



Consultation paper 18

18 April 2013

Guidelines for the National Psychology Examination

Public consultation

This consultation paper seeks feedback on the *Guidelines for the National Psychology Examination*.

The consultation should be read in conjunction with the Psychology Board of Australia's *General registration standard*, published on 1 July 2010 and available on the Board's website at: www.psychologyboard.gov.au/Standards-and-Guidelines/Registration-Standards.aspx

This consultation paper has been issued by the Psychology Board of Australia under the authority of Professor Brin Grenyer, Chair on 18 April 2013.

Please provide your feedback to this consultation by email to psychconsultation@ahpra.gov.au marked 'Attention: Chair, Exam consultation' by close of business **Monday 27 May 2013**.

How your submission will be treated

Submissions will generally be published unless you request otherwise. The Board publishes submissions on its websites to encourage discussion and inform the community and stakeholders. However, the Board retains the right not to publish submissions at its discretion, and will not place on its website, or make available to the public, submissions that contain offensive or defamatory comments or which are outside the scope of the consultation.

Before publication, the Board may remove personally-identifying information from submissions, including contact details. The views expressed in the submissions are those of the individuals or organisations who submit them and their publication does not imply any acceptance of, or agreement with, these views by the Board.

The Board also accepts submissions made in confidence. These submissions will not be published on the website or elsewhere. Submissions may be confidential because they include personal experiences or other sensitive information. Any request for access to a confidential submission will be determined in accordance with the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cwlth), which has provisions designed to protect personal information and information given in confidence.

Please let the Board know if you do not want your submission published, or want all or part of it treated as confidential.



Guidelines for the National Psychology Examination

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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 National Psychology Examination supports the Board's *General registration standard*.¹

The Board has determined that the qualifications that lead to general registration are:

- a) an accredited Master's degree
- b) a five year accredited sequence of study followed by a one year Board approved internship (5+1)
- c) a four year accredited sequence of study followed by a two year Board approved internship (4+2), or
- d) a qualification that in the Board's opinion is substantially equivalent to either (a), (b) or (c).
- e) In addition to the completion of an approved qualification the Board may require the passing of an examination prior to accepting an application for general registration.

In relation to (e) the Board will require affected groups of psychologists (see below) to pass the National Psychology Examination from 1 July 2013 before accepting applications from them for general registration.

These guidelines provide further information about this requirement.

The purpose of the National Psychology Examination

The National Psychology Examination ensures a consistent professional standard of psychologists nationally. Passing the examination will be required in order to gain general registration.

The examination will assess applied psychological knowledge which is the basis of competence in the profession. Importantly, the examination will demonstrate that internship training has produced a practitioner with an appropriate level of applied professional knowledge and competence, which will better protect the public.

Holding general registration means that a practitioner possesses a general skill set in applied psychology that allows psychology practice across a wide range of workplaces. The Board's role is to protect the public by ensuring that any psychologist who offers services to the public possesses this skill set.

Requirement to pass the examination

The following groups must produce evidence of successfully passing the National Psychology Examination:

1. provisionally registered psychologists undertaking a five year accredited sequence of study followed by a one year Board approved internship (5+1) when applying for general registration as a psychologist
2. provisionally registered psychologists undertaking a four year accredited sequence of study followed by a two year Board approved internship (4+2) when applying for general registration as a psychologist
3. Registrants applying to return to practice who have not practiced for more than 10 years when applying for general registration as a psychologist

¹ The General registration standard is published on the website at www.psychologyboard.gov.au/Standards-and-Guidelines/Registration-Standards.aspx. The standard was approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council on 31 March 2010 pursuant to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law), taking effect from 1 July 2010.

4. overseas-trained psychologists when applying for General Registration as a Psychologist, and
5. registrants who are directed to sit the examination by the Psychology Board of Australia or a Panel or Tribunal, in relation to a notification concerning their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.

Exemptions from sitting the examination

In accordance with stakeholder feedback from its consultation processes, the Board will apply an exemption from sitting the examination for graduates of accredited six-year professional Masters, Doctorate or combined Masters/PhD programs leading to an Area of Practice Endorsement that apply for general registration until 30 June 2016 (including those applying under provisions for Doctorate students included in the statement of assessment in form PDEC-76). This exemption is based on the Board's view that the internal examination and assessment processes within accredited degree programs currently meet the Board's standards for general registration. The Board will review this exemption in 2016.

