

Policy and procedure for candidates who fail the national psychology exam three times

Summary

This document sets out the policy and procedures to follow when a candidate sitting the national psychology exam fails the exam three times.

Background

The Psychology Board of Australia's (the Board) *General registration 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), with the registration standard taking effect from 1 July 2010.

The national psychology examination (the exam) supports the Board's *General registration standard*. The following groups of people must sit and pass the exam before making an application for general registration:

- registered provisional psychologists who are undertaking the exam as part of applying for general registration with the Board
- overseas-trained psychologists seeking general registration in Australia
- individuals intending to return to practise as a psychologist who have not practised for more than 10 years, and
- individuals who are directed to sit the exam by the Board, or by a panel or tribunal, in relation to an application for registration under Part 7 of the National Law or a notification about their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.

The *Guidelines for the national psychology examination* (the guidelines) were published in October 2013¹, and outline eligibility requirements for sitting the exam, information on the content of the exam and details on how to register to sit the exam.

The guidelines state that candidates who fail the examination are permitted to re-sit the examination after completing three months of further supervised practice as a registered psychologist.

The guidelines also state that, for candidates who fail the exam:

If they fail three times, they will not be able to sit another examination until their registration renewal or a new application for registration is approved by the Board. At this point the Board may:

1. grant renewal or registration, and allow the person to re-sit the examination up to three additional times

¹ The *Guidelines for the national psychology examination* were published in October 2013 after three public consultations: Consultation #9 on the *Guidelines for the national psychology examination* (April 2011); Consultation #13 on the examination curriculum (November 2011), and Consultation #18 on the *Guidelines for the national psychology examination* (April 2013).

2. grant renewal or registration with conditions, and on those conditions being met, allowing the person to re-sit the examination, or
3. propose to refuse the person's application or renewal.

The purpose of this document is to provide further detail on the policy and procedures to follow when a candidate fails the exam three times.

Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to any candidate for the exam who has failed the exam three times, including:

- registered provisional psychologists who are undertaking the exam as part of applying for general registration with the Board
- overseas-trained psychologists seeking general registration in Australia
- individuals intending to return to practise as a psychologist who have not practised for more than 10 years, and
- individuals who are directed to sit the exam by the Board, or by a panel or tribunal, in relation to an application for registration under Part 7 of the National Law or a notification about their health, performance or conduct under Part 8 of the National Law.

This policy does not apply to candidates sitting the exam who pass the exam on their first or second attempt. It also does not apply to candidates who have applied to sit the exam and fail the practice exam.

Definition of exam pass and failure

The Board has applied a scaled passing score of 70 per cent or higher to the exam.

The examination and pass rates are moderated by the National Psychology Examination Committee of the Board. The pass rate only applies to the total score. Each candidate must obtain a scaled score of 70 per cent or higher to pass the exam. Candidates are not required to pass all four individual curriculum components².

Any candidate who sits the exam and gets a scaled score of 69 per cent or lower is considered to have failed the exam, regardless of whether the candidate:

- completed all of the exam or only part of the exam, and/or
- had been granted special accommodation/additional needs prior to the exam (providing the additional needs were sufficiently met).

In addition, any candidate who does not attend an exam sitting that they have registered to sit, and are not granted special consideration for their 'no show', is considered to have failed that sitting of the exam.

Candidates do not receive their scaled scores as part of the reporting process, only whether they have passed or failed.

Definition of three exam failures

Any candidate who sits the exam and gets a scaled score of 69 per cent or lower on three separate occasions is considered to have failed the exam three times.

If a candidate is granted special consideration³ due to adverse circumstances on the day of the exam that

² The four curriculum components of the exam are outlined in the guidelines, and include ethics, assessment, intervention and communication.

³ The guidelines state that candidates who complete the examination are usually not eligible for special consideration unless there are adverse circumstances beyond their control (such as acute illness, hospitalisation, loss of a family member). Special consideration is granted at the time of sitting the exam by the National Exam Coordinator in conjunction with the Chair, National Psychology Exam Committee.

are outside of their control, then this sitting of the exam is considered null and void, and any failure of the exam on this day is not counted towards the three failures.

