

## Public consultation: Draft competencies for general registration

The Psychology Board of Australia is inviting comments on the *Draft professional competencies for psychologists*. The specific questions the Board is seeking feedback on are listed below. All questions are optional and you are welcome to respond to as many as are relevant or that you have a view on.

Please submit your feedback on this submission template by email to: [psychconsultation@ahpra.gov.au](mailto:psychconsultation@ahpra.gov.au) by close of business **Tuesday 11 April 2023**.

<b>Preferred option</b>
<b>1. Are you in support of updating the professional competencies for general registration? Please provide a rationale for your view.</b>
Your answer: Yes.
<b>Structure of the updated competencies</b>
<b>2. Do you agree with approach to create a single document that lists all the professional competencies in one place?</b>
Your answer: Yes.
<b>3. The term 'threshold professional competency' has been introduced to describe the minimum professional competency necessary to practise safely and effectively as a registered psychologist in Australia. Do the Draft professional competencies sufficiently describe the threshold level of professional competency required to safely practise as a psychologist in a range of contexts and situations?</b>
Your answer: Yes although see responses below re Competency 3 (Exercises professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care).
<b>4. We have improved our approach to drafting the competencies to better align with international psychology regulators, to emphasise that the competencies are interconnected (holistic approach) and to improve how we write the competencies (e.g. using action verbs). Do you agree with the updated drafting approach?</b>
Your answer: Yes.

5. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists have been written at a high level. This aims to provide both sufficient information for clarity and direction, but also be flexible enough to be relevant to the diverse contexts where psychologists train and work. Did we get the balance right? Please provide a rationale for your view.

Your answer: Yes, except for Competency 3 (Exercises professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care). The term “deliberate practice” appears to be a very specific type of professional development.

6. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists include a preamble (p. 3-10) and definition section (p. 16-19). Do you support this addition? Is the content clear, relevant and complete?

Your answer: Yes. These are very helpful.

7. Is the language and structure of the Draft professional competencies for psychologists helpful, clear, relevant and workable? Are there any potential unintended consequences of the current wording?

Your answer: Yes, except for “deliberate practice” under Competency 3.

#### Organisation of the updated competencies

8. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists propose to reorganise the eight core competencies.

Are you in support of combining the current *Knowledge of the discipline* (Competency 1), and *Research and evaluation* (Competency 5) into a new competency: *Applies scientific knowledge of psychology to inform safe and effective practice* (updated Competency 1)?

Your answer: Yes.

9. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists propose to place an intentional focus on professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care (updated Competency 3). Do you support this proposal? Please explain why.

Your answer: Not supportive of “deliberate practice” although supportive of “reflexivity” and “self-care”.

The Board has adopted the definition of "deliberate practice" in line with K Anders Ericcson’s work, which is a very specific approach to professional development. The use of this specific term might be too restrictive and move away from the high level and holistic approach of the competencies.

In the Board’s Public Consultation paper (under point 37) it is stated that “the Guidelines for continuing professional development encourage deliberate practice when developing a CPD learning plan”. Although the spirit of active professional development through feedback from others is captured in the Guidelines, the term “deliberate practice” is not found in the Guidelines document and is not commonly used in our community of psychologists.

While deliberate practice is a good and promising approach, the evidence-base for this form of professional development in the context of psychological practice is still in its development phase.

Based on my experience providing training in deliberate practice to provisional and registered psychologists, there is currently minimal awareness of this concept in our community. There is even lesser number of psychologists actively engaging in deliberate practice due to its recent introduction and its onerous nature.

Deliberate practice should be considered aspirational for psychologists but it is not (yet) suited to be included as a threshold competency.

Some possible revisions for the Board to consider include:

- Using the broader term “continuous professional development” instead of “deliberate practice”.
- Prioritising “supervision” or “peer consultation” over “deliberate practice” if the Board is considering including a specific form of professional development in the competencies.
- Removing “deliberate practice” from the list of competencies.
- Including “deliberate practice” in the Guideline for Continuing Professional Development document but not in the list of threshold competencies.

**10. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists include amended and expanded core competencies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety (updated Competency 7).**

**Is there any content that needs to be clarified, added, amended or removed? Please provide details.**

Your answer: All good and it’s great to see the emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety.

11. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists include an expanded core competency on working with people from diverse groups, including demonstrating cultural responsiveness (updated Competency 8).

Is there any content that needs to be clarified, added, amended or removed? Please provide details.

Your answer: All good.

#### Competencies and their descriptors

12. The Draft professional competencies for psychologists outline eight updated core competencies:

Competency 1: Applies scientific knowledge of psychology to inform safe and effective practice

Competency 2: Practices ethically and professionally

Competency 3: Exercises professional self-reflection and deliberate practice

Competency 4: Conducts psychological assessments

Competency 5: Conducts psychological interventions

Competency 6: Communicates and relates to others effectively and appropriately

Competency 7: Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, families and communities

Competency 8: Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working with people from diverse groups.

Do you suggest any changes to the eight core competencies and their descriptors? What would you like to see changed?

Your answer: Re Competency 3 (see above). All other Competencies look good.

#### Outcome of implementing the updated competencies

13. We propose that an advanced copy of the professional competencies for psychologists would be published when approved, but not take effect until a later date. The estimated date of effect will be 1 December 2024. This coincides with the annual renewal date for general registration to make it easier for psychologists to plan their CPD and for stakeholders to prepare to meet the updated competencies.

Are you in support of this transition and implementation plan?

Your answer: Yes.

14. We have recommended changes to the *Provisional and General Registration standards* and the *Guidelines for the 4+2 internship program* to remove reference to the current core competencies for general registration and replace with the updated competencies (see Attachments F, G, and H). Are you in support of these changes?

Your answer: Yes.

15. The Board proposes a transition process and timeframe for updating board documents with the new competencies including the:

- *Guidelines for the 5+1 internship program* (separate consultation in 2023)
- *Guidelines for the National Psychology Exam, and National psychology exam curriculum* (separate consultation in 2023/2024).

Are there any comments you have on the proposed consultation plan and transition timeframes?

Your answer: No comments. All good.

16. Are there specific impacts for practitioners, higher degree providers, employers, clients/consumers, governments or other stakeholders that we should be aware of, if the Draft professional competencies for psychologists were to be adopted? Please consider both positive impacts and any potential negative or unintended effects in your answer.

Your answer: The new list of competencies provide greater clarity around the required competencies of Psychologists within the Australian context which is a good thing. Higher degree providers would require some time to re-align some of the course content with this new list although this is not anticipated to be a significant undertaking given the alignment of the proposed Competencies with current APAC requirements (except for Competency 3 – requirement for deliberate practice which can be time consuming to develop and implement in some training settings).

17. Would the proposed changes to the Draft professional competencies for psychologists result in any potential negative or unintended effects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or other priority groups in the community? If so, please describe them.

Your answer: Not that I can see.

**18. Would the proposed changes to the Draft professional competencies for psychologists result in any adverse cost implications for practitioners, patients/clients/consumers or other stakeholders? If yes, please describe.**

Your answer: Yes, potentially with the inclusion of deliberate practice as a specific requirement given the time consuming and onerous nature of deliberate practice implemented as per the Board's definition of the term.

**Other**

**19. Do you have any other feedback or comments about the Draft professional competencies for psychologists?**

Your answer: Overall a very good and positive change with the draft professional competencies. As much as I'm in favour of deliberate practice, I do hope that the Board reconsiders its inclusion in the list of threshold competencies.