Applications from New Zealand psychologists applying under the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition arrangements will be exempt from passing the examination.

Start date for the examination

The requirement to sit and pass the National Psychology Examination will apply from 1 July 2013 or the date determined by the Board.

Transition provisions for the examination

A 12-month transition period will apply for provisionally registered psychologists applying for general registration from 1 July 2013 who are currently undertaking 4+2 or 5+1 pathways to registration, or who are returning to practice.

These groups are able to sit the examination from 1 July 2013, but are not required to show evidence of passing the examination until 1 July 2014 in order to obtain general registration. This period of grace will allow an additional one-year period prior to the exam becoming a requirement for registration. This additional year will allow registrants a further year to prepare for the examination. The Psychology Board of Australia would expect all suitably prepared applicants for registration to be able to pass the exam, and therefore this should be reinforcing already existing learning rather than adding material that is new or changing or adding to the burden of training from what is already occurring.

The registration standard that includes the option for the Board to require registrants to pass an examination for general registration has been in force since 1 July 2010, but a three-year transition period until 1 July 2013 has been applied. This transition has been extended for a further year. Therefore, registrants who are eligible to apply for general registration prior to 1 July 2014 are not required to sit the national examination.

2. Content of the examination

Curriculum for the examination

Candidates are required to be familiar with the examination curriculum, which is published on the Board's website under [Registration>National Psychology Exam](#). The 2012 edition of the curriculum was approved by the Board in March 2012 and is currently in force and is due for review in 2015.

The examination questions are derived from the curriculum to test candidates applied knowledge of the areas of psychology described in the curriculum. The responsibility to prepare and pass the examination rests with the candidate. Candidates are expected to develop a broad strategy for preparing for the examination, including private reading and study, seeking advice and assistance from supervisors, training institutes, and workshop providers, and to seek appropriate structured and unstructured learning opportunities.

The examination is designed to test applied knowledge appropriate for the 5th and in particular the 6th 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. Rather, it is designed to test the application of this knowledge to practice, and is therefore based on actual case studies and professional issues.

This curriculum does not relate to area of practice endorsements. Area of practice endorsement is an annotation to the register to communicate to the public those psychologists who have additional accredited training and supervised experience in one or more of the endorsed 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 readings for the examination

The Board has published a recommended reading list as a guide to assist candidates preparing for the National Psychology Examination on its website. This reading list is recommended but not mandatory.

The applied psychology field has an extensive literature covering the curriculum domains, with many more readings that are complementary to 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 readings list will be 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.

Format of the National Psychology Examination

The examination will be multiple-choice. This format is suitable to test applied knowledge. This examination will not test all the competencies of a practicing generally registered psychologist. Some of the other competencies not tested by the examination, are currently assessed during the 5th and 6th years of internship training, by methods that include direct observation, case studies and ratings by approved supervisors of an intern's performance whilst engaged in professional practice. The National Psychology Examination should never be used as the sole test of a person's competence to practice in the profession of psychology. Passing the national psychology examination is not a substitute for a period of provisional registration under supervision.

The exam will test candidates' applied knowledge and allow them to demonstrate psychological reasoning. Although the questions can rely upon a factual knowledge base, the examination will rely 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 will assume

the foundation knowledge of the first four years of training (i.e. in the undergraduate curriculum) but will not specifically test that knowledge.

The examination will therefore examine 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.

Duration of the examination

The total duration of the examination is 3.5 hours (210 minutes), although candidates will be required to be available for 4 hours in order to complete registration procedures, a pre-testing phase and post-examination administration activities.

Number of questions in the examination

The total number of questions in the examination is 150, all of which are to be attempted during the examination.

Test questions will be regularly changed so candidates who repeat an exam are likely to get a different set of questions.

Proportion of questions testing domains of the curriculum

The examination will be comprised of questions testing the four components of the curriculum: ethics, assessment, intervention and communication. As the first three components incorporate greater content they have a greater number of questions included in the examination than the fourth component.

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

Pass grade for the examination

The Psychology Board of Australia proposes to apply 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.

