

Comments on “Guideline for Supervisors and Supervisor Training Providers”

The Griffith University Consortium, which provides the Supervisor Training and Accreditation Program (STAP), support the Board's steps towards establishing national supervision training guidelines and plans for applications for training proposals. Below we raise some issues that may be of value to the Board in their consideration of supervision training in regards to:

- Format and Content of a Supervision Training Program
- Requirements for Supervisors
- Requirements for Training Providers
- Tender process
- Training of Supervisees

Format and Content of Supervision Training Program:

We support the proposal that the training program consists of 4 main aspects: self-directed preparatory stage pre-training; a 2-day initial workshop; evaluation of supervisory ability; and revision programs once the supervisor has been accredited.

Preparatory work: The initial stage including reading of relevant literature about supervision is indeed best followed by a test of knowledge gained from the readings, and a set grade would be required for participation in the 2-day workshop. We agree that some of the assessment should also include responses to vignettes in addition to multiple choice, to encourage greater depth of reflection (p. 14). We agree that the knowledge thus gained would allow for much greater emphasis in training and practice of skills and consolidation of knowledge, thus reducing the amount of didactic knowledge training at the workshop.

It is suggested in the consultation paper that participants may have “options for different types of supervision contexts ... to tailor their program prior to undertaking formal workshops” (p. 7). This differentiation of pathways is again referred to on both p. 8 and 9 of the paper, and in the Training Proposal (p.21). It seems that the Board is considering that supervisors may only be trained to provide supervision for specific paths, e.g. training would only focus on 4 + 2 or endorsed or postgraduate supervision?

When STAP was initially designing a 2-day supervision training program, this issue of whether supervision of different pathways or different speciality areas should be trained separately, were some of the main considerations. To investigate the issue, we had extensive interviews with all of the Queensland Chairs of the nine specialisation areas to investigate whether a supervision training

workshop could provide effective training across a range of psychological specialties. There was considerable agreement regarding the content and process of supervision across specialties, thus suggesting that supervision has much in common regardless of specialty (O'Donovan, Slattery, Kavanagh and Dooley, 2008). Feedback from participants during the seven years of supervision training supported the decision to combine supervision training irrespective of speciality or pathway. However, we appreciate that there has been quite considerable changes in the demands of particularly the 4 + 2 supervision route, and that some of the content of this training may not be applicable directly to supervisors of either higher degree students or those on the endorsement supervision pathway. We thus recommend that there are different modules with content specific to each type of supervision (including 4 + 2, higher education, endorsement) in the pre-training, and supervisors complete components for every type of supervision they wish to be eligible for providing specific types of supervision. But we recommend that the face-face training component is encouraged to be open to all supervisors, irrespective of the type/s of supervisees intended to supervise, to ensure a diversity of experience and views in the training groups.

The 2-day workshop: We agree with the proposed competency-based approach, and also support most of the suggested competencies which presumably are for the 2-day workshop? The only competency which we are unclear as to why included is "Knowledge and understanding of the profession" as this overall competency is already part of the requirement for becoming a registered psychologists, and thus all participants who would be fully registered, should already be adequately competent in these areas.

Further, we suggest that the list thus far does not cover the full array of competencies necessary to be an effective supervisor. For example, some additional competencies / skills demonstrated to impact on effective supervision include: supervisor characteristics which predict effective supervision, understanding supervisee developmental needs and ability to adapt supervision to fit supervisee learning needs. It is thus recommended that potential training Providers indicate in their applications an understanding of the breadth of competencies required for effective supervisions and how they will include all of these in a training program.

Evaluation of Supervisors: Arguably the most important test of supervisory competency is a) demonstration of supervisory knowledge and ability, b) positive feedback from supervisees and c) evidence that supervision is actually safeguarding clients and hopefully improving outcome for clients. Although the latter issue is of particular significance, it is unlikely to be realistically evaluated within the process of the proposed supervisory training program. However, we would recommend that supervisory knowledge and skill, as well as supervisee feedback should be used to assess supervisory competency.

Observation of supervisor skills: We mostly support the various assessment methods proposed in the consultation paper (p. 14), however, we suggest that the assessment of supervisory performance should only be assessed by means of a video or DVD of an actual supervision session, and not direct observation. Not only may direct observation negatively impact on the experience and performance of the supervisor and the supervisee, but this approach also does not allow the evaluator to revise their opinion, and there is no record of the practice. This will be particularly problematic if the session did not meet minimal criteria to pass, as there could be no second opinion or evidence to provide feedback. In addition, self-reflection is an important tool in the development of supervisory competence, and we strongly recommend that supervisors must evaluate their own session and submit this evaluation as well. This will allow an extra learning experience for the supervisor that will be lost if they cannot observe their own practice. One of the main advances made by the Board is the insistence that supervision includes some recording of supervisee work, to allow supervisees' to observe their own practice and more meaningfully discuss with their supervisors – this opportunity should also be required of supervisors.

