

Applied psychologists – Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

Consultation document

Introduction

The standards of education and training are the standards that an education and training programme must meet before we can approve it as leading to registration. We are seeking the views of our stakeholders on an addition to these standards, in preparation for the likely regulation of applied psychologists.

About us

We are the Health Professions Council. We are a health regulator, and our job is to protect the health and wellbeing of people who use the services of the health professionals registered with us.

When we say health professional, we mean a person whose work is concerned with improving and promoting the health and wellbeing of their service users in a variety of different ways and in a variety of different settings.

To protect the public, we set standards that health professionals must meet. Our standards cover health professionals' education and training, behaviour, professional skills, and their health. We publish a register of health professionals who meet our standards.

Health professionals on our register are called 'registrants'. If registrants do not meet our standards, we can take action against them which may include removing them from the Register so that they can no longer practise.

Regulation of applied psychologists

In February 2007, the government published a white paper on the future of regulation, 'Trust, Assurance and Safety – The Regulation of Health Professionals in the 21st Century'.

The white paper said:

'The government is planning to introduce statutory regulation for applied psychologists...' (p. 81)

'Psychologists...will be regulated by the Health Professions Council' (p.85)

The white paper also indicated that psychotherapists, counsellors and other psychological therapists would be priorities for future regulation.

Unless otherwise dictated by a change in government policy, the applied psychology disciplines to be regulated are likely to be the same as those identified in the Department of Health consultation document: 'Applied

Psychology: Enhancing public protection: Proposals for the statutory regulation of applied psychologists' (March 2005).

They are as follows:

- Clinical psychologists
- Counselling psychologists
- Educational psychologists
- Forensic psychologists
- Health psychologists
- Occupational psychologists
- Sport and Exercise psychologists

It should be noted that although the white paper has indicated that applied psychologists should be regulated by HPC, the necessary legislation to allow this to happen has yet to be passed. However, we believe that it is important to start this work at an early stage, to allow sufficient time to consider our proposals. In particular, this allows time for a full three month public consultation.

About the standards of education and training

The standards of education and training are standards which apply to education and training programmes which lead to eligibility for registration.

Our Education - Approvals and Monitoring Department is responsible for conducting approvals visits of education and training providers to ensure that their programmes meet our standards.

We assess programmes against our standards of education and training which cover such areas as admissions, assessment standards and practice placements. A programme which meets the standards of education and training will also allow a student who successfully completes that programme to meet the standards of proficiency. These are the standards we publish for the safe and effective practice of each profession we regulate.

Once a programme is approved, a graduate from that programme is eligible to apply for registration. We grant open-ended approval, subject to ongoing checks via our monitoring and major/ minor change processes.

When we regulate a new profession, we would normally approve the education and training programmes which lead to existing registration. We would then develop appropriate arrangements to visit or monitor programmes over a period of time to make sure that meet our standards. We would inform education and training providers about these arrangements.

You can find out more information about our role in education by visiting our website: www.hpc-uk.org/education/

SET 1: Threshold level of qualification for entry to the Register

Standard one of the standards of education and training ('SET 1') sets out the threshold level of entry to the Register in the professions we regulate. This is articulated as a threshold academic level. Every time we open a new part of the Register, we need to determine the threshold level of qualification for entry for the new profession, following consultation, and add this to the standards.

The standard currently reads:

1.1 The Council normally expects that the **threshold** entry routes to the Register will be the following:

1.1.1 Bachelor degree with honours for the following professions:

- chiropody or podiatry;
- dietetics;
- occupational therapy;
- orthoptics;
- physiotherapy;
- prosthetics and orthotics;
- radiography;
- speech and language therapy;
- biomedical science (with the Certificate of Competence awarded by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS), or equivalent if appropriate); and

1.1.2 Masters degree for the arts therapies.

1.1.3 Masters degree for the clinical sciences (with the award of the Association of Clinical Scientists' Certificate of Attainment, or equivalent).

1.1.4 Equivalent to Certificate of Higher Education for paramedics.

1.1.5 Diploma of Higher Education in Operating Department Practice for Operating Department Practitioners.

We need to set the threshold level at the level necessary for people who successfully complete an education and training programme to meet all of the standards of proficiency.

In setting the threshold level of qualification for entry, the Council is setting the threshold academic level of qualification which it would normally accept for the purposes of an approved programme which leads to registration. As the threshold is the 'minimum', programmes above the threshold academic level may be approved.

