

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF IRELAND**



**STANDARDS FOR THE ACCREDITATION
OF ACADEMIC POSTGRADUATE
COURSES IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY**

May 2007

PSI Accreditation Standards for Academic Postgraduate Courses in Forensic Psychology

Introduction

As stated in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), one of the primary objectives of the Society is:-

“To advocate, set up and maintain high standards of professional training and conduct for the members of the Society”.

In pursuance of this article over the years, the Society has designed accreditation standards for new postgraduate training courses and training in professional psychology offered by institutions of higher education to ensure fairness and comparability across different programmes.

This is a PSI Policy Statement setting out the standards for the accreditation of postgraduate courses in Forensic Psychology. It defines professional and educational training standards for Forensic Psychologists. This document specifies mandatory standards for good practice. These standards should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals to take account of changes in service demands, training standards and in the knowledge base. It is anticipated that the standards will assist the providers of postgraduate professional training courses in achieving high standards and will assist them in obtaining the resources necessary to ensure that high standards are maintained.

The ultimate purpose of these accreditation standards is to assist in the preparation of forensic psychologists for autonomous professional practice. This professional practice will be characterised by high ethical standards, competence to practise in a variety of professional contexts, and a disposition to work collaboratively with other parties, with high levels of professional skill and up-to-date knowledge.

It is important to note at the time of writing, that the provision of obligatory professional placement(s) for students on forensic courses in Ireland is not possible. This is due to the dearth of appropriately qualified Forensic Psychologists working in Ireland and the lack of a training structure in the area of Forensic Psychology. The PSI Special Interest Group in Forensic Psychology will strive to develop this area. The provision of professional training in forensic psychology will continue to be a goal of the PSI. Until such professional courses are provided, courses in forensic psychology in Ireland shall remain academic courses.

The Objective of Accreditation

Accreditation is the product of an independent examination of a training programme that ensures that it meets the criteria for high standards of professional education in forensic psychology as defined by the PSI.

This document will be used as a basis for the assessment of all postgraduate courses in Forensic Psychology. The process will be based on compliance with published standards determined by PSI.

Condition of Accreditation

Accreditation will depend on the partner institution maintaining or enhancing the quality of the programme which has attained accreditation. Satisfactory reports from external examiners will be required.

A standard of accreditation must be implemented in the appropriate manner within a specified timescale. Non-compliance will result in accreditation not being granted to a new programme or withdrawn from an existing one.

A recommendation is an advised course of action for the purpose of enhancing or strengthening areas in an accredited programme. Programme teams should consider all recommendations from the accreditation panels made to strengthen the course.

PSI recognises that accreditation standards should be flexible enough to allow a new area of professional training to develop. However, the standards demand criteria comparable to existing postgraduate training in other areas of professional psychology.

PSI Programme Standards for Postgraduate Academic Courses in Forensic Psychology

1. Core Purpose and Philosophy

- 1.1 Programmes must have a clear statement of their core purpose. This will include a statement of the programme aims and objectives including student learning outcomes.
- 1.2 Programmes must have an explicit core philosophy (including an explicitly stated academic coherence). This will include a statement of the foundations of the programme, its orientations and values.

2. Programme Content

All accredited programmes must deliver the following curriculum topics.

2.1. The context of practice in forensic psychology

- 2.1.1 Psychology and criminal behaviour.
- 2.1.2 Appreciation of the legal framework of the law and the civil and criminal justice systems
- 2.1.3 Methodological issues commensurate with the masters level of education.
- 2.1.4 Appreciation of the ethical and professional considerations of forensic practice.

2.2. Applications of psychology to processes in the justice system

- 2.2.1 Psychology applied to the process of investigation.
- 2.2.2 Psychology applied to the legal process
- 2.2.3 Psychology applied to the custodial process and through care.

2.3. Working with specific client groups encountered in forensic psychology*

- 2.3.1 Assessment and intervention with victims of offences (adults and children)
- 2.3.2 Assessment and intervention with offenders (adults and children)
- 2.3.3 Assessment and intervention with litigants, appellants, and individuals seeking arbitration and mediation.
- 2.3.4 Applications and interventions within criminal and civil justice systems.

* This section should include detailed coverage of one or more of the topics in order to form the basis of a future specialism.

2.4 Using and Communicating Information in Forensic Psychological Practice

- 2.4.1 Approaches to assessment.
- 2.4.2 Criteria for professional report production.
- 2.4.3 Giving of expert testimony.
- 2.4.4 Consultancy, project management, and organisational interventions.

2.5 Research

- 2.5.1 There should be a formal teaching programme in research methods. The aims and objectives of the research methods component must be clearly stated.
- 2.5.2 Students should undertake at least one piece of supervised empirical research in an area relevant to forensic psychology which should be reported in a style appropriate for submission to a selected forensic journal.
- 2.5.3 All students should be given guidance and supervision on the practical and ethical constraints of applied research.
- 2.5.4 Students should be afforded the earliest opportunity to discuss and develop their research proposals.
- 2.5.5 Regular monitoring of students' research progress should be undertaken throughout the course of the programme.
- 2.5.6 Students should be encouraged to present their work in the public domain through publication of their own work.

