14/09/2015

**Re: Consultation paper 25:***Consultation on ending the higher degree exemption from sitting the National Psychology Examination*

This document serves to highlight some of my personal opinions that I would like to contribute as part of the consultation process regarding the proposed introduction of an exam at the end of the higher degree pathway, prior to generalist psychologist registration.

* I am currently studying the first year of a Master of Psychology (Organisational & Human Factors) at Adelaide University.
* I have over a decade worth of work experience that is directly relevant and applicable for my future career as an Organisational Psychologist. In order to forge a career as a Psychologist, I made the decision to undertake the next step in my education, with the ultimate goal of registration.
* I had the opportunity to undertake a 2 year supervision/internship program through an employer (an Organisational Psychologist), but chose instead to complete the Masters program as I believed it would give me a sounder grounding in theory and opportunity to experience 3 industry placements, thus giving an overall broader scope of experience.
* I can appreciate that for the internship pathway, which by its very nature involves a large element of inconsistency and difficulty for regulating learning experiences, a standardised assessment as a final hurdle may be appropriate; no doubt the experiences of individuals would differ substantially, and so an exam at the end of the process has the potential to offer an element of uniformity to ensure consistency amongst those going through this pathway. However, given that Masters programs have been accredited, and thus there is an acknowledgement that they provide an appropriate education for provisional psychologists, the introduction of an exam as an additional element to the 2 years worth of assessment isn’t as easily justifiable in my eyes. It seems the idea is simply a means of ‘easy deflection’ of how ‘good enough’ is measured, and a great money making plot to boot.
* It is claimed that the exam is to address the issue of comparability of programs. Can this not be addressed through having a prescribed standard for what must be included in each Psychology Masters course? It seems as though this is simply a shift in responsibility, and begs the question- what value is there is doing 2 years worth of study, if the Board has no confidence that graduates are getting a quality grounding for the profession.
* Exam preparation is not the same as preparation for the profession.
* The Board’s claim that it “expects all suitably prepared applicants for registration to be able to pass the exam”. If this is the case, the obvious underlying assumption is that all higher degree courses cover the information to be assessed in a standardised manner. I.e. if coverage of the range of topics in the exam is explicitly required for course accreditation, then the exam might hold some weight as a means of ‘checking’ if students paid attention. However, if the Board has not clearly presented psychology schools with this information prior to accreditation of courses, then the introduction of a standardised assessment is completely unfair.
* Anecdotal information indicates that the exam has a very strong clinical bent. There are undoubtedly elements of psychology that are essential for all registered practitioners to be familiar with. However, the existence of different specialisation streams of psychology at Masters level is reflective of the very different focuses that exist within the profession. Needless to say, as a student of Organisational Psychology, my career and practice focus is distinctly different from that of a clinical student. Unless an exam is going to adequately cover only information that is equally applicable to all students across all Masters streams, then it is simply not a fair and feasible form of assessment.
* In terms of cost, it could be argued that those going through an internship pathway have substantially less outlay than those undertaking a Masters course. As a student at Adelaide University, my fees for the course alone are $12,500. The annual AHPRA registration fee is separate and additional to this. An extra exam fee ‘tacked on’ to the end of a Masters program is very off-putting, and indeed adds another significant financial hurdle to me entering the profession.
* Integrity has always been paramount to my value system. I enrolled in the Master of Psychology (Organisational & Human Factors) at Adelaide University with an understanding of the course content, registration requirements and process. To have the goalpost changed partway through course is quite simply disrespectful.
* To think that the time, energy, and monetary commitment I have invested to undertake the higher degree pathway could have been funnelled into preparing for an exam while undertaking an internship process instead is infuriating. If passing an exam is the ultimate hurdle required for general registration, I would have made a different pathway choice. I suspect many others would also rethink their choice. Essentially, the proposed change feels to me like a devaluation of the higher degree pathway, and if this hurdle requirement of an exam is implemented, I suspect enrolment numbers would be impacted. In turn, this would of course impact the overall functioning of psychology departments across all universities.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide these points as part of the consultation process on this issue.

Kind regards,

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**Master of Psychology (Organisational & Human Factors) student**

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