



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpu Matai Hinengaro o Aotearoa

Consultation on an Approach to Continuing Competence Programmes

Feedback from New Zealand Psychological Society To the Psychologists Board October 2007

Consultation questions from the feedback form attached to the consultation document

We urge the Board to ensure that cultural competence is always recognised as a central aspect of competence. That is not true of the “What is Competence?” statement in the discussion document. The non-directive sentence “The Board has also published minimum standards of cultural competence” is significantly weaker than the corresponding statement in the *Core Competencies* document which reads:

N.B.: The Board’s *Cultural Competencies* document underpins each of these competencies and should be read in conjunction with them.

We recommend that the latter statement should be retained or strengthened in Board discussions of competence.

**1. (a) The importance of life long learning to maintain professional competence
AGREE**

**(b) The individual psychologist is the best judge of their own professional needs
DISAGREE**

This statement flies in the face of many of the tenets of core competencies, and indeed the Code of Ethics, regarding the recognised need for psychologists to function within a wider community. This community includes their professional peers, their clients and society as a whole. All are stakeholders in psychologists’ professional competence and therefore to some degree have a contribution to make in determining part of what would constitute their professional needs. There is for instance, a requirement for psychologists’ practice to be supervised: this requirement itself implies the need for external reference for professional practice. The HPCA Act also describes processes to identify psychologists’ professional needs where it has been demonstrated that the individual has been unsuccessful in so doing. A culture of self-responsibility does not mean that individuals have the capacity to make sole decisions about their own needs.

A related issue is the nature of supervision for psychologists. The traditional model of individual oversight or consultation about specific activities does not map well on to some of the diverse activities legitimately conducted by psychologists, for instance, by psychologists working with organisations or diffuse groups. There also needs to be recognition of the value of the psychologists' "community of practice" as defined by Etienne Wenger, i.e. that members of professional communities acquire new learning through their interaction with other members. This influence or relatively informal and unstructured activity in turn needs to be identified by psychologists as an important part of their continuing professional development. They therefore need to capture this in the formal reporting process, in maintaining their records for CCP.

(c) Continued competence programmes should allow for a wide range of possible components

AGREE

Programmes need to be based on the common ground of the Core Competencies, but allow for different emphases depending on the context of the particular psychologist's practice and/or needs. CCP must demonstrate responsiveness to the progression of psychologists' needs through their professional development.

(d) Culture of self-responsible and self-determining professionals

AGREE

As for 2 (b), this self responsibility and self determination are achieved by psychologists in the context of reference to their professional peers and the wider community, including the scientific community.

(e) Assurance to public requires transparency and accountability

AGREE

However, the achievement of these admirable goals requires considerable thought. The nature of transparency has to be weighed against considerations such as confidentiality and natural justice. Accountability to whom, through what mechanisms, requires definition.

2. Should participation in the CCP be mandatory for all psychologists?

AGREE

As the consultation document states, it is a requirement of psychologists that they attest to their standard of competence in order to continue to practise. The CCP provides one mechanism to do this. However, there are already competency programmes in place for some groups of professional psychologists within New Zealand, for instance, the Continuing Professional Development Programme of the Institute of Clinical Psychology. Some workplaces may well have or develop similar models for their own appraisal, credentialing or professional development processes. It would be cumbersome for psychologists to have to collate material or collect information to meet slightly different criteria simultaneously for each of these requirements. Therefore, whilst participation in some form of CCP is mandatory, this could allow for accreditation of a different format of CCP such as the above examples.

Participation in a CCP is a complex skill and in order for this to work well, psychologists will need support, training and feedback about engaging in this process. The Board therefore has a responsibility to provide this support.

3. Do you agree with the flexible approach proposed, as opposed to a more prescriptive approach?

AGREE

This agreement occurs within the provisos of 1(c).

4. Do you agree with the use of auditing?

AGREE

There is no point in having a mandatory process unless it is monitored. However, there are some problems with the model as described. The 20 day timeframe for submission of a plan and portfolio may create problems if the psychologist is on leave and does not get this notice in time. Suspension would be a harsh penalty for inadvertent noncompliance. In the initial stages of the programme, it would be appropriate for auditing to focus much more on plans rather than portfolios, providing a formative assessment process from which members of the profession could benefit. It would be helpful to provide a range of examples of plans to demonstrate possible approaches.

Provision could be made for other forms of auditing such as by peers, as an adjunct to a formal Board audit.

Raymond Nairn
President