3. Teaching and Learning

- 3.1 The partnership between teachers and professional support staff who provide the learning opportunities is important, and both groups should be involved in the development of good professional practice in the teaching, learning and assessment process.
- 3.2 Attention should be given to students at all levels, including those not in full-time study, concerning assessment, academic process and achievement and arrangements should be made to facilitate students at all levels of their study.
- 3.3 Students should receive feedback on their performance and assessment at regular intervals and up to date records should be kept on students' performance and progress by programme providers.
- 3.4 Regular appraisal, informed by appropriate external benchmarks, should be used at all levels to monitor the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

- 3.5 The course should develop structures to facilitate two-way appraisal of performance.
- 3.6 Students should develop reflective skills and processes as a way of appraising their own development.
- 3.7 Through evaluation of the impact of its policies and practices, an institution should seek to implement continuing improvement of the learning environment, the educational opportunities available to its students, and the quality and academic standards of learning in the education it provides.
- 3.8 All courses should have appropriate resources to meet the needs of the students. Library, information technology systems, lecture rooms etc are key resources to the effective learning opportunities for both students and staff.

4. Selection of Students for the Course

- 4.1 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 courses in forensic psychology. Institutions running the courses may set their own standards for entry to the courses over and above this.
- 4.2 Vacancies on the course should be nationally advertised and the selection of candidates should follow the principle of “open competition”.
- 4.3 Selection should be based on explicit equitable criteria and shortlisted applicants should be assessed by a panel.
- 4.4 In addition to the academic criteria for selection to the course, selectors should pay particular attention to personal qualities required to meet the demands of the course and the potential future role as a forensic psychologist. Such demands and the personal qualities required to meet those demands must be explicit and a transparent method of evaluation must be applied.
- 4.5 The selection procedure should be evaluated periodically.
- 4.6 Courses should provide to prospective applicants detailed descriptions about the philosophy of the courses that should include theoretical orientation(s) of the course and the range of skills that the course wishes to develop. 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.

5. Student Development and Support

- 5.1 Student support is an integral component in all aspects of education and learning. Academic institutions should ensure that students have access to confidential support and advice, in addition to educational and vocational guidance, during the course of their study.
- 5.2 Academic institutions should ensure that there is representation from the student body on matters related to the course, and that students are aware of the process through which students' views and opinions can be represented.

6. Student Assessment

- 6.1 Academic institutions should ensure that standards for assessment are made available in full to students, staff and external examiners.
- 6.2 Assessment should be undertaken by appropriately trained staff.
- 6.3 Appropriate policies and procedures should be in place to deal with problems that occur in the assessment of students.
- 6.4 There should be a formal appeals procedure for considering formal complaints from students who fail to satisfy examiners.
- 6.5 Details of appeals procedures should be made known to the students.

7. External Examiner

- 7.1 The role of the external examiner for the course should be defined.
- 7.2 External examiners should receive comprehensive materials to assist them in their role.
- 7.3 The external examiners should have extensive knowledge and expertise in the area of forensic psychology from both a practical and academic perspective. The external examiner should therefore be suitably qualified and experienced in the area of forensic psychology and should be part of the composition of the course's board of examiners.

8. Staffing Resources

- 8.1 The Director of the programme must be a suitably qualified and experienced psychologist with appropriate extensive forensic, research and managerial skills.
- 8.2 The Programme Director will be appointed at the senior lecturer level or higher.

- 8.3 The Programme Director should be appointed by means of an open competition. The selection panel should include external assessors.
- 8.4 Programmes must have sufficient staff to fulfil the aims of the programme and to provide the necessary monitoring, supervision and support to the students.
- 8.5 A particular staff member should be nominated who can act as a research tutor with the responsibility for organising and monitoring the programme of research training.
- 8.6 Staff development and training is an integral and important part of the quality process. Adequate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities should be available to all staff who are associated with the programme.
- 8.7 A staff review and appraisal system should be in place to guide staff development and reward performance.

9. Standards of Professional Conduct

- 9.1 The necessary machinery must be provided to ensure that the position of students on the course, who display unacceptable ethical standards in their course work or behaviour, is reviewed by the course team. In making a decision about the student remaining on the course or not, due process following the relevant college regulations needs to be respected. The PSI's Code of Professional Ethics should be used as a reference in all cases where judgements regarding professional ethics are being made.
- 9.2 Formal appeals procedures should be available to students who are judged to have deviated from acceptable professional ethics.

10. Collaborative Provision

- 10.1 Where accredited programmes offer opportunities for students to work in applied settings it is important that any such provision is open to scrutiny so that standards in quality may be verified to the extent that they reflect the standards and expectations of the awarding body.
- 10.2 Explicit and written statements defining the respective responsibilities of the partners to any collaborative or co-operative arrangement must be provided and subject to periodic review.