questions and additional curriculum and reading resources.

From 1 July 2013, the National Psychology Exam came into effect.