



New Zealand  
**PSYCHOLOGISTS BOARD**

Te Poari Kaimātai Hinengaro  
o Aotearoa

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# **The Continuing Competence Programme for Psychologists Practising in Aotearoa New Zealand: A Guide for Participants**

THIS VERSION (JULY 2017) SUPERSEDES ALL EARLIER VERSIONS.

The current version of the Board's prescribed CCP can be downloaded from our website at [www.psychologistsboard.org.nz](http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz).

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## Introduction to the Continuing Competence Programme

Consistent with the principal purpose of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the **Act**) to "protect the health and safety of members of the public by providing for mechanisms to ensure that health professionals are competent and fit to practise their profession", the Psychologists Board (the **Board**) is obliged to be satisfied that a practitioner is competent to practise in New Zealand before that person is registered, and, in accordance with sections 26 and 27, that he or she has maintained the required standard of competence before being issued an Annual Practising Certificate (**APC**).

In early 2009 the Board introduced a Continuing Competence Programme (**CCP**)<sup>1</sup> as part of its endeavours to meet its obligations under the Act. The dual objectives of the CCP are to provide a framework to assist practitioners to address the ongoing challenge of monitoring and maintaining competence, while also giving the Board a mechanism to check that practitioners are meeting their professional obligation to actively maintain competence.

***All actively practising psychologists are required to participate in the CCP and will be requested to declare they have done so when renewing their APC each year.***

The development of the Board's CCP was initially informed by the College of Alberta Psychologists' emerging continuing competence programme<sup>2</sup>, by broad and robust consultation with psychologists and other stakeholders<sup>3</sup> (August 2007), and by a three-month trial of the planned CCP<sup>4</sup> (completed December 2008). Significant revisions were made to the CCP in 2015 based on all of the feedback the Board had received to date (including from the consultations carried out in 2014 and 2015), recent developments in the field of continuing competence, the original principles developed by the Board and endorsed by the profession in 2007, and the following statements of the Board's position:

The Board...

- Upholds the importance of life-long learning to maintain competence and to maintain currency in our constantly evolving profession.
- Has confidence in the basic CCP model: that a self-reflective review of competence to set individually-tailored learning objectives, followed by directed learning, is a practical and effective way of maintaining competence.
- Is committed to minimising the costs imposed on practitioners so that they can invest their time and resources into learning.
- Trusts that psychologists are committed to striving for excellence by routinely undertaking professional development, whether or not the Board mandates it.
- Understands that supervisors are best placed to review competence and the impact of learning with the practitioner.

Practitioners should ensure that they refer to the current version of this guide, which is available on the Board's website: [www.psychologistsboard.org.nz](http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz).

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<sup>1</sup> The CCP has been established in accordance with section 41 of the HPCA Act.

<sup>2</sup> The Board acknowledges with appreciation the generosity of the College of Alberta Psychologists in making available documentation regarding the development of their continuing competence programme.

<sup>3</sup> See report on the Board's website.

<sup>4</sup> Also reported on the Board's website.

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## 1. What is competence?

The Board has prescribed and published 'Core Competencies' (which include minimum standards of cultural competency) for the "Psychologist" scope, and additional (but still core) competencies for three vocational scopes – "Clinical Psychologist", "Counselling Psychologist", and "Educational Psychologist"<sup>5</sup>. Core competencies are the *minimum* competencies that each practitioner should possess at the time of registration. The initial acquisition of these competencies is the responsibility of the training programme and the practitioner seeking registration.

Competence is variously defined, and in this context it involves the complex interaction of four major components: knowledge, skills, judgment, and diligence.

**Knowledge** involves having absorbed and understood a body of information sufficiently well to then understand and conceptualise the range of professional issues that one can reasonably expect to encounter. Knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient foundation for competence.

**Skill** is the ability to effectively apply knowledge in actual practice.

**Judgement** involves knowing when to apply which skills, and under what circumstances. It includes self-reflection on and awareness of one's own values, experiences, attitudes, and social context, and how these may influence actions and perceived meaning. Good judgement increases the likelihood that choices made will be beneficial for the individuals, families, groups, communities, and organisations with which psychologists work.

**Diligence** requires the consistent application of knowledge, skills, and judgement in one's professional activities and taking care to give priority to the clients' needs. Diligence also encompasses striving to give the best service possible to each and every client.

These components are all required to achieve the level of performance expected of a psychologist, and they will vary depending on the level of seniority and the context of practice. Epstein and Hundert (2002)<sup>6</sup> defined professional competence as "the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and community being served."