Supervisee feedback: There is no clear indication that the Board is intending to have supervisee views included as part of the evaluation of supervisors. We appreciate that this can in some cases be a sensitive issue, however, we would strongly advise that supervisee feedback is of considerable relevance in judging the effectiveness of supervisors. Further, feedback is of considerable importance in assisting supervisors to improve their supervision, and one of the main hallmarks of effective supervisors is that they consistently encourage open feedback from supervisees. It is thus strongly recommended that future Providers are required to address this issue as part of their tenders., suggesting how supervisee feedback could best be obtained so that the feedback is useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the supervisor and also meaningful to both the supervisor and supervisee.

In the consultation paper it states “supervisors who fall below acceptable standards will have their supervisor approval revoked” (p. 6). What is the process of determining this, what would it take to revoke etc. Would the person then have to re-do initial training and evaluation if they wanted to become accredited again?

We would recommend the setting a time-limit set between when supervisors did the training course and when they submit the evaluation component, thus linking recency of training with demonstration of supervisory competencies. Presumably, programs will be providing training in the areas of the knowledge and skills assessed, and thus there should be clear link between the training and the evaluation.

A process for managing assessments which fail to make the standards would need to be indicated by Providers and meet with approval.

Revision Workshop: We support the plan to have ongoing supervisory training in the form of 1-day Revision workshops. We would suggest that if the goals of these workshops are to provide revision and keeping supervisors informed of best practice, and also to maintain enthusiasm for supervision and able to discuss tricky cases, then consideration of more frequent workshops than every 5 years is suggested. In Queensland, revision (called “Refreshers”) workshops were set for every 3 years, and participants regularly commented that this timing was either just right, or could actually be more frequent with many participants requesting to do Refreshers within 2.5 years of completing initial training. The feedback received from the STAP attendees at Refresher workshops were consistently very positive, indicating that they found the opportunity to discuss supervision with fellow supervisors, reflect on more complex supervision issues, and access the most up to date information about supervision without the profession, invaluable.

If supervisors will engage in repeated Revision workshops, we suggest that Trainers could provide a suite of relevant workshops ranging in emphasis, that participants may choose from. Participants can then complete the set of different workshops over time as relevant to their developmental learning needs. We are curious as to whether attendance at non-Board, but supervisory specific workshops could get credit from the Board? Or workshops at conferences? Internationally supervision has become increasingly important, and so this could allow for diversity. We would not recommend this for the initial training regime, which serves the purpose of ensuring supervisors are knowledgeable and skilled in providing Board-specific supervision and there is a standardised assessment to check competence. However, we suggest that as Revision workshops should be advanced and diverse, the Board may consider accrediting a range of Providers who can ensure that the requirements of Revision workshops are met. We would also recommend that the Board creates an internet forum which supervisors could use to consult for supe-of-supe or exchange ideas/resources.

Requirements for Supervisors:

We support the Board's guidelines indicating that any psychologist who is providing supervision needs to have received training and demonstrated that they are competent by means of passing a thorough evaluation process. We also support the other requirements stipulated by the Board on p. 12 of the document. However, we would suggest consideration of the stipulation that a psychologist must be fully registered for at least 3 years before they can act as a principal supervisor and 2 years in a secondary supervisory role. One of the most common concerns raised about the future of Psychology is the risk of insufficient numbers of supervisors to train the growing workforce demand for psychologists.

Universities have been grappling for years with the problem of shortage of placements for training, and with the increased requirements for 4 + 2 supervision, there is likely to be a shortfall in this area as well.

The potential pool of available supervisors could be increased if fully registered psychologists could participate in supervisor training sooner, at least to become secondary supervisors. This suggestion would be irresponsible if there was a risk that psychologists who have been fully registered for less than two years were known to be less effective than those registered for longer. However, we are not aware of any evidence that indicates that there is a period of time between full registration and starting to supervise increases effectiveness as a practitioner, nor that it necessarily increases potential supervisory ability. The only evidence we are aware of is that supervision training improves supervisory practice. Thus, why not allow fully registered psychologists the opportunity to attend supervisors training when they choose to, and then judge their ability to supervise on evidence of whether they meet the necessary competencies?

Although the evidence does not support a predictable increase in practice competence over time, we do appreciate that experience may for many early career psychologists enhance their confidence, which is important for supervisors. However, individuals vary in this regard, and there may also be other advantages of early career supervisors. For example, many Universities provide some supervision training in postgraduate courses, and this assists in the preparation for supervision of early career psychologists. It is often frustrating for these individuals, who feel keen to participate in the profession by providing supervision, to have to wait for years before they can do further training. We would thus support some flexibility in the system which can allow for the potential supervisor to have input in deciding their own readiness. Supervision workshops are able to adapt to different levels of participant supervisory experience, and this variety reportedly increases the diversity and richness of learning.

