

Representing La Trobe, Bendigo Psychology Students



'Consultation - Provisional registration standard': Response to Consultation Question Number 2 of the Provisional Registration Standard for Consideration.

I am writing on behalf of the psychology students association at La Trobe University in Bendigo. We would like to respond to consultation question number 2: "Is there a public benefit to introducing student registration for undergraduate psychology major students that the Board has not identified?"

I currently attend La Trobe, Bendigo, which is one of the largest regional providers of psychology degrees in the country. Of my cohort, only two Bendigo students of have been offered honours places within our university. To put that into perspective, less than 5% of the people who completed a psychology degree at my campus have a *chance* of becoming psychologists. Beyond this, the statistics of those who successfully attain postgraduate places is equally depressing. The reality is that many students are left at the end of third and fourth year, partially trained, and unable to practice as psychologists. I have talented friends who dreamed of becoming psychologists considering education, occupational therapy, social work, even life-coaching, because they see postgraduate psychology courses as unattainable. This is a huge shame, given the demand for psychologists in our region.

We believe putting undergraduate students under the category of doing "science" and not "practice", and structuring university pathways along these lines is contributing to this problem. Put simply, excluding students from practice costs an increasingly understaffed profession and puts psychology behind other allied disciplines, such as pharmacy and nursing, where students are engaged in professional life much earlier. We believe that empowering undergraduate students to take on responsibility (through student registration) could have significant benefits. Students would receive more experience faster, be able assist psychologists in their work, begin in practice faster, and alleviate the workforce shortages that threaten the sector (see the Psychology 2020 paper released by the APS).

We would like to challenge the criticisms levelled against 'student registration': that students lacks accountability, and can places the public at risk. First, just because "provisional psychologists are held to greater accountability than students" doesn't mean students cannot be held accountable. Many psychology students volunteer with organisations such as Lifeline, and are already engaging with individual's experiencing crisis: such as psychological disorders, relationship problems, suicidal ideation, drug dependency. Students constantly show they can act ethically, work under supervision and can refer effectively. It is a shame that psychology students have to build experience with organisations outside of the psychology sector, when they could provide so much value within it. A potential solution for creating accountability is found in pharmacy: pay students to work as psychology assistants. Pharmacy students sign codes of conduct, have

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obligations and protection under employment law, are inducted, and are given a title as part of their employment contract at pharmacies. The current (opposite) system, where students pay for supervision, will inevitably exclude students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which ultimately hurts the diversity and robustness of Australia's psychology workforce.

Second, students engaging in professional activities does not mean that the "risk to the public would be too high". The same criticism could be levelled against pharmacy students: if drugs are dispensed incorrectly people can die. However the profession has developed robust checks and balances, and the community benefits by spending less time in queues and having more experienced practitioners.

Keeping in mind that there is no category of 'student registration', the proposal indicates that the board wants to require registration as a provisional psychologist when "there is direct client contact, such psychological testing when undertaking a research thesis or for any other reason". This makes no sense; there are many aspects of psychology that are 'low risk' for students to be involved in. Examples include: personality testing, aptitude and intelligence testing, administration and the business side of practice, performance optimisation and positive psychology, applied behaviour analysis, the list goes on. Rather than increasing barriers to entry into the profession, we believe that the board should be focussing on low-risk activities that students could perform during the course of their undergraduate degrees. Limiting pathways to 4+anything, disconnects psychology students from practice for two thirds of their education and continues to perpetuate the bottleneck we are seeing in the training of psychologists.

We hope that you will consider our points, and direct your attention towards addressing these systemic problems that are paralysing the profession.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daniel Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Daniel Wright
President of the La Trobe, Bendigo Psychology Students Association (Get Psyched!).