General principles for the application of this policy

1. The Board believes that protection of the public is paramount, and that its role is to ensure the safety and competence of practitioners to meet a minimum professional standard. The exam assesses applied psychological knowledge, which forms a significant basis of competence in the psychology profession. The examination helps demonstrate that training has produced a practitioner with an appropriate level of applied professional knowledge and competence, which will more effectively protect the public.
2. The examination should never be used as the sole test of a practitioner's competence to practise psychology. Passing the examination is not a substitute for a period of registration under supervision. This policy should be implemented in the broader context of a candidate's practice.
3. All decisions made after a candidate fails the exam for the third time will be made as soon as practicable after the third failure. A timely resolution and providing direction to the candidate is preferable.
4. Renewing provisional registration has time limitations under section 64 of the National Law⁴, and provisional psychologists will need to get permission from the Board to continue their training if they go beyond these limits. This policy should be implemented within the context of these time limitations.
5. It is expected that all candidates for the exam undertake supervision of their work, including exam preparation, regardless of whether they are registered as a provisional or general psychologist.

Procedure for applying this policy

Step one: Exam outcome

AHPRA will notify registrants who have failed the exam for the third time.

Step two: Registrant understands the options available and communicates chosen preference

If a registrant fails the exam three times, they will not be able to sit another examination until their registration renewal or a new application for registration is approved by the Board.

For provisional psychologists, renewal of registration occurs once per year on the anniversary of the initial application for registration. For psychologists, renewal of registration occurs once per year on 30 November.

There are three options for registrants who fail the exam three times:

- 1) During the renewal/registration period – if the renewal/registration period is open, the registrant can choose to submit an application for renewal of registration or a new application (under section 64 if relevant).
- 2) Outside of the renewal/registration period – if the registrant fails the exam for the third time outside of the renewal/registration period, there are three options depending on the timing of the failure in relationship to the renewal period.
 - a. If the date for renewal/registration is close (e.g. within three months), the registrant can choose to wait until the renewal/registration period is open, and submit an application. The Guidelines explain that a registrant must wait a minimum of three months before sitting the exam again.
 - b. If the renewal date is several months away, the registrant can choose to apply to the Psychology Regional Board for early permission to sit an additional exam/s before the renewal date by submitting a statement and plan. If the Psychology Regional Board approves, the registrant may

⁴ Provisional registration may not be renewed more than twice. If a registrant is unable to complete the supervised practice during the initial period of registration and two renewals of that registration, the individual would need to make a new application for provisional registration.

apply to re-sit the national psychology exam. The statement and plan will be re-confirmed when an application for renewal or registration (under section 64 if relevant) is submitted during the renewal/registration period.

- c. If the renewal date is several months away, the registrant can choose to wait until the renewal/registration period is open. The registrant should continue supervised practice during this time. However, the registrant will be unable take another exam until the Psychology Regional Board approves the statement and plan.

- 3) Discontinue registration – registrants may choose not to submit another application for renewal or a new application for registration.

Registrants will need to communicate with AHPRA their preferred option.

Step three: Evidence required and registration status

The following information will be requested and must be submitted for each of the three options:

- 1) During the renewal/registration period

Evidence required: When a registrant has failed the exam three times, and submits an application for renewal of registration or a new application for registration (under section 64 if relevant), the Psychology Regional Board will request a statement and plan ([form SPPD-76](#)) from the registrant and their supervisor under section 80 of the National Law.

This statement and plan will explain the reason/s for not yet passing the exam, and outline the proposed steps to gain the knowledge and skills of professional practice expected to be demonstrated by a general psychologist. This statement allows the registrant to put their case to the Psychology Regional Board for consideration. The exam results will be reviewed, along with the statements and the application for renewal/re-registration.

Registrant status: Registrants who choose this option will be able to continue to work as a provisional psychologist or psychologist while remaining registered, but will not be able to re-sit the exam until the Psychology Regional Board has provided permission to do so. The Psychology Regional Board will not consider providing permission until they have an application for renewal of registration.

- 2) Outside of the renewal/registration period

Evidence required: When a registrant has failed the exam three times, and the renewal or re-registration period is several months away, the Board aims to minimise any delay before the registrant re-sits the exam. As a result, the Psychology Regional Board will allow early submission of the statement and plan (as per option one above) from the registrant and their supervisor.

This statement and plan ([form SPPD-76](#)) will explain the reason/s for not yet passing the exam, and outline the proposed steps to gain the knowledge and skills of professional practice expected to be demonstrated by a general psychologist. This statement and plan allows the registrant to put their case to the Psychology Regional Board for consideration.

When the registrant reaches the renewal or registration period, the Psychology Regional Board will ask for a confirmation of the plan (under section 80) and for an update on progress.

Registrant status: Registrants who choose this option will be able to continue to work as a provisional psychologist or psychologist while remaining registered and the Psychology Regional Board is reviewing their statement. If the Psychology Regional Board approves the registrant to sit additional exams, they will be able to register for an exam, even if it is scheduled before the annual renewal or registration deadline.

