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# Consultation on proposed revision of the “Intern Psychologist” and “Trainee Psychologist” scopes of practice

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## Historical context

The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (**HPCA Act**) requires that the New Zealand Psychologists Board (**the Board**) describe the contents of the profession in terms of one or more scopes of practice. Following extensive consultation the Board originally gazetted five scopes of practice: the “Psychologist” scope, the special purpose “Intern Psychologist” and “Trainee Psychologist” scopes, and two vocational scopes.

The Intern Psychologist and Trainee Psychologist scopes were intended to facilitate the Board's regulation of the practice of those practitioners who were completing the practical component of their training in order to qualify for full registration. These scopes have worked well to date, with one important exception. Under the HPCA Act, there is no mechanism (in circumstances other than with the individual's consent) for the Board to cancel a practitioner's registration in the event that they do not complete their training. Their registration therefore continues indefinitely unless;

- it is cancelled with their consent (ss 142 and 144), or
- is cancelled by the Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal following an adverse finding at a disciplinary hearing (s 101(1)(a)), or
- is revoked by the Board where registration was occasioned by a false representation or mistake (s 146(1)), or
- if the health practitioner dies (s 143).

Although consent has only been withheld infrequently, this has created significant difficulties for the Board and poses a risk to the public by enabling a practitioner to use the scope's title and/or to continue to refer to their ongoing registration status despite having not completed their training and having no approved supervision or oversight.

## Purpose of the proposed revisions

The only way in which the Board can limit the period of registration is by revising the scopes of practice. Section 11(2) of the Act provides that “a scope of practice may be described *in any way* the authority thinks fit” (emphasis added). The Trainee Psychologist and Intern Psychologist scopes of practice can therefore be described (in part) by reference to a period of time. Other regulators (e.g., the Medical Council of New Zealand) have used this mechanism to enable finite registration.

Pertinently, on 27 August 2009, the Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand amended its existing “Postgraduate Physiotherapy Student” scope of practice to incorporate the following restriction:

*Registration within the special purpose scope of practice will be authorised for the duration of the postgraduate study and apply only to that postgraduate study.*

If the Trainee Psychologist and Intern Psychologist scopes of practice were to be similarly amended, the effect would be to divest an individual of registration as soon as the training programme came to an end.

**The Psychologists Board therefore proposes to revise the Intern psychologist and Trainee Psychologist scopes in order to limit registration to the time period in which the practitioner is undertaking their Board-approved training.** This consultation process will inform the Board's eventual decision about revision of these scopes.

## Revised scopes of practice

The proposed new wording for the "Intern Psychologist" scope is;

### **Special purpose scope of Practice: Intern Psychologist**

The special purpose scope of practice for postgraduate psychology students comprises of psychology services undertaken as part of the postgraduate internship on which the application is based. It does not extend to practice or any other activity outside that postgraduate study. Registration within the special purpose scope of practice will be authorised for the duration of the postgraduate study and applies only to that postgraduate study.

An Intern Psychologist within a special purpose scope is defined as rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organisations or the public any psychological service involving the application of psychological knowledge, principles, methods and procedures of understanding, predicting, ameliorating or influencing behaviour, affect or cognition. Such practice is undertaken within an individual's area and level of expertise and with due regard to ethical, legal, and Board-prescribed standards.

*Standard conditions on the scope:* "May only practise under close supervision while undertaking the internship requirements for the Post Graduate Diploma or Doctoral course the intern is enrolled in."

The proposed new wording for the "Trainee Psychologist" scope is;

### **Special purpose scope of Practice: Trainee Psychologist**

The special purpose scope of practice for 'supervision-to-registration' candidates comprises of psychology services undertaken as part of the Board-approved supervision plan on which the application is based. It does not extend to practice or any other activity outside the approved supervision plan. Registration within the special purpose scope of practice will be authorised for the duration of the supervision plan and apply only to that supervised practise.

A Trainee Psychologist within a special purpose scope is defined as rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organisations or the public any psychological service involving the application of psychological knowledge, principles, methods and procedures of understanding, predicting, ameliorating or influencing behaviour, affect or cognition. Such practice is undertaken within an individual's area and level of expertise and with due regard to ethical, legal, and Board-prescribed standards.

*Standard conditions on the scope:* "May only practise under supervision at their place of employment while undertaking their Board-approved Supervision plan."

## Qualifications

It is proposed that the currently prescribed qualifications for the "Intern Psychologist" scope of practice should remain unchanged;

An Intern Psychologist Scope of Practice may be granted to applicants who have completed formal academic qualifications that have provided the foundation competencies required for safe practice in the approved supervised setting and who are entering Board-approved supervised practice for the purpose of achieving full registration.

It is proposed that the currently prescribed qualifications for the "Trainee Psychologist" scope of practice should also remain unchanged;

A Trainee Psychologist Scope of Practice may be granted to applicants who have completed formal academic qualifications that have provided the foundation competencies required for safe practice in the approved supervised setting and who are entering Board-approved supervised practice for the purpose of achieving full registration.

## **To comment**

To comment on the Board's proposed revisions to the Intern Psychologist and Trainee Psychologist scopes, please write to the Board's Psychology Advisor;

Mail:  
Anne Goodhead  
Psychology Advisor  
New Zealand Psychologists Board  
PO Box 10-626  
**WELLINGTON 6143**

Or email:  
[anne.goodhead@nzpb.org.nz](mailto:anne.goodhead@nzpb.org.nz)

Our sincere thanks for your consideration and feedback.

Steve Osborne MSc ClinPsych  
MASPPB MCPRBA MIPGA  
Chief Executive/Registrar