

History of the national psychology exam

July 2019

The planning for a national psychology exam in Australia has a rich history. While the national psychology exam did not come into effect until 2013, those responsible for regulating psychologists in Australia were engaged in the exam's development as early as 1986.

Table 1 below is a timeline showing the development of the exam from 1986 until 2009, the years leading up to the start of the [National Registration and Accreditation Scheme](#) (the National Scheme) in 2010.

Table 2 outlines the major milestones of the exam's development under the National Scheme from 2010 onwards.

Table 3 outlines the public consultations about the exam that have been published by the Psychology Board of Australia (the Board).

Table 1 – Development of the exam from 1986 to 2009

Year	Action
1986	<p>The Council of Psychologists Registration Boards (CPRB) resolved to develop a national exam, with a focus on using it to test overseas psychologists applying for registration in Australia.</p> <p>The CRPB was developed in the mid-1980s to work towards consistency in professional standards and procedures for the regulation of psychologists. The CRPB consisted of all state and territory psychology registration boards in Australia (along with their New Zealand counterpart).</p>
1987	A budget was considered to finance the development of a national exam system.
1990	A national exam system was approved in principle.
2007	<p>The CRPB determined to start a process to develop options for a national exam, and to establish a working party to explore a national exam proposal and report by March 2008.</p> <p>Ministers for Health determined to continue supporting the unaccredited two-year internship pathway (the 4+2 internship pathway) to general registration.</p>
2008	<p>The New South Wales Psychology Board issued a consultation paper on the development of a national psychology exam for public comment.</p> <p>Feedback and further consultations with stakeholder groups at that time indicated strong support for the development of the exam.</p>
2009	<p>An update on the exam project was presented and subjected to peer review by all state and territory boards, representatives from the Australian Psychological Society and the Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (HODSPA).</p> <p>An update on the status of the exam was published (Grenyer, B.F.S. (2009). Development of a national psychology exam. <i>InPsych: Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society</i>, 32 (3), 13).</p>

Table 2 – Development of the exam from 2010

Year	Action
2010	<p>Early in 2010, before the National Scheme began, the NSW Psychology Board approved funds to support the initial development of the exam.</p> <p>Under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (the National Law) the Board can develop and recommend registration standards about various matters to the Ministerial Council. This may include matters relevant to the eligibility of individuals for registration in the profession. On 1 July 2010, the Psychology Board of Australia published the General registration standard which included the provision for the Board to require the passing of an exam before accepting an application for general registration (unless exempt)¹.</p> <p>In September, the Board approved the appointment process for a National Psychology Exam Committee (the Committee²). The Board established the Committee under the National Law to support the development and quality assurance of the national psychology exam (the exam). The Committee members included National Psychology Board members, Psychology Regional Board members, and senior members of the psychology profession that are external to the Board.</p>
2011	<p>In February, the National Psychology Exam Committee held its first meeting.</p> <p>In March, the Board announced in its communiqué that the exam would be implemented from 1 July 2013.</p> <p>In April, the Board released the first public consultation paper on the development of the national psychology exam.</p> <p>In November, the Board released the <i>draft National Psychology Exam curriculum</i> for public consultation.</p> <p>Between February and November, the Board held seven public consultation forums across Australia that included information about the exam commencing 1 July 2013.</p>
2012	<p>In January, the Board published the first <i>Recommended Reading List</i> to assist candidates in their exam preparation.</p> <p>In March, the curriculum for the exam, based on stakeholder feedback, was approved by the Board and published on the website.</p> <p>In July, the Board tested draft questions for the exam and undertook statistical analysis of their reliability and validity, which provided the basis for further question development and improvement.</p> <p>In October, the Board initiated a tender process for providers of computer-based testing to provide the platform for administering the exam within confidential test centres and environments across Australia. The successful tender was announced in December.</p> <p>In December, the Board appointed the second National Psychology Exam Committee.</p> <p>Four public consultation forums were held during 2012 that included information about the exam.</p>

¹ Refer to the Psychology Board of Australia's [Guidelines for the national psychology examination](#) for information on exemptions.

² The Committee was originally called the National Psychology Exam Panel.