- 3) Discontinue registration

Evidence required: A registrant can choose to discontinue their registration at any time by writing to AHRPA or by indicating the intent to relinquish registration at renewal.

Registrant status: Registrants will be removed from the register when registration lapses (or if registration is suspended or cancelled). Registrants will no longer be able to use the title provisional psychologist or psychologist.

Step four: The Psychology Regional Board makes a determination

The Psychology Regional Board will review exam results, the statements from the registrant and their supervisor, and the application for renewal/registration. When the Psychology Regional Board is satisfied that the statement and plan from the registrant (and their supervisor) is reasonable, the Psychology Regional Board will approve the plan.

All registrants who fail the exam three times will have conditions placed on their registration at the time of their next renewal of registration. This condition will include adhering to the elements and timeframes outlined in the agreed plan.

At this time, registrants are strongly encouraged to put into place effective supervision, study, CPD and other strategies that will assist them to pass the exam in the future.

Registrants who fail the exam are permitted to re-sit the exam after completing a further three month period of supervised practice as a provisional psychologist or psychologist. This is a minimum (not maximum) timeframe, and registrants are encouraged to be fully prepared before sitting the exam.

Passing the exam is important, and is one of the necessary components to gain general registration. Should the registrant fail the exam another three times, the Psychology Regional Board will propose to refuse the application for renewal or registration.

Step five: Proposal to refuse an application for renewal or registration

The Psychology Regional Board will propose to refuse a registrant's application for renewal or registration when the registrant has failed the exam six times.

In exceptional circumstances, the Psychology Regional Board can propose to refuse a registrant's application for renewal of registration before the 6th exam sitting, if there is reasonable evidence that the registrant is not adhering to their agreed plan, is not progressing in their performance on the exam, or there is evidence that the registrant's work does not meet standard.

In exceptional circumstances, the Psychology Regional Board can agree to allow a registrant to sit the exam one additional time if there is clear documented evidence of mediating factors that have adversely affected the registrant's ability to pass the exam despite adhering to the agreed plan. Should the registrant fail this seventh exam sitting, the Psychology Regional Board will propose to refuse a registrant's application for renewal or registration. No additional exam sittings are permitted.

Definitions

In this policy:

AHPRA means the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency established under Part 4 of the National Law.

Board means the Psychology Board of Australia established under part 5 of the National Law.

Candidate means any person approved by the Board as eligible to sit the national psychology exam.

Exam means the national psychology exam.

Guidelines means the *Guidelines for the national psychology examination* as published on the Board's website.

National Law means the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory of Australia. The National Law can be viewed at: www.ahpra.gov.au/About-AHPRA/What-We-Do/Legislation.aspx.

National Psychology Exam Committee means the committee of the Psychology Board of Australia that the Board has established under section 37(1)(a) of the National Law to develop the exam, monitor the exam and provide advice and reports to the Board about the administration of the exam.

Provisional psychologist means a person registered as a provisional psychologist under part 7 of the National Law.

Psychologist means a person who holds general registration as a psychologist under part 7 of the National Law.

Psychology Regional Board means the four boards of the Psychology Board of Australia that the Board has established under section 36 of the National Law to provide a timely local response to health practitioners and the public in registration and notification matters. The regional boards for psychology are:

- The ACT/Victoria/Tasmania Board of the Psychology Board of Australia
- The New South Wales Board of the Psychology Board of Australia
- The Northern Territory/South Australia/Western Australia Board of the Psychology Board of Australia, and
- The Queensland Board of the Psychology Board of Australia.

Scaled passing score means passing the national psychology exam at a score of 70 per cent or higher. Raw scores (the total number of answers that were correct) are arithmetically converted to a scale that ranges from 0 to 100 and takes into consideration differences in difficulty among different versions of the exam. Adjusting scores will ensure that the passing score will remain the same, even if different versions of the test vary in difficulty. This ensures that candidates will not be penalised if a test is harder, or given an unfair advantage if a test is easier.

Supervisor or **board approved supervisor** means a person who holds general registration as a psychologist and who has been approved by the Board to supervise provisional psychologists or psychologists.

Responsibilities

The Board is responsible for formulating and approving this policy. The state or territory Psychology Regional Boards are responsible for making individual decisions about the registration (and notification) of psychologists. AHPRA is responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented and effectively managed.

Authorisation

Psychology Board of Australia. Date of issue: 16 February 2016

Review

This policy will be in effect from 16 February 2016. The Board will review this policy at least every five years.