Raw scores (the total number of answers that were correct) will be arithmetically converted to a scale that ranges from 0 to 100.

This takes into consideration slight differences in difficulty for various tests being administered at different times. Another consideration is that a person randomly responding will be expected to get a score of 20% correct, as the exam is based on a choice of five options.

Adjusting scores will ensure that the passing score will remain the same, even if different versions of the test vary in difficulty. Therefore candidates will not be penalised if a test is harder, or given an unfair advantage if a test is easy. The examination and pass rates are moderated by the Examination Committee of the Psychology Board of Australia. The pass rate only applies to the total score; candidates are not also required to pass all four curriculum components in addition to achieving a passing score on the overall examination.

3. Sitting the Examination

Eligibility to sit the examination

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

- completed the first four years of accredited study, plus 1,540 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 have an approved plan and supervisor arrangements in place, or
- completed a course of study overseas and are seeking general registration as a psychologist in Australia, or
- held general registration as a psychologist and are now returning to practice after more than 10 years without practicing, or
- been directed to sit the examination by the Psychology Board of Australia or a Panel or Tribunal, in relation to a notification concerning their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law

In the event of having failed the examination, candidates must wait three months before being able to re-sit the examination.

Applications from overseas trained practitioners

Applicants from overseas need to ensure they meet the mandatory standards for registration, including the *English language skills registration standard*. Overseas trained practitioners are generally required by the Board to complete at least a 3-month period of provisional registration once in Australia prior to 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 accepted into this provisional registration program, they become eligible to sit the examination when they have less than 12 months of provisional registration to complete (i.e. are in the 6th year). The examination will only be available for sitting in Australia.

Examinations timetable

The timetable of examination dates will be published on the Board's website, along with the closing dates for applications. Examinations are expected to be scheduled at least twice per year and up to four times a year, and 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. When advised by AHPRA of their eligibility, candidates are required to pay the prescribed fee for the examination when scheduling the examination by the application closing date.

Examination fee

Applicants will be required to pay an examination fee for each sitting. The fee will be published on the Board's website. The fee is expected to be as low as possible (below \$500) to allow candidates from all parts of the country to attend their regional testing centre.

On the day

Candidates will be required to bring their booking receipt and two pieces of identification (one Photo ID) to the examination centre to be able to register for the examination. Failure to do so may result in refusal to sit the examination.

Candidates will not be permitted any reference material (electronic or hard copy) during the examination. Telephones and other equipment 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.

Notification of results

Candidates will receive their examination results in writing via mail or email. Results will not be given via the phone.

After the conclusion of the examination, any communication regarding the examinations must be addressed to AHPRA. Candidates must not communicate with the adjudication staff, members of the Psychology Board or the Board's committees concerning the examination.

Special needs

Candidates with a disability will be able to request support to provide appropriate assistance to allow them to sit the examination. Special needs requests need to be made in advance, and no later than at the time of lodging the application to sit the examination.

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

- Mobility condition: All exam centres have wide passages, wheelchair access, accessible toilets and adjustable desks.
- Visually impaired: The examination can be delivered with larger fonts and higher contrasting colour on examination, and reader assistance.
- Hearing impaired: Site support will be provided to ensure that invigilators can communicate key instructions in a satisfactory manner.
- Other mental or physical impairment: Other impairments, supported by appropriate documentation, will be addressed on a case by case basis.

Special consideration

Candidates are permitted to change the date and time of their examination within 72 hours of the scheduled examination date without forfeiting their examination fee.

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

Applications for special consideration:

- will only be accepted from eligible candidates
- will not be approved unless there are exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the candidate, and
- must be supported by convincing evidence of the exceptional circumstances.

Candidates who can demonstrate that they have reasons beyond their control are eligible for special consideration. These reasons include:

- acute illness (e.g. hospital admission, onset of serious illness)
- loss or bereavement (e.g. death of a close family member)
- hardship or trauma (e.g. victim of crime, severe disruption to domestic life)
- unforeseen call-up for service (e.g. 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 form), and
- religious convictions (a letter from a religious leader must accompany the application)
- computer malfunction at the examination centre
- bomb threat or similar such event necessitating the evacuation of the examination centre

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.

