



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND (PSI)

CUMANN SíCEOLAITHE ÉIREANN

**GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF
POSTGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES**

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

The revised guidelines for the accreditation of postgraduate professional training courses in Counselling Psychology should be read in conjunction with the Society's policy on postgraduate accreditation and the accreditation process and procedures document and the Society's Code of Professional Ethics (see www.psihq.ie).

DEFINITION OF COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Counselling psychology, as a psychological speciality, facilitates personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span with a focus on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, and developmental concerns. Therefore counselling psychologists can be found working in such diverse areas as schools and colleges, industrial workplaces and health services. Counselling psychology encompasses a broad range of practices that help people improve their well being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises, and increase their ability to live more highly functioning lives. Counselling psychologists work with people who have experienced a range of emotional and psychological difficulties. These include problems of identity and bereavement, relationship problems, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The following general principles should cover any course established in Ireland to provide postgraduate professional training in Counselling Psychology.

- 1.1 The primary aim of each course should be to provide postgraduate training that will enable the psychologist to become professionally qualified to work as a counselling psychologist.
- 1.2 Each course should provide basic professional training in counselling psychology.
- 1.3 Each course should be based on a model that includes theory, practical skills, research/evaluation skills, and has personal development as an integral part of training.
- 1.4 Proposers of courses should make detailed statements about the philosophy of the courses that they are offering. The statement should include references to the theoretical orientation(s) of the course, the range of skills the course wishes to develop, the role of personal development, and the provision for research and evaluation skills.
- 1.5 Each course should enable students to become acquainted with different theoretical frameworks of counselling and psychotherapy and their applications.
- 1.6 Courses should foster in students a strong sense of professional competence, personal awareness, professional responsibility and scientific integrity.
- 1.7 Courses should include practical counselling and psychotherapy experience and training in the broader role of counselling psychology. Due regard should be given to the appropriateness and quality of supervision.
- 1.8 A high level of communication between staff and students should be evident, so that students can freely discuss with staff different aspects of the course, while staff should keep students informed about their progress.
- 1.9 Courses should have an in-built review structure that elicits feedback from all stakeholders.
- 1.10 In regard to the duties assigned to students on practical placements, it is particularly important that their training needs be given priority over service requirements, with due recognition of the needs and rights of clients.
- 1.11 Courses should lead to the award of a postgraduate degree (of at least Masters level) or equivalent qualification.

- 1.12 Course should be of at least two full calendar years duration or part-time equivalent.
- 1.13 Courses in counselling psychology should be cognisant of other specialisms in psychology and have an awareness of how other specialisms overlap and can complement counselling psychology.
- 1.14 These accreditation procedures are targeted for those postgraduate counselling psychology courses which admit graduates with academic awards that make them eligible for Graduate Membership of the Society.

2. PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

2.1 STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- 2.1.1 The PSI Code of Professional Ethics must be central to the ethos of the course.
- 2.1.2 All psychologists involved in the course must adhere to their professional responsibilities under the Code. Other stakeholders must be made aware of a psychologist's professional responsibility, including extended responsibility, under the Code.
- 2.1.3 The necessary formal procedures must be in place to ensure that individuals on the course (both staff and students) who display unacceptable ethical standards or demonstrate fitness to practice issues in their professional work are not allowed to continue on the course. Due regard should be given to parallel university procedures.
- 2.1.4 The PSI's Code of Professional Ethics should be used as a reference in all cases where judgements regarding professional ethics are being made. Due regard should be given to parallel university procedures.
- 2.1.5 Formal appeals procedures should be available to students who are judged unsuitable to continue on the course.

2.2 EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- 2.2.1 Courses should assist students to value human diversity and understand the impact of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality on health and psychological well-being throughout their training.
- 2.2.2 Courses should provide sufficient reflective learning experiences for students to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills to adopt inclusive practice in their role as a Counselling Psychologist.

Inclusive practice for psychologists means:

- Expect diversity among colleagues, research participants and client populations and to respect this diversity.
 - Understand the issues facing diverse client groups and to be able to respond to their specific psychological needs.
 - Provide an accessible and appropriate service within a psychologist's area of competence.
- 2.2.3 In particular, courses should facilitate students to develop insight into personal attitudes and beliefs and how these can impact on the provision of an equal and inclusive service to a diverse range of people in terms of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller Community.
- 2.2.4 Courses should assist trainees in recognising how organisational, political and social policies, procedures and practices can serve in excluding people from diverse backgrounds in accessing appropriate services.
- 2.2.5 Courses should assist students to develop a thorough understanding of equality legislation in Ireland as it relates to all aspects of their professional work.

