

Psychologists Board of Queensland
Policy on Implementation of an Oral Examination as a Requirement for General
Registration or for Removal of Probationary Conditions

Date of Approval: 18 September 2003

Background

The *Psychologists Registration Act 2001* (the Act) under Sections 46(1) (c), 46(3), 97(1) (c), and 97(3) makes provision for applicants seeking general registration and registrants seeking the removal of their probationary conditions to be required to undertake a written, oral or practical examination before the Board makes its decision on their application. The purpose of such examinations is to establish the applicant's ability to practise the profession competently and safely. Depending on the outcome of such an examination, the Board, under Section 59(1) relating to general registration and under Sections 98(1)(ii) and 98(3) relating to the removal of probationary conditions, may impose additional conditions on general and probationary registrants that allow the Board to monitor their ability to practise the profession competently and safely.

From now on, persons applying for general registration with or without probationary conditions, or seeking to have their probationary conditions removed, may be required by the Board to undertake an oral examination for the purpose of the Board deciding to register or not to register the applicant, or to remove or not remove probationary conditions.

Reasons for Implementation of the Examination Provision

In keeping with the stated purpose of the examination, the Board may decide to implement the examination in the following circumstances:

Applicants for General Registration

- If the applicant in the past has been subject to disciplinary action by the Psychologists Board of Queensland, or by a similar health board in this State, or another State or Territory, or another country;
- If the applicant's training in, and/or practise of, the profession has limited breadth, and the Board has concerns about the applicant's ability to practise the profession competently and safely without conditions in the first instance;
- If the applicant's academic record does not clearly show that the applicant has had education and training in ethical and professional issues, thus causing the Board to question whether the applicant meets Competency No. 6, Ethical, Legal and Professional Matters; or
- If the applicant has not practised the profession for a period of time, and that period of non-practise is sufficient to cause the Board to have concerns about the applicant's recency of practise in the profession and, in particular, knowledge of Competency No. 6, Ethical, Legal and Professional Matters.

Applicants for Removal of Probationary Conditions

- If the applicant has been subject to disciplinary action during the course of the Supervised Practice Program;
- If the applicant has a history of non-compliance with the Supervised Practice Program, so that the applicant's conduct calls into question the applicant's ability to practise independently in the profession;

- If there is disagreement between the supervisor and the applicant about the applicant's ability to meet one or more of the Competencies, or parts thereof; or
- If the applicant has not practised the profession for a period of time, and that period of non-practise is sufficient to cause the Board to have concerns about the applicant's recency of practise in the profession and, in particular, knowledge of Competency No. 6, Ethical, Legal and Professional Matters.

The Board may, for other reasons pertaining to the assessment of an applicant's ability to practise the profession competently and safely, also decide to implement the examination.

Content and Format of the Oral Examination

Without limiting the scope of the oral examination, it shall address: applicants' own perceptions of their competence in proposed practice area(s); professional attitudes; professional development plans and aspirations; knowledge of the registration act and regulations; and knowledge of the Board's Code of Practice, including knowledge of psychologists' psycho-legal responsibilities.

For the purpose of examining these areas, the applicant shall be required to respond to examiners' questions about: (a) their application for general registration or removal of probationary conditions, and the accompanying documentation; and (b) a vignette that raises ethical and professional issues that are relevant to the practice of psychology. The vignette shall be chosen by the panel of examiners from a data bank of vignettes compiled by the Registration, Supervision and Training Sub-Committee specifically for this purpose and, whenever possible, shall reflect the applicant's current or proposed area of psychological practice. The applicant shall be allowed to view the vignette for a period of 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the oral examination.

The oral examination shall normally last for no less than 45 minutes and no more than 1 hour. All things being equal, approximately two thirds of the allotted time will focus on the ethical vignette and knowledge of any Code of Practice and Ethical Guidelines adopted by the Board at the time of the examination, while the remaining time will be given over to questions about the applicant's professional attitudes, professional development plans and aspirations, and knowledge of registration act and regulations. The responsibility for obtaining and assimilating the Board's Code of Practice and adopted Ethical Guidelines prior to the examination rests with the applicant. The examination will be recorded in order to allow for a check on examiners' ratings, and for use in decision making, if examiners cannot agree on a recommendation to the Board.

After the oral examination has concluded, based on the applicant's responses to questions put by the panel of examiners on the application and accompanying documentation, and on the ethical vignette, the examiners individually in the first instance shall assess the applicant's competence and safety to practice. This will be done by the examiners individually rating applicants' responses separately on professional attitudes, professional development plans and aspirations, knowledge of registration act and regulations, the ethical vignette and knowledge of any Code of Practice and Ethical Guidelines adopted by the Board, and individually assigning an overall rating to the applicant. The examiners will employ a four point rating scale that ranges from very unsatisfactory to very satisfactory for this purpose.

Members of the panel of examiners shall then consult and formulate a recommendation to the Board to either: grant general registration; grant general registration with conditions; grant general registration with (further) probationary conditions, or not grant general registration to the applicant. The recommendation shall be based finally on the panel's collective judgement of the applicant's suitability to practice, bearing in mind the individual examiners' ratings of the candidate's knowledge about competence and safety.

On receiving the panel's recommendation the Board shall either accept the recommendation, or request further information from the panel on the reasons for the recommendation, or reject the recommendation. The Chairperson of the panel of examiners shall make available to the Board the individual examiners' ratings of applicant's performance, if such ratings are requested by the Board or if the panel has not been able to reach consensus on its recommendation.

Notwithstanding the summative nature of the examination and rating procedures, in the course of the examination and provision of feedback, emphasis will be placed on collegiality, confidentiality, and respect for candidates. The Chairperson of the panel will provide the other examiners with an orientation on the nature and purpose of the examination, including the provisions of the Act, methods and procedures for rating applicants, criteria for rating applicants, and the professional conduct expected of an examiner, before the examination commences.

The Board shall provide applicants who fail an oral examination and whose applications have been rejected, or on whom further probationary conditions or other conditions have been imposed, with an information notice containing its decision, and such applicants shall have further opportunity to obtain verbal feedback on their oral examination performance from the Chairperson of the panel of examiners.

Applicants who are aggrieved by the Board's decision not to grant them registration, or to impose further probationary or other conditions, may take action in accordance with Part 6 the Act.

The Panel of Examiners

The panel of examiners shall consist of a member of the Board who shall be the Chairperson of the panel, and two other registrants who are eligible to supervise. The latter registrants shall be selected from a list of registrants compiled by the Board specifically for this purpose. The list shall include eligible registrants from metropolitan and regional areas of Queensland in order, where possible, to facilitate the scheduling of oral examinations outside of the metropolitan area for applicants who live in regional and rural communities. Panel members shall absent themselves from, and be replaced on, examination panels for applicants with whom they have had, or currently have, a teacher-pupil, supervisory, collegial, or social relationship, or other relationship that might be perceived to influence their judgement about the applicant.

Location and Timing of Oral Examinations

Oral examinations will be held at a time and in a location that are mutually agreeable to the Board and the applicant, provided that the timing is in keeping with the requirements of the Act for processing applications. Applicants shall meet their own costs of attending the examination if there are such costs.

Payment of Examiners

Examiners shall receive a fee for service from the Office of Health Practitioner Registration Boards. The Chairperson shall receive the same fee as other examiners. The fee shall be set and reviewed from time to time by the Board. In addition, the Board shall meet the costs of travel and accommodation for examiners.