13 April 2010

Associate Professor Brin Grenyer
Chair, Psychology Board of Australia

RE: your invitation to comment on the proposed guidelines for the "4+2" pathway under the PBA

Dear Professor Grenyer,

The Cairnmillar Institute has been involved in the training and education of provisional psychologists under the "4+2" pathway in Victoria over many years, and we currently have a large number provisional psychologists under supervision in Victoria.

We would like to provide some feedback regarding the suggested new guidelines for provisional psychologists under the "4+2" system. Much of what we wish to express concerns the paperwork that will be required and the processes of administering it. Our experiences in the current Victorian system, which appears to be the basis of much of the proposed PBA system, have lead to these considerations.

First, we feel it would be beneficial to all involved parties to have required paperwork structured in such a way as to make the task of completing it both educative and time-efficient, and the processing of it efficient and satisfactory for all. Specifically, we refer to the following areas:

- **Future-oriented questions in paperwork** (such as the supervision plan ,P4, under the current Victorian system) seem to have advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that the supervisor and supervisee are encouraged to think through how the supervisee's circumstances will allow for all competencies to be met by the end of the program. Disadvantages are that the content of what is written becomes hypothetical and somewhat vague, as many future factors remain unclear, and the applicant often has little to say about competencies they do not yet possess. Collapsing of certain categories in forms and simplifying certain questions would help to keep the advantages and reduce disadvantages.

- **Repeating the same question in numerous fields.** (For example, in the current Victorian supervision plan, asking for each of the core competencies - and their sub-competencies - how supervision and professional development will contribute to them). This has the advantage of being thorough, but the disadvantage of redundancy. Allowing for the collapsing of categories would again lead to an optimal outcome.

- **Assessments of individual competencies** in progress reports. This seems to fill an important gap in allowing for more direct assessment of the supervisee. We applaud many of the changes made in this form by the current Victorian Board. However, some issues now arise in regards to this assessment. These are:

  - We see a need for the clarification of the supervisor's role in providing education in certain areas, such as "Knowledge of the Discipline". For example, what exactly is meant when the supervisor ticks that they have "addressed" the field of "Social Psychology"? It is enough to discuss social psychological topics when they arise in relation to case work? Does recommending readings suffice? How much of the entire field of Social Psychology would need to be covered? Only those more relevant to work with clients? Clarification in these areas would be useful.

  - How is it envisioned that the supervisor will keep track of the supervisee's progress in so many different areas (in terms of what is covered and in terms of their level of competence)? Should specific records be kept for each supervisee? These would have to be very detailed, yet quite subjective, records. Is it expected that the supervisor make these assessments from memory? Again, clarification here would be useful.

Given that assessment of the provisional psychologist has obvious benefits, we would be in favour of an assessment procedure by which a separate supervisor (perhaps a recognized "assessing" supervisor) officially assesses the (oral or written) work of supervisees they are not personally supervising according to clear guidelines. This would solve the above problems. However, we understand that the recently approved national registration legislation may not allow for such a system.

- **Speed of processing.** We consider it highly desirable to introduce a system in which the processing of paperwork (supervision plans, progress reports, transition reports etc.) is as swift as possible. Delays in processing paperwork may unnecessarily hold up provisional psychologists' progression. The above suggestions could potentially lead to reducing the time needed to process applications. In addition, certain Board administrators could be given authority to approve a range of minor amendments that have been requested, rather than delaying a provisional psychologist until the next board meeting.

Furthermore, we would like put forward some comments on matters unrelated to paperwork:

- We would welcome a system in which feedback mechanisms are available to both provisional psychologists and supervisors, in order to improve the system while it is running. This would also ensure the maintenance of good relations between supervisors and the Board.

- It is unclear to us how the submitted case studies will be assessed. We would consider it appropriate to have at least 2 independent reviews of the case studies. Ideally, we would we would consider it beneficial to have a peer review system, whereby identified reviewers (perhaps certain supervisors) who are competent in a particular area of practice would review the case studies. Having only one reviewer, who may not be competent in a particular area of practice, would seem unsatisfactory.

- In order to ensure that ethical and professional practice issues are dealt with in the most didactically efficacious way, we would be in favour of making use of group supervision. Setting aside a certain number of group sessions specifically for the presentation of ethical dilemmas would seem to make good use of small group effects, which evidence supports the use of (e.g. Mattick & Bligh, 2006). To make such a system possible and more flexible, group supervision should able to be carried out by any Board-approved supervisor, not only a primary or secondary supervisor.

We thank you for giving us this opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed guidelines and hope that you find them useful. We wish you the best of success in implementing the new system.

Dr. Russell Deighton
Head of School

Reference
Mattick, K & Bligh, J (2006). Teaching and assessing medical ethics: where are we now? *Journal of Medical Ethics*. March; 32(3): 181–185.

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