Possible outcome of an application for special consideration

Where 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 approved, special consideration may consist of:

- deferral of the examination until the next available date (no additional or reduced fee), or
- other special arrangements for undertaking the examination (no additional or reduced fee).

Applications for special consideration must:

- be in writing
- be submitted prior to, or within 14 working days, of the date of the examination (depending on the nature of the request)
- include relevant documentary evidence of the exceptional circumstances beyond the control of the candidate, e.g.
 - medical certificate
 - death certificate
 - police report
 - statutory declaration
 - examination centre report, or
 - evidence of requirement to attend court appearance, jury service, military service, emergency service

A candidate who believes that they have cause to apply for special consideration in relation to the outcome of examination conducted by the Board must apply in writing. The application must include supporting documentation and must be lodged with the Psychology Board of Australia (psychologychair@ahpra.gov.au) no later than 14 days following the completion of the examination.

The special consideration procedure is initiated by the written request, and will be managed by an internal review carried out by the Board to establish whether the request is permissible on the

grounds outlined above. The internal review will usually be held within 21 days of receipt of the request being lodged. If the request is granted the Board will make a decision on further action, which will be advised to the candidate in writing.

Applications for special consideration are considered by the Psychology Board and the decision of the Board is final.

Failure to follow the special consideration application procedure may result in the application being delayed or not accepted.

Any special arrangement offered to the candidate whose application for special consideration has been approved will be acted upon promptly. Failure to comply with the arrangement will mean the candidate will sit the examination in the next scheduled examination period published on the Board's web site.

Policy for examination failure

Candidates who fail the examination will be permitted to re-sit the examination after three months of further supervised practice as a provisionally registered psychologist.

The Board will allow the provisionally registered psychologist (the registrant) up to three examination failures.

In the event of failing three times, the registrant will not be able to sit another examination until their renewal or re-registration is approved by the Board. At this point the Board may:

1. grant renewal or re-registration and allow the registrant to re-sit the examination up to three additional times.
2. grant renewal or re-registration with conditions and on those conditions being met, allowing the registrant to re-sit the examination, or
3. propose to refuse the registrant's renewal.

In the instance of 1 or 2, the Board will provide feedback to the registrant on the knowledge areas requiring improvement.

In the instance of outcome 2 or 3, the registrant may be allowed to make a submission to the Board to support their renewal as a provisionally registered psychologist.

Renewing provisional registration has limitations under the National Law, and candidates will need to get permission from the Board to continue in training if they go beyond these limits.

4. Attachment A: Implementation 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. Below is a summary timeline showing the development of the National Psychology Examination, which began in 1986.

Year	Action
1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration was given to a budget to finance the development of a national examination system
1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national examination system was approved in principle
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determined to instigate a process of developing options for a national examination including that a working party be established to explore a national examination proposal and report by March 2008 Ministers of Health determined to continue supporting the unaccredited two-year internship pathway to general registration
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The New South Wales Psychology Board issued a consultation paper on the development of a National Psychology Examination for public comment Feedback and further consultations with key stakeholder groups at that time indicated strong support for the development of the examination
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association An update on the status of the examination was published (Grenyer, B.F.S. (2009). Development of a national psychology examination. InPsych: Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society, 32 (3), 13)
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early in 2010 the NSW Board prior to the National Scheme approved funds to help support the initial development of the examination The registration standard for general registration (that includes 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 In September 2010 the Psychology Board of Australia approved the appointment process for a National Psychology Examination Panel
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: <i>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.</i>

Year	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March the Board announced in its communiqué: <i>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.</i> • In April the Board released the first public consultation papers on the development of the National Psychology Examination • In November the Board released the <i>Exposure draft National Psychology Examination curriculum</i> 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: <i>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, prior to 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.</i> • Over the period of February to November, the Board holds seven public consultation forums across States and Territories that included information about the examination commencing 1 July 2013
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four further public consultation forums held over 12 months • In March the final curriculum for the examination, based on stakeholder feedback, is 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: <i>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</i> • 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
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early in the year the Board will provide a sample of test items for candidates to practice the examination. Sample tests will provide feedback and rationale of the correct and incorrect answers • A timetable will become available of the examinations, which will be published on the Board's website • The first examination will be held from 1 July 2013