



Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

The Psychological Society of Ireland

Standards for the Assessment of
Postgraduate Professional Programmes
in Behavioural Psychology

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DEFINITION OF BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Behavioural Psychology is the application of the principles of behaviour and of experimental and applied behavioural research findings to create supportive adaptive environments in many contexts.

Behavioural psychologists work to support the behavioural and learning needs of the individuals to whom they provide services. This includes working collaboratively with a child or adult, parents or guardians, people who support the individual, and the service provider. Their work involves both assessment and intervention. They work primarily, but not exclusively within education, health, home, residential and respite care, and rehabilitative services.

Behavioural Psychology students are students who have obtained an undergraduate degree in psychology and are enrolled in a postgraduate Behavioural Psychology course. This is a programme of study that provides a minimum of a Master's level qualification in the discipline of behaviour analysis. This may be a Master's course in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) or another Master's course which include the core content and competencies specified below.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The following general principles should govern any course intended to provide postgraduate training in Behavioural Psychology.

- 1.1. The primary aim of each course should be to provide professional postgraduate training in Behavioural Psychology which will ensure that on completion, graduates can provide services in a competent and professional manner to individuals seeking them.
- 1.2. Courses must enable students to develop assessment and intervention strategies and skills, with particular emphasis on the principles of behaviour, evidence-based methodologies, and competent administration of suitable assessment methods and intervention strategies and the evaluation of outcomes.
- 1.3. Each course should prepare students for a range of autonomous and collaborative professional roles that are, or could be, performed by a behavioural psychologist in relation to a range of contexts and client groups. In addition, courses should prepare students to work in collaboration with other professionals within the wider education and health systems.
- 1.4. Each course should be based on a scientist/practitioner model. That is, it should train behavioural psychologists as practitioners, but with a well-founded scientific basis and orientation.
- 1.5. Courses should ensure that students are conscious of the need to appraise and reflect on their practice. They should further ensure that students are committed to the need for continuing professional and personal development.
- 1.6. Courses should be of at least two academic years' duration, and lead to at least a Master's degree.

2. PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The [PSI Code of Professional Ethics](#) must be central to the ethos of the course.

- 2.1. All stakeholders in the course should be made aware of psychologists' professional responsibilities under the code.
- 2.2. The PSI code of Professional Ethics should be used as a reference in all cases where judgment regarding professional ethics are being made and due regard should be given to any parallel university procedures that exist.
- 2.3. The necessary formal procedures must be in place to ensure that individuals on the course who display unacceptable ethical standards in their professional work are not permitted to continue on the course.
- 2.4. Formal appeals procedures should be available to students who are judged unsuitable to continue on the course.

3. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES, STRUCTURE AND CORE COMPETENCIES

3.1. PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The objectives of each course should enable students to:

- 3.1.1. Demonstrate systematic knowledge of the principles of behaviour and the practical procedures of ABA.
- 3.1.2. Demonstrate a critical awareness of relevant ethical frameworks including the PSI Code, professional and employer responsibility and scientific integrity.
- 3.1.3. Apply the principles of behaviour in practice settings.
- 3.1.4. Generate independent empirical research with the potential to contribute to the professional knowledge base of the field.
- 3.1.5. Apply critical thinking and a systematic scientific approach to challenges in both applied and research contexts.
- 3.1.6. Collate and analyse data from a range of relevant sources, and evaluate these in accordance with the theories and practices of behaviour analysis.
- 3.1.7. Demonstrate the appropriate skills necessary for designing and implementing programmes and interventions adhering to the professional practice of behavioural psychology.

3.2. PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

- 3.2.1. Each course will offer a minimum of Master's level qualification, and should take a minimum of 2 years to complete.
- 3.2.2. Each course should comprise a minimum of 90 ECTS credits including taught modules, assessed supervised work experience and an assessed a major research project on a topic relevant to Behavioural Psychology.
- 3.2.3. The curriculum of the taught modules should align with the Verified Course Sequence (VCS) of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI). Specifically, the course should either be approved as a VCS by ABAI, or be demonstrated to align with the VCS requirements. .