The threshold level might change over time to reflect changes in the delivery of education and training. This has happened in a number of the existing professions we regulate – as professions have developed the threshold academic level has increased. Any change in the threshold academic level is one that is normally led by the profession and/or by education providers and employers and which occurs over time. At an appropriate time, consideration might be given to changing SET 1, having regard to the level at which the majority of education and training is delivered.

Our primary consideration in approving a programme, whether at or substantially above the threshold, is that the programme meets the standards of education and training and will allow students to meet the standards of proficiency on completion.

Standards of proficiency

We are consulting on an appropriate threshold level alongside a consultation on draft standards of proficiency for applied psychologists.

The standards of proficiency are the threshold standards for safe and effective practice in each of the professions that we regulate. Although we are consulting separately, the results of the standards of proficiency consultation will feed into our analysis of the results of this consultation.

Routes of entry to the Register

The threshold academic level of qualification for entry to the Register applies to pre-registration education and training programmes seeking approval rather than to individuals. Therefore, it would not affect individuals who might have followed education and training programmes delivered at levels below the threshold in the past.

When we regulate a new profession, all those whose names appear on the relevant voluntary register would normally transfer to the HPC Register. There are then three routes open to registration:

- **UK approved course:** Our Education and Training Committee would normally approve those programmes which have led to membership of the voluntary register. This means that any individual who could have been a member of the voluntary register on the date of the transfer, but was not (for example, their membership had lapsed) would be able to apply to us for registration via the UK-approved course route.
- **Grandparenting:** Whenever we regulate a new profession, and protect a title, there will be a 'grandparenting' period. The length of the grandparenting period is defined by law, and has previously been two years. The 'grandparenting window' allows people who have previously been practising the profession, but who could not become voluntarily registered, to apply for registration, provided that they can meet certain criteria. Applications are assessed on an individual basis by registration assessors, who are appropriately qualified members of the profession. After the grandparenting period has closed, the only way to become registered for UK-trained individuals is to complete an approved programme.
- **International route:** Applicants who have trained outside the United Kingdom can apply to us via our international route.

You can find out more about the routes to registration and about what happens when a new profession becomes regulated, by visiting our website.

About the consultation

We are seeking the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including professional bodies and associations and education providers, on an appropriate threshold level for applied psychologists.

Our considerations in setting the threshold level include taking into account:

- the academic level / academic awards of existing entry routes which lead to chartered status with the British Psychological Society (BPS); and
- any variation in entry routes between the home countries.

We recognise that setting the threshold level can be a sensitive area in which there are often a variety of strongly held views. We are keen to hear the views of all those with an interest in this area before we make a final decision, so we make no recommendations about the threshold level in this document.

However, we felt that it might be useful to provide two examples in order to illustrate how the threshold level functions. In the first example, a level is set which is applicable to the whole of the applied psychologists part of the Register (i.e. to all disciplines); in the second a level is set which is specific to each discipline.

- Threshold set for the whole part of the Register. For example, with the following wording:
'Masters degree for applied psychology or equivalent (with further training and experience, as appropriate)'
 - This would recognise that a masters award forms part of the education and training routes in a number of disciplines.
 - This would recognise that additional training/ supervised practice is necessary to become registered.
 - Qualifications at academic awards above the threshold could still be approved.
- Threshold set for each specific discipline. For example: the threshold level for clinical psychology might be set at a doctorate.
 - This would mean that a threshold would be set specific to the education and training routes of each discipline rather than to the whole part of the Register.
 - Qualifications at academic awards above the threshold for the discipline could still be approved.

The examples are provided for illustrative purposes only. They are not intended as an exhaustive list of the possible options.

Your responses

We would welcome your comments on an appropriate threshold level of qualification for entry to the applied psychologists register.

We would like to invite any individual or organisation with an interest in these issues to respond to this consultation. As we are making no recommendations in this document, we are not asking any specific consultation questions. However, if you do suggest a threshold level we would be particularly interested to learn of your rationale behind this, in particular how this level is linked to safe and effective practice and public safety. This is because, as a regulator, we have to ensure that our standards are set at the level necessary to protect members of the public.

The consultation will run until **Friday 8 February 2008** and further copies of the document will be available on our website to download.

If you would like to respond to this consultation, please send your response to:

Applied psychologists SET 1 consultation
Policy and Standards Department
Health Professions Council
Park House
184 Kennington Park Road
London
SE11 4BU

Email: policy@hpc-uk.org

Website: www.hpc-uk.org/aboutus/consultations

At the end of the consultation period, we will publish a summary of the responses we receive together with an explanation of our decision or decisions as a result.

If you prefer your responses not to be made public, please indicate this when you respond.

We look forward to receiving your comments.

Yours faithfully

Eileen Thornton
Chair of the Education and Training Committee