Whereas "competencies" refers to the component skills and knowledge which contribute to the whole, a competent psychologist is one who has attained a state of overall or integrated professional abilities. The CCP recognises that it is this state that each individual strives for and is continually refining.

The CCP requires each practitioner to undertake a structured self-reflective review (**SRR**) of their own knowledge and skills against the Core Competencies each year. The commitment to ongoing learning means that, at a minimum, each psychologist should do as much learning as needed to maintain these required core competencies.

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<sup>5</sup> Core competencies for the Practice of Psychology, New Zealand Psychologists Board.

<sup>6</sup> Epstein, R.M. and Hundert, E.M. (2002) Defining and assessing professional competence. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 287(2), 226-235

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## 2. What is continuing competence?

A continuing competence programme involves engagement in self-reflection to identify areas in need of attention, the development of learning objectives to address identified needs, the drafting of a learning plan to achieve those objectives, implementing the learning plan, and completing a final review of progress against the original learning objectives. This is an active and dynamic process of continual learning and review which supports ongoing competence.

**The Self-Reflective Review (SRR)** requires the psychologist to work with his or her supervisor to critically examine his or her own competence relative to the core competencies prescribed by the Board. Research has shown that self-assessment can be quite inaccurate<sup>7</sup>, and so testing its accuracy by considering the feedback of appropriate others is an important component of the self-reflection process.

While the HPCA Act places a statutory obligation on the Board to be satisfied that a practitioner is competent before issuing an APC, the Code of Ethics places responsibility for keeping abreast with current developments on the individual psychologist. Therefore there is an alignment between the obligation on practitioners to maintain competence and the Board's statutory obligations.

The Board's CCP model requires psychologists to actively assure their continued competence. This process is designed to help maintain the vitality and safe practice of individuals and to promote psychology's high professional standing.

## 3. Overview of the CCP

The CCP (see Diagram 1) therefore requires each psychologist (with the assistance of his or her professional supervisor) to engage annually in a self-reflective review against the Board's prescribed Core Competencies. Learning objectives should then be established, and a self-directed learning plan developed to meet those objectives. A log book (see full description below) must be kept for the purpose of recording required details of key steps (date of initial SRR, learning objectives arising, learning activity and date of review of progress) as it will need to be presented for any audit. Fuller records of the SRR, learning plans and progress review notes may (optionally) be kept to facilitate later reviews with a supervisor and for the practitioner's own purpose, but such additional records are discretionary and will not be audited.

A self-directed learning plan should inform each practitioner's intended continuing competence activities for the following year, although it is recognised that some objectives may be overtaken by more urgent learning priorities that arise or, alternately, that some may be delayed by the lack of a suitable learning opportunity. It is also acknowledged that unforeseen learning opportunities may provide fresh stimulus and direction during the year, and that learning objectives and plans may be extended to also include aspirational and/or employment-related components.

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<sup>7</sup> Eva, K. and G. Regehr (2005). "Self-assessment in the Health Professions: A reformulation and research agenda." *Academic Medicine* 80(10): S46-S54.

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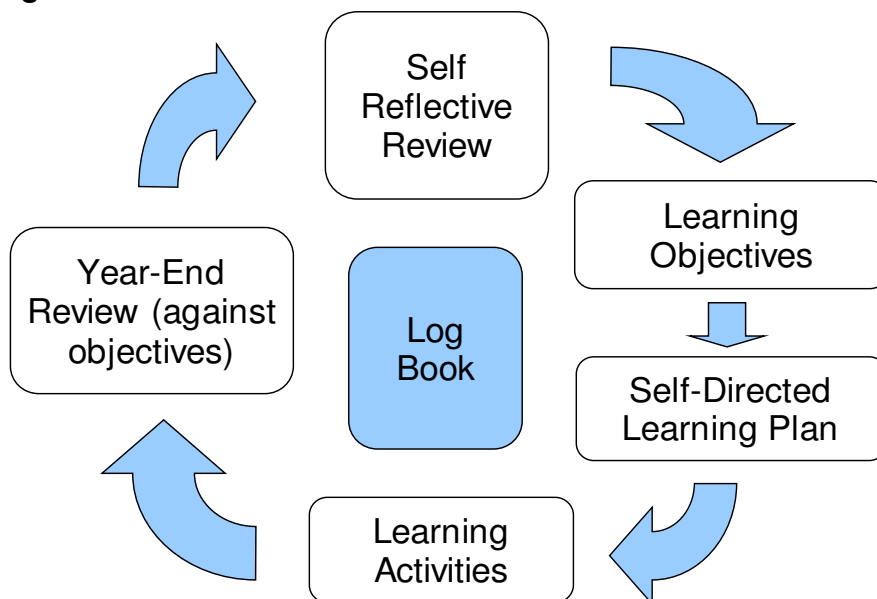
The range of activities that may contribute to continuing competence is broad and is likely to be different depending on the stage of a practitioner's career. For example, this breadth may encompass (but is not limited to) continuing education to consolidate and deepen knowledge, keeping abreast of emerging research, upgrading practice to match new developments, or personal therapy.

