

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 12: *Guideline for Supervisors and Supervisor Training Providers.*

The following is the response from HODSPA (Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association) to the Psychology Board of Australia Consultation Paper 12 *Guideline for Supervisors and Supervisor Training Providers* (the Consultation paper).

The Consultation paper proposes that psychologists be required to undertake a Board-approved supervisor training program in order to provide supervision to provisionally or generally registered psychologists undertaking:

- the 4+2 internship program
- the 5+1 internship program
- a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program, or
- the registrar program leading to endorsement in an approved area of practice.

Of these programs, the members of HODSPA are most directly concerned with supervision within a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program although, depending upon the manner of its implementation, the 5 + 1 internship program may also be of direct concern.

In relation to these programs, HODSPA wishes to draw the following points to the attention of the Board:

First, HODSPA is sympathetic to the expressed intentions of the consultation paper – namely to improve student supervision and hence improve the provision of training to trainee psychologists. In recognition of the need for explicit training in the particular demands of the supervisory role, training for research supervisors is now commonplace in most universities. However, it is also clear from this experience that the requirements for such training can adversely affect the supply of appropriate supervisors with the consequence that institutions may be confronted with a reduced capacity to meet the demands of research training. Such bottlenecks can arise in two ways; (a) the specified requirements prevent certain individuals from gaining access to the role of supervisor (e.g., if there is a minimum period of practice or prior experience), and (b) the training is perceived as too onerous, time consuming, or expensive, to be worth undertaking.

The implications of this experience are clear. Without incentives to undertake supervision training, such requirements are likely to have an adverse impact on the availability and supply of supervisors. In our experience in university settings, research active academics are sufficiently motivated to supervise higher degree students that they are prepared to undertake the relevant training that is required no matter how onerous. However, this may not be the case for professional psychologists. HODSPA is very concerned that psychologists who provide supervision within a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program may be unwilling to undertake additional supervisor training, with its considerable commitment in time and expense, and simply abandon this role. HODSPA has already received reports from some Universities that this trend has been observed – even before the policy has been implemented. It has also been suggested that if the trend gathers pace, Universities will be forced to reduce their annual intake of postgraduate trainees because they will not be able to guarantee the number and range of practicum options arising from the lack of suitable supervisors.

We believe that the solution to this problem is for the Board to distinguish between the roles of a supervisor who is part of a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program and a supervisor who is part of an internship or registrar program. In the former case, as required under APAC accreditation, supervisors are themselves closely supervised by appropriately qualified academic staff. The demands of the supervisory role are therefore shared between the external placement supervisor, situated in the workplace, and the internal placement supervisor, situated in the University. In many cases, as when a Psychology School or Department supports its own clinic, the external placement supervisor will also be a member of academic staff.

Given that internal placement supervisors involved in a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program are directly engaged in teaching and student supervision, HODSPA believes that, consistent with what appears to be the Board's view, it is inappropriate that they be required to undertake supervisor training for this role.

Given that external placement supervisors involved in a Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree program share the demands of supervision with the internal placement supervisor, HODSPA believes that it is inappropriate that they be required to undertake the same kind of supervisor training as that required for the less closely-regulated internship and registrar programs. It is the view of HODSPA that such external placement supervisor training as may be required should be conducted by the relevant Psychology School or Department and be formalised within accreditation requirements. This will ensure that external supervisors will have the knowledge and skills to discharge their role effectively but without an undue impact on the provision of such supervisors in the workplace. HODSPA does not propose that this arrangement should in any way substitute for the additional supervisor training requirements associated with the internship and registrar programs.

As a final comment, HODSPA believes that a distinction also needs to be made between the core psychological knowledge and skills that a supervisor

possesses and, to some extent, will impart to the trainee, and the specific knowledge and skills required to do this (i.e., to supervise) effectively. Drawing on the analogy with research supervision training in Universities, such training is not aimed at developing core research knowledge and skills as these are assumed to be possessed by the suitably qualified academic. It therefore strikes HODSPA as inappropriate that a major part of the Board-approved supervisor competencies (c.f., p. 9 of the Consultation paper) refers to “knowledge and understanding of the profession”. If this were to form part of a specific supervisor training course then it could well be perceived as aversive to professional practitioners. It also undercuts the Board’s own system of registration by implying that a registered psychologist who meets all the Board’s registration requirements for active experience and continuing education may, nevertheless, have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the profession to impart these to a less-qualified trainee. This seems an odd position for the Board to place itself.

HODSPA is very willing to support policies and programs that will encourage the improvement of supervision of our students. But HODSPA would ask that the Board reconsider its current view that all modes of supervision are essentially identical. We agree with the statement on p. 7 of the Consultation paper that, in reference to the different Board-approved pathways, “although the competencies required of supervisees for these tasks differ in scope, the general supervisory competencies required of supervisors apply in all pathways”. However, we disagree with the following statement that “potential supervisors will only be required to complete one Board-approved training course, as well as any revision course required to maintain and update knowledge and skill”. This ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will very severely encumber external supervisors contributing to Board-approved APAC accredited higher degree programs to the extent that it is likely that they will withdraw their services from University Schools and Departments. Mindful of this, we look forward to further discussion with the Board concerning how appropriate supervisor training should be implemented in this setting.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair, HODSPA