3. COURSE CONTENT

3.1 ACADEMIC CONTENT

The following units or modules should formally be taught:

- 3.1.1 The evolution of counselling psychology as a profession and the basic constructs and philosophy underlying the counselling process.
- 3.1.2 Detailed study of at least two major schools of counselling and psychotherapy, which includes their theoretical foundations, intervention strategies and current developments and the use of these models in supervised practice.
- 3.1.3 The greater part of the theoretical content of the course should be covered in the first year. This will allow students in the latter part of the course to become more involved in supervised practice and in research.
- 3.1.4 Personal development work should continue throughout the course.
- 3.1.5 Introduction to the basic concepts and practices of the major schools of counselling and psychotherapy such as humanistic, cognitive, behavioural, analytic and modalities such as couple, family and group therapy.

- 3.1.6 A holistic (e.g. cognitive, emotional, somatatic/physiological, behavioural and experiential) and comprehensive perspective on the person, including inter-relationships between levels of personal functioning and their development throughout the lifespan including normal and psychopathological functioning.
- 3.1.7 The development of competencies in basic group processes and dynamics, including interventions with different groups.
- 3.1.8 Ethical, professional, case management and legal aspects of the counselling psychologist's role.
- 3.1.9 Familiarity with the procedures and approaches of related disciplines and agencies, including awareness of psycho-pharmacology.
- 3.1.10 Knowledge of organisational issues relevant for working as a Counselling Psychologist including multidisciplinary work and coverage of the Irish Health and Social Care System and other relevant settings.

3.2 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The following skills should be covered on the course:

- 3.2.1 Basic skills necessary for establishing a therapeutic relationship, including basic interview skills.
- 3.2.2 Other therapeutic skills consistent with the rationale of the course. The skills to be taught should be clearly outlined in the course syllabus.
- 3.2.3 Assessment skills including competency to administer and interpret standard psychological tests, observation and goal setting skills within the scope and practice of counselling psychology.
- 3.2.4 Skills should be taught through theory input, structured experiences and regular opportunities for skills practice to include self-observation, feedback (from both staff and fellow students), observation of clients, discussion and review.
- 3.2.5 Communication with clients and colleagues (e.g. through report writing and in conference with other professionals and agencies).
- 3.2.6 Presentation skills appropriate to counselling psychology.
- 3.2.7 While many of the above skills will be further developed under supervised practice, it is essential that organised teaching sessions of a practical and/or workshop nature be provided. These should maximise feedback to the student through the use of videotapes, role-playing and other such methods.

3.3 PRACTICE

- 3.3.1 Postgraduate training must include suitable opportunities for students to gain supervised practice and experience.
- 3.3.2 It is essential that the student should have certain skills before face-to-face client contact is undertaken and that fundamental principles of professional behaviour should have been acquired.
- 3.3.3 Students should have a minimum of 250 hours of supervised client contact experience (accrued over a minimum period of 15 months based on two placement days per week) supported by substantial case conferences, reviews and discussion (suggested ratio 5 hours contact: 1 hour supervision). Students should also develop an awareness of the placement service on an organisational level and participate in appropriate placement activities as required. For a substantial proportion of the contact hours the student should assume the primary therapist role for the client.
- 3.3.4 Students must gain client experience, including experience of diversity, in at least two settings, one of which should be in a health care setting. By setting is meant any institution, agency or unit which provides a counselling or psychotherapy service.
- 3.3.5 Client work should vary across the problems, conditions, and disorders in which counselling and psychotherapy are normally indicated. It should also cover clients of different life-span development stages.
- 3.3.6 In all instances where students are gaining client experience, they must work under supervision, ideally under the supervision of a qualified Counselling Psychologist.
- 3.3.7 At least fifty hours of a student's client contact must be intensively supervised by an experienced counselling psychologist, who is a Registered member or eligible for Registered Membership of the Society and full Membership of the Division of Counselling Psychology.
- 3.3.8 Other client contact hours may be supervised by suitably qualified personnel who may be:
 - 3.3.8.1 professionally qualified psychologists with an additional counselling psychology or psychotherapy qualification/training (at least one-year full-time or part-time equivalent) and at least two years counselling psychology or psychotherapy experience;
 - 3.3.8.2 graduates with a postgraduate qualification in counselling or psychotherapy (at least one-year full-time or part-time equivalent)

and at least three years additional counselling or psychotherapy experience;