Continuing competence activities undertaken are to be (again briefly) documented as evidence of the psychologist's ongoing programme of competence maintenance. At minimum, the learning activities which specifically address the identified learning objectives are to be recorded against those objectives. It is likely that the learning activities engaged in throughout the year will be a mixture of opportunistic and directed learning for most psychologists. New learning opportunities or unforeseen challenges may stimulate a practitioner to evolve in some directions that were not anticipated at the time of the SRR. However, if a psychologist's annual SRR were to identify significant competence deficits, then it is expected that the remediation of those deficits would be acted on as a priority.

The CCP cycle is completed by a final, year-end review which focusses on the assessment of progress towards the originally identified learning objectives. This naturally leads into the next SRR, which generates the next round of objectives.

A simple log book must be kept that records key CCP activities: the learning objectives identified, and the activities undertaken to advance those objectives (see page 10 for full details).

**Diagram 1**



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## 4. Underlying principles

The CCP has been shaped by the following principles.

- Ψ *Accountability:* As a health professional, a practitioner bears the ultimate responsibility both for maintaining and for demonstrating professional competence to practise.
- Ψ *Lifelong continuous learning and improvement* is essential to the professional psychologist. Self-reflection, self-assessment, and evaluation are intrinsic to the psychologist's role, both for quality assurance and for professional self-care. There is also a need to keep abreast of evolving fields of knowledge as the psychology discipline moves forward. The performance of practitioners who do not engage in regular professional development is almost certain to deteriorate over time.<sup>8</sup> It is incumbent on each and every psychologist to maintain the reputation of the profession by practising to the required standard of competence.
- Ψ *Psychologists at different stages of their career have quite different professional development needs.* Maintaining competence is a process which continues over the entire course of a career, adapting to changes in practice environments, professional activities, and consumer needs.
- Ψ *Flexibility in maintaining competence:* There is no one best way to maintain competence. The range of activities selected will vary according to individual learning style, identified needs, timing, availability, and context.
- Ψ *Easy to follow, understand, and sustainable:* The CCP's design is such that it should be readily integrated with other requirements and with the full range of professional tasks and roles. The self-reflective review should be tailored to individual needs to make it a useful and personally meaningful exercise. Recording of learning activities should be clear and brief.

## 5. Who is required to complete the CCP?

Each psychologist who applies for an APC is required to declare that they are fit and competent to practise. On applying to *renew* an APC, each psychologist is also required to declare that they have met the requirements of the Board's prescribed CCP. **To meet this annual requirement, your participation in the CCP should start from no later than 1 April each year**, beginning with a SRR and the setting of learning objectives for the following CCP year. (See section 7 regarding exemptions.)

## 6. Guidelines to facilitate your CCP participation

The Board's CCP is a high-trust model that emphasizes personal responsibility, flexibility, and choice. However with flexibility comes some ambiguity, so we offer the following *advice to guide (but not overly restrict)* your efforts.

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<sup>8</sup> Neimeyer, G., Taylor, J. and Rozensky, R. "The diminishing durability of knowledge in professional psychology: A Delphi Poll of specialties and proficiencies." *Prof Psych: Res And Pract* Vol 43(4), 364-371

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Participation in the programme requires you to identify those competencies where attention is required, to set learning objectives to address those needs, plan how you will achieve your objectives, complete your learning activities, and then evaluate the impact of those activities vis-à-vis your original objectives.

**While your SRR, learning objectives, and learning plan may initially be developed independently, these steps must ultimately be reviewed in consultation with your supervisor.** The involvement of your supervisor is intended to help overcome the natural tendency towards under- or over-estimation, blind spots, and “not knowing what you don't know”.

**The following steps are involved:** (This is the “CCP in a nutshell” – more detailed notes on each of these steps is provided below.)

