



26 April 2006

Dr Neale Fong
Chair of AHWOC
Department of Health, Western Australia
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Dear Dr Fong,

At the suggestion of the Federal Minister of Health, and Ageing the Honourable Tony Abbott, I write to inform you that the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC) is currently negotiating with the relevant State and Territory jurisdictions for a significant proposed change to legislation regarding the requirements for registration of psychologists in Australia. The proposed change will have implications for Federal and State Health Departments as major employers of psychologists. I have also written to the relevant Federal and State Ministers of Health, Education and Training.

The change is intended to enhance the quality and uniformity of training throughout Australia without extending the duration and is concordant with the recent Productivity Commission Report on Australia's Health Workforce and with international developments. The aim is to reduce inequality of practice standards by requiring all registered psychologists in the future to have University based professional training. Currently only half of registered psychologists have such professional training, while the remainder acquire their training in service by individual arrangement with registered psychologists (see Table 1).

Table 1: Current professional training pathways for registration as a psychologist

	Individually arranged supervision in service	<i>University training and supervision</i>
Entry requirements	Bachelors degree 4 th year approved course Character references.	Bachelors degree Honours 2A or equivalent Referee reports and interview
Professional training	2 years supervised practice	2 years course work and university supervised practice
Coursework Evidence based practice	Optional No formal training	Required Thesis required
Duration to full registration after undergraduate degrees	2 years	2 years

In the first pathway involving individually arranged supervision, any graduate of a recognized four-year sequence of university study including non-psychology topics may apply for conditional registration as a trainee psychologist. Unlike the entry requirements for professional postgraduate training degrees, there is currently no minimum standard of academic achievement required to enter the supervised practice program. The training involves two years of supervised practice of psychology with no mandatory coursework on clinical practice or training in evaluation of evidence based practice. The relevant state/territory registration board approves the supervisor(s) and the program but standards and content of training vary with different supervisors, different workplaces and between different jurisdictions. Moreover, the supervision process has no inherent checks or balances. Nor are there any uniform quality assurance processes, national standards and/or national requirements of the supervision process for registration. Registration is virtually automatic if supervisors and trainee psychologists sign forms certifying the completion of training and that the trainee possesses various competencies.

The other pathway involves a university based professional degree (masters or doctoral) with all the associated quality controls for entry, training and assessment. The training degrees are highly structured, comprising coursework, practical training in provision of psychological services in functioning service organizations (clinics etc.) and a research component addressed to an applied problem. Mastery of relevant professional skills in interviewing, history taking, problem formulation, psychometric assessment, planning and implementing intervention and evaluating the effects of the intervention are required. The coursework, psychological services, and applied research thesis are assessed by two staff members and reported to examiners' meetings. Quality of training is assured through both internal university processes and external national accreditation requirements.

Both pathways take a total of 6 years to complete and there are currently about equal numbers of trainees nationally in each pathway although the proportions vary in different jurisdictions (see Table 2).

Table 2 Number of Registered Psychologists in Australia (March 2006)

Jurisdiction	Fully Registered	Individually arranged Supervised Trainees	University Supervised Trainees	Total
ACT	535	86	64	685
NEW SOUTH WALES	7837	672	393	8902
NORTHERN TERRITORY	126	28	4	158
QUEENSLAND	3103	487	420	4010
SOUTH AUSTRALIA	988	32	28	1048
TASMANIA	354	28	25	407
VICTORIA	5186	578	964	6728
WESTERN AUSTRALIA	2115	±79	±79	2273
TOTAL	20244	1911	1898	24211

In October 2004, The Council of Psychologists Registration Boards [Australasia] Inc (CPRB), comprising the State and Territory Registration authorities in Australia and New Zealand,

recommended that the minimum requirement for registration as a psychologist should be completion of an accredited professional postgraduate degree in psychology with a minimum duration of two years (full time equivalent). This will align registration requirements in Australia with those in the US, Canada, UK, and New Zealand without any lengthening of training.

This recommendation of CPRB for a nationally accredited unitary pathway has the support of the Australian Psychological Society (APS), which is the professional association representing 14,500 psychologists, and of the Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association (HODSPA), which represents all universities currently providing professional psychology training in Australia. It is consistent with the recommendations of the recent Productivity Commission report on the Health Workforce, which recommended the adoption of a standard national approach. It is also consistent with international developments such as the trend toward postgraduate professional training in the European Union Higher Education Area, to which the Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training has recently drawn our attention.

The Australian Psychologists Accreditation Council (APAC), an incorporated joint body of Australian Psychological Society and the Council of Psychologist Registration Boards of Australasia, has been charged with the implementation of the policy to adopt a unitary university based professional training program. The function of APAC is to set national standards for professional training in psychology in Australia and to accredit institutions offering such training. APAC recognizes that the proposed changes will require a phased introduction. Subject to the relevant State and Territory legislation being amended, we are aiming to phase in the process by 2010 to enable universities to provide additional training places and for prospective psychologists to appropriately plan their study from 2007 onwards.

APAC considers that this matter needs discussion by AHWOC and is willing to provide fuller information as required. For example, there needs to be workforce planning to ensure no temporary shortages of trainees or significant reduction in their service contributions. Provided that the educational sector is willing to provide the additional post graduate university places (the Commonwealth has recently announced an additional 2800 funded post graduate places in 2007), the health sector would gain the service contributions of these trainees at no additional cost. This is because the additional university supervised trainees would do their clinical placements in government sector services which would not have to employ trainee psychologists receiving individually arranged supervision as at present.

APAC stresses the need for an expeditious national recognition of this initiative to improve standards of psychology training and registration in Australia and to align these to countries with similar conditions of practice.

Yours sincerely



Professor Gina Geffen, Ph.D, FASSA, FAPS,
Chairperson of the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council