- 3.3.9 The terms of supervision between student and supervisor must be clearly outlined and agreed in written form. The employer or director of an agency should know the terms of supervision where supervision takes place.
- 3.3.10 The course organiser or co-ordinator of supervisors should hold regular meetings to communicate to all providers of supervision about the goals and purposes of supervision and to clarify interagency issues as they arise.
- 3.3.11 Supervisors should provide supervision based on the developmental needs of the student.

3.4 RESEARCH

- 3.4.1 Courses should have an explicit and written statement of aims and objectives for a programme of research training in counselling psychology.
- 3.4.2 There should be a formal teaching programme on research methods covering qualitative and quantitative methods, assessment and evaluation of outcomes, research methodology and familiarisation with the research literature.
- 3.4.3 During the course students should undertake at least one piece of applied research and report it formally. This can include a variety of approaches appropriate to counselling psychology, e.g. quantitative or qualitative methodologies, single or multiple subject designs, process or outcome research, etc.
- 3.4.4 A designated research supervisor should be provided to the student.
- 3.4.5 Courses should identify a person who can act as a research co-ordinator with the responsibility for organising and monitoring the research project process.
- 3.4.5 The research project should be assessed separately to other course work and be examined by an independent examiner (other than the research supervisor).
- 3.4.6 All research should be conducted with regard to the PSI Code of Professional Ethics and seek and obtain appropriate ethical approval.

- 3.5.7 Variety is encouraged in research undertaken on the course. However a strong research:practice link to Counselling psychology is to be encouraged.

4. ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE COURSE

- 4.1 Links should be made by the course team between the theoretical, practical and personal development parts of the course e.g. through staff meetings where course objectives are reviewed and matched to practice outcomes.

- 4.2 Time for private study should be explicitly allowed for in the course timetable.

4.3 COURSE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- 4.3.1 The course should have a management committee. This committee should report to the institution that runs the course. It should normally include the head of the psychology department concerned, course director, and course teaching staff, supervisor and student representation and ensure that the interests of each group are fully respected.

- 4.3.2 The major function of the committee should be to facilitate communications among all those involved in the course.

- 4.3.3 The committee should be involved in considering the long-term objectives of the course and reviewing its progress. Other functions could be specific to the individual course.

- 4.3.4. In all cases it is essential that the roles and functions of the committee should be clearly specified and that there are clear terms of reference.

5. STAFFING RESOURCES

5.1 COURSE DIRECTOR

- 5.1.1 The course director should be an experienced qualified counselling psychologist, who holds or is eligible to hold Registered Membership of the Psychological Society of Ireland and Full Membership of the Division of Counselling Psychology. The post of course director should be integrated into the organisation structure of the institution that runs the course. Remuneration for the post should at least reflect the pro-rata salary of a Senior Lecturer.
- 5.1.2 The course director should have the course as a major commitment and course organisation should be recognised as an important component of the post.
- 5.1.3 It is desirable that each course director should have an ongoing professional practice and engage in continuing professional development.
- 5.1.4 There should be a clear channel of accountability for the course director within the institution in which the course is run.

5.2 TEACHING STAFF

- 5.2.1 Courses should have appropriate staffing to provide effective training in counselling psychology. This means sufficient staff with enough time allocated to carry out the required tasks: management; teaching; organising; co-ordinating and monitoring of placements; training and supporting supervisors; research supervision and assessment and monitoring of students.
- 5.2.2 The course should have adequate administrative and clerical support.
- 5.2.3 A substantial part of the teaching should be done by a core group involved in the organisation of the course.
- 5.2.2 Other individuals, with particular areas of expertise, may more appropriately teach certain sections of the academic programme.