1. At the beginning of each CCP year, **conduct a self-reflective review** of your current competence with reference to the Board's prescribed core competencies and with the assistance of your supervisor. Note the date of the review in your log book.
2. **Develop learning objectives** for those competencies requiring attention (as well as for any aspirational or employment-driven learning needs) and list them in your log book. **Note:** A learning objective specifies “what” you intend to learn (e.g., “refresh my understanding of the Privacy Act”).
3. **Devise a learning plan** to achieve each of your objectives, and note completion of this step in your log book. (You may also choose to briefly document your plan in your log book, but details of your plan will not be required for audit.) **Note:** A learning plan specifies “how” you intend to achieve the objective (e.g., by reading a book or attending a workshop.)
4. **Carry out your learning activities** through the year, and make note of each of the activities you complete in your log book.
5. Toward the end of the CCP year, work with your supervisor to **critically review the impact of your learning activity on your original learning objectives.** This will contribute to your next self-reflective review and the setting of learning goals for the subsequent cycle. Note in your log book that a review of progress on your selected objectives has been undertaken. (You may choose to also briefly record the outcome of the review in your log book or to keep that fuller record in your supervision notes. Your notes on the year-end review will not be required for audit.)

Having participated throughout the APC year, you should be able to declare on applying to renew your APC (normally in February or March) that you have met the CCP's requirements.

Retain your CCP log book for a minimum of three years. Note that a portion of APC renewal applicants will be audited each year and that audit participants will be asked to submit their log book (showing participation for the previous one to three years).



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### **Step 1: Your self-reflective review**

The purpose of the SRR is to quickly and simply develop an overview of your practice by identifying those competencies requiring attention. It can be seen as an annual stock-take of your overall competence and individual competencies, as well as an opportunity to identify and prepare for any areas of emerging practice.

You are expected to involve your supervisor in your SRR. He or she should actively participate in your review by assisting you to evaluate your competence against the Board's prescribed core competencies and by offering feedback on any perceived strengths and weaknesses in your practice. It may be helpful to supplement this with feedback from other sources (e.g., clients and/or colleagues with particular expertise). Record the date of the completion of the SRR process in your log book.

**Note:** *Your SRR is the foundation upon which your entire CCP is built, so it is worth investing the time and effort to make it meaningful, robust, and useful for yourself.*

### **Step 2: Set your learning objectives for the year**

Based on the insights gained from your SRR, identify and record your learning objectives for the following year. A learning objective is a clear, simple statement about *what* you intend to learn (e.g., how to use a certain psychometric tool, how to work with older clients). Optimally, your learning objectives should be specific, measurable, and attainable. You may, however, have some that are less specific and that are stated in higher level or abstract terms. It is essential that your learning objectives are meaningful to you. Record your learning objectives in your log book.

**Note:** You are not expected to generate learning objectives related to *all* of the Core Competencies. Conversely, you may have more than one objective arising from a single competence. If you generate more objectives than you can reasonably progress in a given year, you should prioritise them and defer some for later attention. You are expected to set at least a few objectives each year.

As noted above, it is possible that you will identify additional learning objectives during the year as opportunities or professional challenges arise. These can simply be noted in your log book as late additions or changes.

### **Step 3: Develop your learning plan**

Once your learning objectives are formulated, you should develop a plan that briefly outlines how you intend to achieve each of them. A learning plan states simply and clearly *how* you intend to learn something. These plans may include (but are certainly not limited to) such activities as researching a topic, consulting a colleague, engaging in supervision, reading professional literature, enrolling in a continuing education course, and/or attending a workshop or conference. Your plans should be realistic and should account for the availability of opportunities and resources, along with the variety of ways that your objectives may be achieved. Note the date you complete your learning plans in your log book.

Your learning plan is prospective. That is, it sets out your *intended* way forward as you begin a new CCP year. It is recognised that you may subsequently not be able to complete all of your intended learning plans. It is also acknowledged that changes in your circumstances may result in ongoing alterations to your objectives and/or plans. Where this occurs, simply document it in your log book.

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#### **Step 4: Record the activities undertaken to achieve your learning objectives**

Briefly record each of the activities you complete towards achieving your learning objectives and, where possible, retain documentary evidence of completion.

You may also wish to record other learning activities which are unrelated to your specified learning objectives/plan. This would include more general professional development activity, opportunistic training events, reading, a supervision log,<sup>9</sup> and other professional events which have stimulated your interest. These more extensive records are optional extras, but they may usefully inform your future self-reflective reviews.