3.3. CORE COMPETENCIES

Core competencies of qualified behavioural psychologists should include excellence in:

- 3.3.1. Ethical and professional conduct, including responsibility to clients, carers, services, and colleagues; and commitment to best practice in the interest of clients and other stakeholders;
- 3.3.2. Understanding of core principles of behaviour analysis;
- 3.3.3. Strategic analysis of problem behaviour and the application and knowledge of evidence-based practice to promote behaviour change;
- 3.3.4. Experimental design and behavioural measurement;
- 3.3.5. Conducting functional behavioural assessments (FBAs), preferably including functional analysis;
- 3.3.6. Analysing FBA data and using these data to devise function-specific intervention and support plans aimed at addressing the unique needs of each client;
- 3.3.1. The development of idiosyncratic, personally relevant interventions and behaviour support plans (BSPs) based on the client's needs, working in a client-centred manner;
- 3.3.2. The identification of problem behaviour and the function of the behaviour; and the design and implementation of interventions to increase functionally equivalent alternative behaviours in order to support skill acquisition and promote adaptive positive behaviours;
- 3.3.3. Understanding behaviour change considerations, fundamental elements of behaviour change, specific behaviour change procedures, and behaviour change systems;
- 3.3.4. Continuous evaluation and the appropriate modification or revision of BSPs in order to adapt to changing client needs;
- 3.3.5. Capacity to train others in behaviour change procedures and monitor their use;
- 3.3.6. Idiosyncratic approaches to functional assessment and behaviour-specific intervention with a range of client groups such as those experiencing difficulties related to autism, intellectual disabilities, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, brain injury, mild cognitive impairment, dementia, mood, anxiety, sleep and eating.

Upon completing the behavioural psychology course, students should possess the skills, values and knowledge to:

- 3.3.9. Understand the implications of alternative approaches for psychological intervention and collaborate/work effectively with other professionals within the education and health and social care sector
- 3.3.10. Work effectively with clients from a diverse range of backgrounds, understanding and respecting the impact of difference and diversity upon their lives
- 3.3.11. Conduct professional activities effectively at an appropriate level of autonomy, but within the limits of one's own competence
- 3.3.12. Appreciate the need for and demonstrate a commitment to continued self-reflection and professional development
- 3.3.13. Demonstrate appropriate experience related to applied practice and professional development, conflict resolution, team building skills, and supervision skills.

4. PROGRAMME CONTENT

4.1. ACADEMIC CONTENT

- 4.1.1. Courses should have a comprehensive academic syllabus covering both behaviour analysis theory and its application across the life span covering child, adolescent, adult, older adults, people with developmental/ intellectual disabilities and specialist areas.
- 4.1.2. Course Content Standards:
Courses are required to constitute substantial classroom hours of instruction in the following content areas
 - A. Ethical and Professional Conduct
 - B. Concepts and Principles of Behaviour Analysis
 - C. Research Methods in Behaviour Analysis
 - Measurement (including Data Analysis)
 - Experimental Design
 - D. Applied Behaviour Analysis
 - Fundamental Elements of Behaviour Change & Specific Behaviour Change Procedures
 - Identification of the Problem & Assessment
 - Intervention & Behaviour Change Considerations
 - Behaviour Change Systems
 - Implementation, Management and Supervision
 - E. Discretionary
 - Selected Specialist Topics

Co-ordination between the theoretical and practical aspects of the course is essential.

4.2. SUPERVISED WORK EXPERIENCE

- 4.2.1. Students registered on a behavioural psychology course undergo a rigorous programme of training, education and experience. They are trained within academia in the university setting and also complete substantial supervised work experience.
- 4.2.2. Supervised experience is a period spent working in applied practice under the supervision of a suitably qualified psychologist. Students seeking to become a Chartered Behavioural Psychologist must meet the supervision standards of the PSI ([Click here for more information](#)).
- 4.2.3. Supervised experience should allow students multiple opportunities to practice core competencies as outlined in Section 3.
- 4.2.4. The development of supervised experience should include opportunities during training to acquire skills in assessment, measurement, intervention, data collection, analysis, evaluation and reporting.
- 4.2.5. Students must record relevant details of their supervised experience as per PSI guidelines, to facilitate the monitoring of their training and confer eligibility to apply for Chartered status as a Behavioural Psychologist.
- 4.2.6. In order to apply to become a Chartered Behavioural Psychologist, applicants must satisfy the standards as described by PSI in their Standards for Chartered Membership.

4.3. RESEARCH

- 4.4.1. Courses should have an explicit and written statement of aims and objectives for a programme of research training throughout the course.
- 4.4.2. There should be a formal teaching programme on research methods, including: Measurement (Data Analysis) and Experimental Design.
- 4.4.3. Students should be taught about the practical constraints of applied research.
- 4.4.4. They should be taught how to carry out research with single-case designs.
- 4.4.5. During the course, students should undertake at least one small scale research project and a major research project that makes an original contribution to knowledge and is formally written up as a thesis or a journal article.
- 4.4.6. All research projects must be relevant to Behavioural Psychology.
- 4.4.7. In conducting research close attention must be paid to ethical considerations and research activity must comply with the PSI Code of Professional Ethics.

5. ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE COURSE

5.1. PROGRAMME BOARD

- 5.1.1. The course should have a programme board that may include the Head of Department (or representative), Programme Director(s), and teaching staff.
- 5.1.2. The board should seek to ensure good practice on the course and promote clear communication among all stakeholders relevant to the course and its functioning.
- 5.1.3. The board should be involved in reviewing the progress of the programme and also consider the long-term objectives of the course. Other individual functions may be specified but the programme board should play a clear role in reviewing its selection and examination process.

5.2. LIAISON BETWEEN ACADEMIC STAFF AND WORK EXPERIENCE SUPERVISORS

- 5.2.1. supervisors should report to programme staff regarding student performance and development in the work experience setting.
- 5.2.2. Supervisors should complete and sign supervision forms for the student after each supervision session, detailing content of supervision and level of satisfaction with student performance.

6. PROGRAMME TEAM/STAFFING RESOURCES

- 6.1 The Programme Director will be an experienced Behavioural Psychologist who has: Doctoral level qualifications in Behaviour Analysis/Behavioural Psychology, eligibility to hold registered membership of the PSI and full membership of the Division of Behaviour Analysis.
- 6.2 The Programme Director's role should constitute the greater part of their overall academic responsibilities and they should devote the majority of their time to it.
- 6.3 Programmes should have appropriate staffing to provide effective training. Programme staff will need allocated time for programme tasks such as teaching, academic management, research supervision, coordination and management of placement supervision and assessment and monitoring of students.
- 6.4 A member of the core academic staff should be responsible for monitoring supervised experience.
- 6.5 The programme should have appropriate administrative and technical support.

7. PROGRAMME RESOURCES

- 7.1 The programme must have appropriate teaching and research space for each cohort of students.
- 7.2 There must be appropriate office space for all members of the programme team.
- 7.3 There must be appropriate access to library facilities and electronic resources to support teaching and research needs. This should include access to a wide range of Behavioural Psychology/Behaviour Analysis texts, journals and other resources.
- 7.4 There should be adequate secure storage for materials associated with the programme.
- 7.5 There should be appropriate access to psychometric and behavioural psychology resources to facilitate student learning, research and placement experience.
- 7.6 There should be access to a programme room or common room for the use of the students.

8. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

- 8.1 Relevant information about the structure, organisation and requirements of the programme should be made available to potential applicants.
- 8.2 Applicants should satisfy at least the minimum standards for Graduate Membership of PSI.
- 8.2 Selection procedures should take account of relevant qualifications and experience and should pay particular attention to the suitability of candidates to work with vulnerable populations.
- 8.3 Selection of candidates should be completed by a panel of assessors to include the Programme Director, members of the programme team and, where feasible, the Head of Department/ Discipline.

9. ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

- 9.1 Assessment procedures on the course should facilitate students to demonstrate competence in each of the following areas:
 - Academic skills – assessed by, e.g., exams, essays, AV presentations etc.
 - Research competence – assessed by, e.g., small scale studies and at least one substantial research study,
 - Professional experience – assessed by case studies, other reports of students' work, and supervisors' reports against experience standards
- 9.2 The programme team should formulate procedures and standards for assessment including standards for pass/failure of each area.
- 9.3 External examiners of high professional and academic standing in Behaviour Analysis/Behavioural Psychology should be involved in all three areas of assessment.

- 9.4 Relevant information regarding the requirements necessary to pass the various elements of the programme should be made available to students.
- 9.5 Students should be provided with ongoing feedback on their progress throughout the programme. A student who is experiencing significant difficulties and who may be at risk of failing one or more elements of the programme should be advised of this possibility at an early stage and receive appropriate support and guidance.
- 9.6 It is the responsibility of the programme team to ensure that students whose behaviour does not conform to the PSI Code do not obtain a professional qualification to practice. Reference should be made to the PSI Code of Professional Ethics in making this decision.
- 9.7 Students should be made aware of relevant appeals procedures available to them in the case of failure to satisfy programme requirements.

APPENDIX 1: STANDARDS FOR THE SUPERVISION OF BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN TRAINING

To qualify as a Chartered Behavioural Psychologist, students must meet the necessary criteria as set out by the Guidelines for PSI Chartered Membership.