

## **Psychology Board of Australian consultation - updating the competencies for general registration**

The Department of Education (Department) employs the largest number of psychologists in Western Australia and has a long and proud history of training provisionally registered psychologists to general registration. As at 4 April 2023, 140 of its workforce of 579 psychologists held provisional registration and were at varying stages of completing internship programs.

**Option 2 - 'Adopt the Draft professional competencies for psychologists'** is the Department's preferred option.

**1. *Are you in support of updating the professional competencies for general registration? Please provide a rationale for your view.***

Yes.

The draft competencies:

- reflect the contemporary practices of school psychologists, working across a variety of educational settings within the Department;
- reflect the need for school psychologists to demonstrate competencies, within the diverse settings in which they work; and
- align with the Department's strategic direction for provision of culturally safe and appropriate services, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families.

The inclusion of professional reflection, deliberate practice and self-care as a new competency is welcomed and aligns with the Department's existing performance management and development processes for school psychologists.

The Board's revised definition of 'client' includes individuals, groups, organisations and communities, which aligns with the Department's model of school psychology service delivery.

**2. *Do you agree with approach to create a single document that lists all the professional competencies in one place?***

Yes.

**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?***

Yes.

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?***

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.***

Yes.

- The higher-level increases clarity and direction for practitioners but also increases clarity for members of the public to better understand what is expected from psychological services.
- The draft competencies are clear in expectations and flexible enough to be applicable/assessed in the variety of contexts in which the Department employs psychologists.
- The proposed changes will better reflect the work of psychologists in schools which involves direct, indirect and whole school/systems level work.

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?***

Yes.

7. ***Is the language and structure of the Draft professional competencies for psychologists helpful, clear, relevant, and workable?***

Yes.

***Are there any potential unintended consequences of the current wording?***

No.

**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)?**

Yes:

- The updating of Competency 1 will allow psychologists to demonstrate their competency within their current roles and workplaces.
- No competency is 'stand alone' in the practice of psychology and the proposed updated Competency 1 reflects that.
- The emphasis on application of the knowledge rather than just possessing the knowledge is welcomed.

**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.**

Yes.

The draft competencies draw an explicit link between professional reflection, deliberate practice and self-care and the delivery of competent and safe psychology services.

**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.**

Updated Competency 7 is clear.

- It is important and timely to see cultural responsiveness reflected across the competency areas.
- The Department supports the embedding of culturally safe practices across all competencies, replacing the one competency addressing 'diverse groups' in previous document.
- The updated Competency aligns well with the Department's *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*.

**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.**

No.

**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?***

No.

**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?***

Yes.

The proposed timeline will be sufficient for the Department's school psychologists to engage in self-reflection and access relevant professional learning. The Department is well-prepared to meet the Board's proposed timeline.

**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?**

No.

- The Department recommends that psychologists completing the 4 + 2 internship pathway should remain with their current supervision plan until reapplication for provisional registration (at the end of three years, if required). This would be a natural point in time for provisional psychologists and their supervisors to develop a new learning and supervision plan in line with the proposed updated Competencies. This approach would minimise the disruption to supervision plans already in place.
- New competencies should apply for all those seeking registration after 1 December 2024.

**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?**

No.

**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.**

- The Department welcomes improved processes for auditing psychologists' adherence to the proposed new competencies.
- As the largest employer of psychologists in Western Australia, the Department is well-placed to plan and implement relevant professional learning to meet the needs of its workforce.
- The draft core competencies may impact on small organisations and/or sole practitioners working in private practice due to a lack of available and affordable professional learning around cultural responsiveness and culturally appropriate practice. There is a chance this may create a division within the profession, with others at risk of being left behind.
- There needs to be further consideration of the Board's role in this area, including ensuring that appropriate professional learning is available to all psychologists, regardless of the context they work in.

**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.**

Possibly, and the comments in response to question 16 are applicable.

The Board should consider implementing broader, culturally safe mechanisms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, so that issues related to psychologists' cultural competency can be raised and addressed.

**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.**

Yes.

- There will be a cost to upskill Board approved supervisors to ensure they are providing appropriate supervision for provisionally registered psychologist in line with the proposed new competencies.

- There will be cost of providing professional learning to all psychologists in culturally appropriate and safe practises.
- The Department considers these costs a wise investment into the profession and its psychology workforce.

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

Yes.

The proposed draft competencies are a particularly good proactive step by the Board to ensure psychologists are embedding culturally safe and appropriate practices in their work. The Department welcomes the stipulation that culturally responsive service provision is a requirement of all psychologists. The need for a cultural shift in the profession cannot be passive and the Board may wish to have formal mechanisms in place to ensure that all psychologists are meeting the requirements of the updated competencies. The Board should investigate provision of a prescribed/mandated professional learning program in response to updated core competencies. Such a program should be readily available; easily accessible (ideally online) and available at low or no cost to the entire psychology profession.