#### **Step 5: Reflect on the outcomes of your learning**

The CCP year concludes with a review of the progress made towards achieving each of your originally identified learning objectives. Your review should be an active process of critically appraising the gains made and should be completed with the full participation and feedback of your supervisor. Relevant questions could include:

- Have you achieved the objectives you intended to?
- What gains in knowledge have you realised?
- Has your learning resulted in any changes in your professional practice?
- Has your supervisor noticed any changes in your competence, practice, or confidence?
- Have you encountered any barriers to enacting your gains in knowledge that need to be addressed?
- Have there been impacts for your clients, colleagues, or your organisation?

Your year-end review should include consideration of whether each of your learning objectives has been achieved, whether any residual objectives remain (that could be carried over to the next year), or if they have been overtaken by other objectives.

The year-end review and consideration of feedback naturally leads into a new SRR to start the next cycle, making your CCP a constantly self-regenerating process.

Record the date of your year-end review of progress in your log book. **Note:** The full details of the review and your reflections on your ongoing learning do not need to be recorded (though you may choose to keep these with your supervision notes).

#### **Declaration of competence**

You are required to participate in the CCP as part of your ongoing efforts to ensure that you maintain your competence to practise. As part of your annual application to renew your APC, you will be required to make a declaration that you have met the requirements of the CCP over the past year and that you are competent to practise. If you are selected for audit, you will be required to make a more detailed declaration including statements that you:

- completed an annual self-assessment of your competence at the beginning of the APC year;
- discussed that assessment with your supervisor;
- developed learning objectives and a learning plan based on your self-assessment and your supervisor's input;
- engaged in activities to achieve your learning objectives during the year;

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<sup>9</sup> Please note that detailed notes of your supervision sessions do not need to be submitted for audit.

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- evaluated (at year-end) the progress you made on achieving your objectives; and
  - documented your CCP participation in your log book.

### **Supervisor's Declaration**

Your declaration must be counter-signed by your supervisor, confirming that he or she was actively involved in both your SRR and year-end reviews.

### **Log book and retention of records**

*The CCP log book will record, at minimum:* a note of the dates of key CCP activities (e.g., a review with a supervisor), the learning objectives identified, and the activities undertaken to advance those objectives. It may also list any additional objectives set and professional development activities undertaken (whether or not it is learning activity directed at the chosen objectives). A balance should be sought between avoiding burdensome detail versus sufficient information to evidence your (timely) completion of CCP requirements (for audit) and for your own learning purposes. Your log book can be kept in paper or electronic form, as long as it can readily be submitted for audit when requested. Please note that you must retain your CCP log book for a minimum of three years.

## **7. Audit of CCP participation**

### **General and targeted audits**

Each year approximately 20% of APC applications will be audited for CCP participation. These will be either randomly selected (general audit) or from specifically targeted groups of practitioners (targeted audit).

### **The audit process and what it involves**

1. If you are selected for audit, you will be required to submit your CCP log book within 15 working days of receiving the request.
2. You will normally be notified (in writing) of the outcome of the audit within 15 working days.
3. If you have only partially met the CCP's requirements, the auditors will offer you feedback and guidance, and may arrange for you to be audited again the following year.
4. Where you have not met the CCP's requirements, individual assistance will be made available to you to make sure that you are on track with your CCP.
5. In the unlikely event that a psychologist is unable or unwilling to provide the required documentation or otherwise declines to cooperate with the CCP audit, his or her registration may be suspended. [Refer s 43 of the HPCA Act.]

### **Exemptions from participation**

You may apply to the Board at any time to be exempted from CCP participation and/or an audit of participation for a specified period. Please use the prescribed Exemption Application form, which can be downloaded from the Board's website (<http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz/resources/resources#CCP>). Your reasons for requesting an exemption should be clearly stated. An exemption may be granted for various reasons, including (but not limited to) if you have not been or will not be practising for more than eight months during the APC year<sup>10</sup>; on compassionate or

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<sup>10</sup> This includes first-year practitioners who have worked less than four months prior to APC renewal.

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pragmatic grounds; long-term incapacitating illness; serious illness of a close family member; study leave; parental leave; or extended overseas travel. Evidence to support your request may be requested. You will be notified of the outcome of your request within 10 working days of its receipt. If an exemption is not granted, you have the right to have the decision reviewed by the full Board.