Requirements for Training Providers:

We are assuming that the main goals in consideration to training programs are to ensure high quality training which will enhance the safeguarding of the community by enhancing the provision of effective supervision. The following points are made in light of these goals:

1. The consultation paper indicates that the Board would encourage a range of different programs providing supervision, e.g. it “envisions diversity in the number of approved programs, with some focusing on individual States or Territories, and others with a national focus”. We support diversity, but with diversity, caution the need to ensure standardisation / equivalence of programs if there are a number of training providers. In this regard, we suggest the Board consider the following points:

- We would encourage the Board to provide a clear governance structure of how they will monitor and evaluate each program.
 - That there is a probationary period for all providers in which they have to demonstrate at least participant satisfaction of training to be able to become fully accredited to continue with training. We suggest that the Board design / require the use of a standardised evaluation form for all providers to use so that outcomes can be compared. The results of different providers should be publically available, so that potential participants can make informed decisions of which programs they wish to do.
 - Presumably the content of the programs will be the same or very similar considering that the Board is suggesting that the programs are competency based and what these competencies should be. In this case, will the Board provide a training package? Who will own the IP to the training package?
2. The paper also indicates that the Board has differentiated between Metropolitan and Regional areas for training (p. 9). We would seek assurance that there is not a suggestion for different quality of training and content depending on areas – but that providers can indicate how they can provide equivalent training irrespective of where participants reside. This includes the potential that providers may suggest providing training online to regional areas. We argue caution with this, as although the preparatory training will be suited to online for all participants, we would argue that if the 2-day and Revision workshops are required as face-to-face, this should be the case for *all* participants. Presumably the main issue with providing training for regionally located supervisors is costs, both associated to possible workshop size and cost of travel for providers. This issue has been managed in Queensland, arguably representing much of the regional areas in Australia, by offering workshops in regional areas contingent on enough numbers to cover the additional costs. This may mean that workshops are not run as frequently in these areas as in metropolitan areas, but regular workshops were provided by STAP across Queensland. As a point of interest, many participants from regional areas chose to attend workshops in Metropolitan areas to fit in with other meetings etc they had organised.

Despite our view on the advantage of face to face workshops regardless of geography, we recognise that supervisors will increasingly need to be able to provide online and videolink (skype) supervision. Therefore training in such skills may logically be provided online or equivalent (e.g., videolink). Therefore trainers may need to be assessed for their capability to provide an online/videolink version of, for example, refresher training.

3. Trainer Qualifications: We support that the Board would require evidence of the effectiveness of Trainers. We would suggest that the Board use evidence such as:

- Participant satisfaction ratings from similar types of workshops
- Evidence of knowledge and skills change as a result of the trainer's work
- Direct observation of the Trainer's ability to run workshops (e.g. an interview where this is demonstrated; vignette of training etc)

The issue of Trainers from "cognate professions" requires further consideration. Much of the process and content of effective supervision is very similar across most disciplines. Thus, it is possible that trainers from other areas could provide excellent coverage of the generic aspects of supervision, and we would not preclude this as a possibility. However, considering that one of the competencies indicated as necessary for supervisory training is "knowledge and understanding of the profession", it is questionable how a non-psychologist would be able to train psychologists in this area. Further, we would not support Evaluators of the assessment components being non-psychologists, as a rich knowledge of psychological practice, ethical considerations and an understanding of the training of provisionally registered psychologists, is essential in accurate evaluation of supervisory practice. Given this, we would question whether it would be unnecessarily complex to evaluate the possibility of a non-psychologist for the role of trainer as well.

4. Size and Cost of workshops: The quality of training depends on a number of factors: the skill of the presenter, the richness of training materials, diversity of the methods used in training;, and of course, the degree of engagement by the participants. The larger the workshop, the cheaper the cost can be. However, the larger the group, the more difficult it may be encourage full participation and thus enhanced learning. One of the most consistent positive feedback on the STAP training has been the opportunity for group participation, with comments about how limiting group size made this possible (approx 24 – 28, and often smaller in rural areas). Although we are aware that effective workshops in general can have much larger numbers and still do effective training, we would recommend that the Board considers whether there is an optimal size for workshops and if so, should there be a limit for maximum size? Further, that this is monitored through participant feedback and if there is evidence that workshop size is negatively impacting on outcomes, group size is limited.
5. Training Methods: As there is evidence that effective training requires a range of different training methods, we would recommend that the Board when evaluating potential providers, requests details of what training methods will be included.
6. Risk of Dual Relationships: Will the Board allow organisations to run only their own training / evaluation 'in-house', and what are the risks with this in terms of dual-relationships?