5.3 LIAISON BETWEEN CORE TEACHING STAFF AND SUPERVISORS

- 5.3.1 It is imperative that close liaison is maintained between core teaching staff and supervisors if an integrated comprehensive course is to be provided.
- 5.3.2 Regular meetings should be held between such staff.
- 5.3.3 All teaching/training staff should be in regular communication so as to facilitate feedback to students regarding their progress on the course and also to allow the staff to be responsive to feedback from students and graduates.

6. COURSE RESOURCES

The course should have appropriate facilities and resources including:

- 6.1 Teaching space of appropriate size and quality for each cohort of students;
- 6.2 Access to computer facilities;
- 6.3 Adequate space to enable the course to be administered effectively, including office space for administrative staff;
- 6.4 Individual office space for academic staff;
- 6.5 Access to library facilities;
- 6.6 Access to a range of psychometric tests;
- 6.7 Adequate storage for the efficient operation of the course;
- 6.8 Access to a common room or similar facility for trainees.

7. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

- 7.1 Only those graduates who hold academic qualifications which are recognised as satisfying at least the minimum qualifications of Graduate Membership of PSI are eligible for inclusion on postgraduate professional training courses for counselling psychology. Institutions running the courses may set their own standards for entry to the courses over and above this.
- 7.2 Vacancies on the course should be nationally advertised and the selection of candidates should follow the principle of “open competition”.

- 7.3 Courses should provide perspective applicants, via the university/course webpage, with detailed descriptions about the philosophy of the course that should include theoretical orientation(s) of the course, the range of skills that the course wishes to develop and the role of personal development. It should also include some background statistics on the course, e.g. number of students normally accepted and in the case of long-standing courses, some information on previous employment destinations of graduates from the course. This information should be reviewed and updated regularly.
- 7.4 A group composed of representatives of both the core teaching and the supervisory staff should carry out the selection procedure.
- 7.5 The selection procedure should be evaluated periodically and any changes made should be recorded and these documents made available.
- 7.6 In addition to the academic criteria for selection to the course, selectors should pay particular attention to personal qualities required to meet the demands both of the personal development aspects of the course and the eventual role as a counselling psychologist.
- 7.7 The selection criteria must be explicit and a mutually agreed method of evaluation (between the course and supervisors representative) must be applied.

8. ASSESSMENT

The following principles should govern the procedures of assessment.

- 8.1 The following areas should be assessed:
 - 8.1.1 conceptual knowledge
 - 8.1.2 work with clients
 - 8.1.3 methods of research and evaluation
 - 8.1.4 personal development (see Section 9)
- 8.2 It is important that each module/component of the course be assessed separately/independently. The student should satisfy the examiners in all areas of study.
- 8.3 External examiner(s) of high professional and academic standing in counselling psychology should be involved in all areas of assessment.
- 8.4 Each course should strive for a variety of assessment methods, e.g. exams (seen and unseen), essays, case reports, video and audiotapes, supervisors' reports, research project, tutor/peer/self assessment techniques.

- 8.5 Students should be continuously assessed and be given feedback (both written and verbal) about their progress. Students' continuous assessments should contribute to their final assessment.
- 8.6 The procedure and criteria for assessment should be made available to students.
- 8.7 The assessment of research and evaluation skills should be based on a research project or dissertation. Research may be reported in the form of a publishable paper.
- 8.8 The format for the evaluation of personal development and its place in the total assessment procedure of each course must be communicated to students.
- 8.9 There should be an explicit formal appeals procedure, which should be made known to the students.

9. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 9.1 Personal development work is a hallmark of counselling psychology. Students must become knowledgeable of their own process and appropriately resolve related issues for their personal and professional development to be effective as a counselling psychologist. This should be reflected in the course content and in group and individually based activities and assignments throughout the training course.
- 9.2 Regular and systematic approaches to self-awareness should be consistent with the rationale of the course.
- 9.3. Self-awareness will proceed on both an individual and group basis. A minimum of 75 hours of individual personal counselling and 40 hours of group counselling or psychotherapy hours, facilitated by a qualified psychologist/psychotherapist, is required.

10. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

- 10.1 The course should engage in a quality assurance programme, possibly as part of the host institutions existing structure.
- 10.2 The Quality Assurance procedures should ensure that the views of all stakeholders are sought and contribute to the ongoing evaluation and development of the course.
- 10.3 Course staff should actively solicit information on the impact of the course on students and respond accordingly.