

Directors of University-Based Organisational Psychology Programs Committee

Comments on the Consultation Paper on Registration and Standards issued by the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA), 27 October, 2009

This response is restricted primarily to a consideration of Option 3 and its implications from the perspective of Directors of Organisational Psychology Programs within Universities. In summary, we consider the adoption of Option 3 particularly problematic, since it will inevitably reduce the number of specialist psychologists available within Australia and will create unnecessary impediments to educational opportunities and professional accreditation.

1. Specialisations

The Committee endorses the transition towards the recognition of specializations within the registration framework, and considers it appropriate to use course nomenclatures as a means of defining specialties.

2. Four + Two

The Committee endorses the phasing out of the 4 + 2 model of registration and recognizes that this currently falls below international standards.

3. Doctor of Psychology

The committee is concerned about the specification of the Doctor of Psychology as the minimum requirement for specialist registration. These concerns are based primarily around resourcing these Programs and a possible reduction in entry requirements as has been experienced in jurisdictions such as the United States (Baker, McFall, & Shohan. 2009).

3.1 Doctor of Psychology - Funding

There appears to be an assumption amongst members of the Board that the DPsych is eligible for funding under the Research Training Scheme. According to the APAC guidelines (5.4), the DPsych requires a thesis or dissertation of one calendar year representing 33% of the course requirements. This falls markedly below the 66% required for RTS funding. Furthermore, under the guidelines of the Research Training Scheme (2.1.2), only 1/3 of the course may be completed by coursework alone. However, APAC requires that courses comprise a minimum of 40% coursework as part of a Professional Doctorate.

Given these constraints, resourcing the Doctor of Psychology as the base specialist degree will have significant implications for universities insofar as it represents additional costs in both staffing and infrastructure. Given that RTS funding is not available, these costs must be passed to students, thereby increasing the base cost of a specialist degree by at least one third. Inevitably, there will be restrictions placed on the numbers of students admitted to doctoral degrees as a means of managing the demands of teaching and placement.

Past experience suggests that significant increases in the costs of education will also encourage students to undertake part-time, rather than full-time studies. In the case of specialist psychological services, the completion of degrees part-time is likely to further reduce the availability of specialist

psychologists within the community. If it is the intention of the new standards to increase, rather than reduce our future workforces, then it seems unlikely that the proposed changes will meet this objective.

3.2 Doctor of Philosophy - Entry Requirements

The academic entry requirements for a Doctorate are necessarily more stringent than the entry requirements for Masters Programs. A doctoral degree is normally reserved for those students who demonstrate exceptional academic achievement, such as a first-class Honours degree. If universities continue to maintain this standard for entry into doctoral degrees, the potential pool of applicants for specialist degrees will be significantly constrained. Further, the intensity of the resources required may necessitate a reduction in student places available in specialist programs.

With resourcing constraints, many capable students (including those with first-class Honours and high second class division 1 degrees) will be unable to seek specialist registration due to limited university places. Furthermore, those students considering undergraduate degree courses with the intention of becoming specialists may be discouraged by the likelihood of success and select university courses outside of Psychology (e.g. Medicine, Commerce, etc.) or undertake the 4 + 2 supervision route. By selecting our Programs, they run the risk of never achieving their goal of working in their area of keenest interest.

Alternatively, universities may reduce the requirements for entry into DPsych as has occurred in the United States (Baker et al., 2009), thereby reducing the quality of practitioners potentially below that provided under existing Masters programs, particularly given the constraints on resources.

3.2.1 Doctorate of Psychology – Evidence to support superior training option

While it is recognized that the preference for Option 3 is largely in response to a recognition for equivalency of specialist international qualifications, psychological practice in the United States has been the subject of a critique recently, in which the authors comment on the lack of scientific rigour in the application of much psychological practice (Baker, McFall, & Shohan. 2009). Therefore, simply increasing the number of years of training as is proposed under the DPsych model does not necessarily increase the quality of specialist psychological practice. More research evidence needs to be provided that the Doctorate Programs will provide superior practitioners to those produced by Masters Programs.

4 PhD Pathway

The requirement for PhD candidates to complete a further two years of coursework is confusing, given that, under the proposed model, no two-year specialist coursework programs will be available. Therefore, the coursework requirements for PhD graduates need to be made clearer

5. Support for Specialist Masters Training

We believe that the current Masters programs meet all the coursework, practicum and research requirements necessary for specialist registration. In addition, it provides an opportunity for high quality supervision consistent with aspirations of the PBA and APAC.

The Board presents three options for implementation. The Board rejects Option 1 - The WA Model (requiring Masters level training) in favour of Option 3 requiring Doctoral training. If there are

demonstrated limitations in the WA model, these need to be made clear. The consultation paper highlights only the benefits of such a program:

“After 15 years of specialist registration in Western Australia there exists no evidence of unreasonable negative impact on workforce or workforce flexibility” (p.20, under the heading “The development of the proposal takes into account the COAG principles for best practice regulation”).

It is not clear to whether the inclination towards Option 3 reflects concern as to the skills and competencies associated with existing specialist psychologists. If there is some concern, one might expect evidence to be available to support an increase in both the coursework and the competencies necessary for specialist registration. However, to date, organizational psychology programs, like other specialist degrees, are oriented towards the development of competencies amongst students. To this end, they are audited, and the evidence so far suggests that students are well prepared for entry into the workforce as organisational psychologists. Evidence needs to be provided if this is not the case.

References

Baker, T.B., McFall, R.M., & Shoham, V. (2009). Current status and future prospects of clinical psychology: Toward a scientifically principled approach to mental and behavioral health care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 9, 67-103.

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