

Hunter New England Area Health Psychology

Comments on Consultation Paper: “Guideline for Approved Training Programs In Psychology Supervision” issued by the Psychology Board of Australia 17 May 2010

My comments relate specifically to the training of supervisors of post-graduate placements and the requirement that they have appropriate endorsement. The issues I raise may have been anticipated by the authors of the Consultation Paper but the absence of any explicit mention warrants comment.

I note that the Board’s most recent Communiqué of 7/6/10 includes the news that: “The Board agreed to provide interim approval until 30 June 2013 for existing supervisor training programs in Queensland, NSW and Tasmania”. This is reassuring in some respects (more so for 4+2 supervision) but fails to address significant issues for post-graduate student placement supervision.

The introduction of a requirement that post-graduate placement supervisors must undergo supervision training is a positive move and should ensure standardization of supervisory processes across post-graduate training programs. However, it also raises a number of potential difficulties.

Issues of concern:

1. A survey of post-graduate trained psychologists in our Area Health Service (Hunter New England) indicated that the majority have not undergone Registration Board supervisor training. 100% are prepared to undergo training if it is at no cost to them and occurs in work time. Less than half were prepared to consider bearing the cost of training if it happened in work time. They were almost unanimous (99%) in being unwilling to undergo training in their own time and at their own cost. (It’s likely that this would be reasonably representative of all NSW Area Health Services which provide the bulk of placements for clinical psychology, clinical neuropsychology and health psychology post-graduate training programs in NSW).
2. There is very little (tangible) incentive for public sector psychologists to be involved in placement supervision and thus to undergo training to enable them to supervise.
3. It is unlikely that the Area Health Service would allow psychologists funding or time on duty to do the amount of training proposed.
4. Supervisors/potential supervisors in rural and remote locations will face a greater burden in terms of time involved if they have to travel to larger centres for training. Public sector managers in rural settings are typically less understanding of the need

for such activities making it even more difficult for psychologists to obtain funding or time.

5. If endorsement in a specialty area is to be required of post-graduate placement supervisors, only a small proportion of our post-graduate trained psychologists are APS College members and therefore have obtained “automatic” endorsement accorded College members. Consequently, there will be a period of time between 1/7/10 and the processing of their endorsement applications when they will not have endorsement.
6. Failure to appropriately address these concerns could have a very significant adverse impact on the availability of post-graduate student placements in the Hunter New England area and probably across NSW. Our psychologists are prepared to undergo training if issues of cost and time are addressed.

Suggested solutions:

1. The Board should develop a training package specifically for post-graduate placement supervisors.
2. A total of 15 hours of preparatory and direct instruction should be sufficient for such supervisors. A half-day every 5 years should be sufficient revision. (Supervisor training for this group does not need to include education relating to the administrative processes involved in 4+2/5+1 supervision. Many are very experienced supervisors who have undergone supervisor training through the universities or the Area Health Service. Furthermore, their provision of supervision occurs in a more structured and supervised context under the direct oversight of a university compared with 4+2/5+1 supervision.)
3. The universities should be allowed and encouraged to provide free training to their placement supervisors.
4. Such training should be delivered (by the universities) as “in-service” training occurring within the various government instrumentalities to maximize the chance that employers will allow it to occur in work time.
5. There should be provisions for on-line, tele- or video-conferenced training to facilitate training for psychologists in rural and remote areas thereby off-setting the significant risk that this group will be differentially disadvantaged.
6. There will need to be a transition period to allow these supervisors to undergo training. Taking into account the time involved in developing an appropriate training program a period of at least two years is suggested. In the interim those meeting existing requirements to supervise should be able to continue as placement supervisors.

7. If endorsement is required of placement supervisors there will need to be a period of grace from 1/7/10 to allow psychologists to obtain the appropriate endorsements. It's difficult to suggest a time period as who knows what sort of a processing load the Board will face once applications for endorsement open. Six months may be a reasonable period which could then be extended depending on the processing burden.

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