### **What is expected in the audit?**

The Board's aim is that all active psychologists engage in a meaningful process of self-reflective review and self-directed learning. The audit will check for evidence of engagement in this process. (See section 6 re declarations, logbooks, and other records.) The Board has intentionally avoided prescribing the specific *content* of each practitioner's learning plan, so our audit will focus primarily on your completion of the required steps, rather than (for example) on how many learning activities you have engaged in.

### **What you can expect from the audit**

Your audit submissions (log book, declaration, and any other evidence specifically requested) will either be securely destroyed (if received electronically) or returned to you promptly after the audit with feedback indicating whether or not they met requirements. You will be sent an audit feedback form<sup>11</sup> that specifies the criteria to fully meet requirements, whether your submissions were assessed to have met those criteria, and the overall outcome of the audit. You will also be invited to offer any feedback you may wish to give about your experience with CCP participation or as an audit participant.

## **8. Contacts**

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or want some further guidance:

### **Psychology Advisor (and CCP Auditor)**

Anne Goodhead  
Email: [anne.goodhead@nzpb.org.nz](mailto:anne.goodhead@nzpb.org.nz)  
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### **Deputy Chief Executive and Deputy Registrar (and CCP Auditor)**

Frances Hamilton  
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### **Professional Standards Coordinator (CCP audit administration)**

Gina Giannios  
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<sup>11</sup> A copy of the feedback form is available on the Board's website at [www.psychologistsboard.org.nz](http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz).

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## Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

### **Acronyms:**

**APC** - Annual Practising Certificate

**CCP** - Continuing Competence Programme

**HPCA Act** - Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003

**SRR** - Self-Reflective Review

### **Terms:**

**APC Year** - April 1 to March 31

**Competence** - see page 3

**Continuing competence** - see page 4

**Core competencies** - see page 3

**Diligence** - see page 3

**Judgement** - see page 3

**Knowledge** - see page 3

**Learning activities** - activities undertaken in order to meet a learning objective (e.g., supervision, workshops, reading, teaching, personal therapy...).

**Learning objective** - a brief, clear statement of an intended outcome or goal in relation to identified needs. (e.g., "I will deepen my knowledge and understanding of the use of psychometrics with New Zealand subjects.")

**Learning plan** - a considered, flexible, self-directed plan for achieving identified learning objectives. (e.g., "I will attend a local workshop on the use of psychometrics.")

**Scope of practice** - means the range of services that a practitioner is permitted to perform. [Refer also section 5 of the HPCA Act 2003.]

**Self-reflection** - see page 4

**Self-Reflective Review (SRR)** - see page 7

**Skill** - see page 3

**Vocational scope** - the further-defined range of services that a qualified practitioner is permitted to perform, and also the title under which they can practise. Currently this includes the "Clinical Psychologist", "Counselling Psychologist", and "Educational Psychologist" scopes.

Appendix 2: CCP Declaration (If selected for audit, you will be sent a copy of this form to complete.)

**CCP - Declaration of Participation (for audit only)**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CCP requirements</b></p> <p>I, <span style="background-color: #cccccc; display: inline-block; width: 150px; height: 1.2em; vertical-align: middle;"></span>, declare that...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Practitioner's signature confirming requirements completed</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Date(s) requirement was completed</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Supervisor's signature confirming involvement and completion of requirements</b></p>
<p>...with the direct involvement of my supervisor, at the beginning of the 2017/2018 APC year I completed a self-reflective review of my competence with reference to the Board's prescribed <i>Core Competencies for Psychologists Working In Aotearoa New Zealand</i>.</p>		/ /	
<p>...based on the results of my self-reflective review, I developed learning objectives and learning plans for the 2017/2018 year.</p>		/ /	
<p>...during the 2017/2018 APC year I engaged in activities to meet my learning objectives.</p>			
<p>...with the direct involvement of my supervisor, at the end of the 2017/2018 APC year I conducted a review of my progress against the objectives I set at the beginning of the year and of the impact of my learning on my competence to practice.</p>		/ /	
<p>...I have kept records (including a log book) of my CCP participation over the year that reflect my completion of the requirements noted above, and</p>			
<p>...I believe that I have met all requirements of the Board's prescribed Continuing Competence Programme during the 2017/2018 APC year.</p>		/ /	
<p>...the evidence and information I have provided to the New Zealand Psychologists Board for the purpose of the Continuing Competence Programme (CCP) Audit are a true and accurate record of my participation in the CCP over the 2017/2018 year.</p>			