2013	<p>In April, the Board released the <i>draft Guidelines for the National Psychology Exam</i> for public consultation.</p> <p>Also in April, the Board made available new resources on the exam, including example exam questions and additional curriculum and reading resources.</p> <p>From 1 July 2013, the National psychology exam came into effect.</p> <p>The Board approved several transition provisions allowing a stepped roll-out of the exam. The following groups of people were required to show evidence of having passed the exam:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overseas trained applicants for general registration, and • individuals who are directed to sit it 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.
2014	<p>In May, the Board published the <i>Assessment domain additional resources document</i> to assist candidates in their study and preparation for the exam.</p> <p>From 1 July under the transition provisions, the following groups of people were required to show evidence of having passed the exam before applying for general registration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applicants for general registration who completed an internship pathway (4+2 or 5+1) applying for general registration, and • individuals who were previously registered as a psychologist who wished to resume practice after an absence of 10 years or more. <p>In December, the Board appointed the third National Psychology Exam Committee.</p>
2015	<p>In August, the Board released a consultation on ending the higher degree exemption from sitting the exam. Applicants for general registration who had completed the higher degree pathway and applied for general registration before 1 July 2016 were exempt from sitting the exam. As a result, the exemption for this group was extended until 1 July 2019.</p>
2016	<p>In February, the Board published the Policy and procedure for candidates who fail the exam three times (exam failure policy).</p> <p>In September, the Board published the document entitled <i>A brief orientation to the national psychology exam</i> to assist candidates to further understand the depth and scope of the curriculum, and to prepare for sitting the exam.</p>
2017	<p>In July, the Board released a consultation on reviewing the exam curriculum. The curriculum had not been reviewed since its publication in 2012, and the Board considered that a review was timely to ensure the exam remained fit-for-purpose and was aligned with advances in the field of psychology. As a result, the curriculum was aligned with the International declaration of core competencies in professional psychology (the Declaration), and the <i>Assessment domain additional resources document</i> was retired.</p> <p>The Board began a quality assurance project to evaluate the exam's quality and functioning to ensure that the exam is fair, reliable, effective and fit-for-purpose, and to identify any areas of the exam, or any exam items, that should be improved. The aim of the project was to address reputational and regulatory risks associated with implementing a national high-stakes exam.</p>
2018	<p>The Board released an advance copy of the new exam curriculum in January 2018, allowing a six-month transition for exam candidates and their supervisors to become familiar with the new requirements. The new curriculum came into effect on 1 August.</p> <p>In August, the higher degree exemption from sitting the exam was extended from 1 July 2019 until 31 December 2019 to allow the Board to consult widely with the profession and the community on a policy position about the exemption while alleviating uncertainty for mid-year graduates about the Board's requirements.</p> <p>In December the Board undertook a five-year review of the governance structure for the development and monitoring of the exam. The Board determined that a new governance structure could be implemented since the exam was now embedded into practice. The National Psychology Exam Committee was retired in favour of a Board working group.</p>

2019

In March, The Board published information about the exam quality assurance project that began in 2017. The project evaluated the quality and functioning of the exam to ensure that it is fair, reliable, effective and fit-for-purpose. The project also aimed to identify any areas of the exam that should be improved. The project demonstrated that the exam is a reliable and effective regulatory instrument and is fit-for-purpose in the regulatory context.

In April the Board released a consultation on the *Guidelines for the national psychology exam*. As a result of this consultation:

- the guidelines were separated into two documents; a policy document (a revised guideline) and an operational document (a new manual for candidates who are enrolled to sit the exam). Separating the policy and operational information has made it easier for candidates to prepare for the exam by improving the clarity, simplicity and access to relevant information.
- the higher degree exemption from sitting the exam became permanent. The permanent exemption has removed the need to periodically consult on extending the exemption, has allowed the Board to use accreditation processes more effectively, has resulted in reduced regulation and created certainty for higher degree students, education providers and supervisors about the Board's requirements for registration.

Table 3 - Summary of public consultations on the exam

The Board has consulted extensively on the national psychology exam, including consulting on both the curriculum of the exam and when and how the exam is used within the regulatory framework.

[Past public consultation papers](#) on the exam are available on the Board website including the submissions by psychologists and stakeholders. The Board has previously released the following public consultation papers about the national psychology exam:

Date	Consultation
April 2011	Consultation Paper 9: National examination consultation paper
November 2011	Consultation Paper 13: Exposure draft on the national psychology examination curriculum
April 2013	Consultation Paper 18: Guidelines for the national psychology examination
August 2015	Consultation Paper 25: Ending the higher degree exemption from sitting the national psychology examination
July 2017	Consultation Paper 28: National psychology examination curriculum review
April 2019	Consultation Paper 33: Review of the national psychology exam guidelines