7. Evaluators: In addition to the workshop Trainers needing to provide evidence of qualifications / competence, Evaluators should also provide such evidence. Evaluators would have to be competent psychologists of good standing, who have already passed an approved supervision training and evaluation program. They would require training in how to effectively evaluate materials and how to provide effective, corrective feedback. Evaluators will require clear guidelines as to how to mark assessments.
8. Providing outcome data to the Board annually: We assume that the Board will be assuming overall responsibility for the accountability of all training programs? Accountability will be essential to the good reputation and professional standing of the training programs. We suggest that there is a range of outcome data useful to evaluating a training program: a) supervisors satisfaction with training, b) evidence of training improving supervisory knowledge and skills, c) overall, increased competency in the delivery of supervision in psychology in Australia – thus requiring supervisee feedback.

In addition to evidence of competence of trainers, there also needs to be evidence of standardised and effective marking by evaluators of supervisor competencies. It is vital that the standard of evaluation is consistent and stringent enough to in fact assure a basic level of competence. Programs should be required to use very clearly defined marking criteria in the evaluations, and there would need to be a system of random checking for inter-rater reliability of evaluations. All courses would need to have the same level of difficulty of assessment, otherwise some supervisors may be tempted to take the “easier to pass” or cheaper to do (which is likely to correspond with less rigour and thus easier) options, with the risk being that many supervisors may gain approval when they don't actually meet minimum standards.

The overall process of evaluation would have to be proved completely ethical. For example, Providers could be require to indicate steps ensuring how they would manage possibility of dual relationships (i.e. that under no circumstances would the evaluator be in a dual relationship with the person they are evaluating to prevent any risk of bias in evaluation), confidentiality (what is the system for maintaining confidentiality about any records / information about participants); and the process of managing potential failed assessments, e.g. a process of double marking, re-submission rules etc.

A program which does not have at least some Participants failing evaluations would require close scrutiny, as it would indicate a lack of appropriate criteria and / or standards of evaluation. As stated in the consultancy paper, the central purpose of supervisor training and

evaluation programs is to safeguard the community. This value would not be upheld with programs where everyone can get through the process without appropriate scrutiny. Our point is that the evaluation process is as important as the training process, and the Board is advised to require very clear evidence of effectiveness of this from Providers.

We are curious as to whether the Board would approve for Providers to provide only training or only evaluation, thus whether these processes can be separated. Standardisation of evaluation is possibly even more important than standardisation of training, and thus having fewer Providers manage the assessment component will reduce the risk of disparate standards. However, potential disadvantages of separating the training and assessment processes may include: lack of connection between training and assessment, the training Providers not being able to provide information to assist participants in completing assessments.

9. Revoking Board-approved training status: We were pleased to see that the Board is considering mechanisms for ensuring that if there are any poor training programs, these could not continue. The main issue we can see is that the Board needs to ensure equivalence of standards of training and evaluation across all providers. The biggest risk that we can see to ensuring a safeguard for the community is if potential providers can ascertain which training is the easiest and least likely to carefully scrutinise competence. If some programs earn the reputation of having below par training which does not enhance knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for supervision, and / or as being “easy to pass” or “non-discriminating”; then the potential advantage of mandated supervisory training programs will be unmet.

We are curious as to the basis on which the Board would revoke training status. We presume a main reason would be complaints made by supervisors / supervisees about the training and outcomes? If so, how many complaints or what nature would it take? How quickly would the Board respond?

Tender Process:

There are a number of questions we have in regards to the process and choice of Providers:

- Will there only be one time period for tenders? Will new Providers be able to apply after the initial tender is set out?
- Will there be a limit to the number of programs approved by the Board? We ask this question in light of the presumed difficulty to ensure standardisation and effective service delivery the larger the number of Providers.
- Will the Board make the different Providers' details in regards to qualifications etc transparent to prospective participants?

- How will potential participants be notified of who successful Providers are and what services they provide?

Training of Supervisees:

On p. 9 there is an indication that there could be training provided for Supervisees. We would strongly support the addition of supervisee training, as effective supervision can only be enhanced if both supervisors and supervisees are familiar with issues such as: the respective responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees; the qualities of a good supervisory alliance, ethical practice in supervision, how to manage difficulties in supervision, providing feedback. Supervisees are often unclear about what to expect from supervision, and thus do not benefit fully from the experience. More concerning, without clarity of what “good enough” supervision is, many supervisees have suffered through poor experiences, not knowing that it was not best practice and thus did not feel confident to address issues. Many Universities already do some training of supervisees, which we strongly support. We would recommend that the Board ask for tenders from potential Providers for the training of supervisees.

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Supervision Training and Accreditation Program (STAP) is a program endorsed by the Board during the interim period to provide supervision training and evaluation of supervision skills. STAP has been operating since 2004 and over 1500 supervisors have attended the 2-day supervision training and Refreshers workshops.