

Approaches to Planning and Recording the New Zealand Psychologists Board's Continuing Competence Programme.

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Abstract

This paper summarises the process for the Continuing Competence Programme (CCP) that the New Zealand Psychologists Registration Board requires to be completed by all registered psychologists in New Zealand, and presents some different approaches for developing and recording a psychologist's CCP that are currently being used. The Psychologists Registration Board has elected not to comment on the contents of this paper or the suitability or adequacy of any of the models described. Nevertheless, it is hoped that, in conjunction with the Board's documents, the models described here may assist psychologists to further develop their own CCP. Psychologists will be required to attest that they have completed this process to obtain a 2010-2011 Annual Practising Certificate.

Introduction

Consistent with its role of ensuring the competency of psychologists under the Health Practitioner Competency Assurance Act 2003, the New Zealand Psychologists Board ("the Board") has developed a Continuing Competence Programme (CCP) for registered psychologists practising in New Zealand. Psychologists are required to participate in this programme from 1 April 2009 and into the future as an ongoing requirement for maintenance of an Annual Practising Certificate (APC). All psychologists applying for an APC in 2010 will be required to affirm that they have undertaken the CCP, and will be required to provide evidence of their participation if audited. If they have not undertaken such a programme they will not be able to renew their APC. Their APC may be suspended if they are audited and do not supply satisfactory evidence of participation in a CCP

Both the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists and the New Zealand Psychological Society developed and piloted continuing competency frameworks prior to development of the Board's programme. However, the Board has decided that all New Zealand psychologists should utilise the Board's framework. These alternative frameworks are no longer in use.

The Psychologists Board CCP was described in a document that was distributed with APCs

in March 2009, and is also available on the Psychologists Board web site (N.Z. Psychologists Board, 2009). Recognising the diversity of psychologists' roles and the diversity of methods to enhance their competence, the Psychologists Board has not recommended a particular format for planning and recording CCPs. However, many psychologists have reported that models for planning and recording their CCP would be helpful as a starting point.

This paper briefly summarises the CCP process specified by the Psychologists Board and presents some models for planning and recording the CCP that have been developed throughout the country. These are intended to assist psychologists who are still developing their CCP by being a resource that they can use or modify to support the development and recording of their individual programme. While it is not guaranteed that these formats will be entirely consistent with the eventual requirements of the CCP as it evolves, they should provide a useful starting point. Anne Goodhead, Psychology Advisor to the Psychologists Board has indicated that for the Board's auditing of psychologists' CCP cycle ending in April 2010, evidence of an honest engagement with the CCP process will be more important, than the specific content or presentation style of the evidence provided (Goodhead, 2009).

Caveat

The Psychologists Registration Board was asked to comment on this article and on the proposed models for CCP planning and recording, but elected not to do so. Representatives state "We have therefore not actively reviewed your article and cannot vouch for the accuracy of any statements made therein. It is very important that practitioners rely upon the Board's own documents to understand the requirements of the CCP (and the possible consequences if their participation is assessed as less than satisfactory). We hope you will appreciate the Board's desire to remain true to the flexible, high-trust model it has adopted, and therefore not to prejudge or predetermine what approaches may or may not be acceptable."

Undertaking the Continuing Competence Programme

The reason for the Psychologists Board's development of this programme and the underlying principles are detailed elsewhere

(N.Z. Psychologists Board, 2009). The required process involves seven steps that are described in detail by the Board (N.Z. Psychologists Board, 2009), but can be summarised as:

At the beginning of the year:

1. **Conduct a self-assessment of competency**, reflecting on all aspects of practice relevant to your role, with the assistance of your supervisor or a senior colleague.
2. **Develop objectives for the coming year** to address areas for competency improvement that were identified as part of step one.
3. **Develop a learning plan to achieve these objectives.**

Throughout the year

4. **Record continuing competence activities** you undertake to achieve the objectives, as well as any other competence enhancement activities that may be relevant. Keep evidence of this activity, including in supervision records.

Towards the end of the year

5. **Critically reflect on the outcomes** of the professional development programme (include your supervisor in this reflection process)

At the end of the year, when applying for your Annual Practicing Certificate

6. Having participated in the above process, **you can declare that you have undertaken continuing competence activities** and that you have maintained competence.
7. **Retain the records that are the evidence** of having participated in your CCP, as any person who has applied for an Annual Practicing Certificate may be audited by the Board to ensure that they have participated in a CCP.

In summary, this process involves

- **Reflecting on your needs** to enhance your competency
- **Planning a Continuing Competence Programme** that is tailored to addressing these needs,
- **Undertaking activities** to meet the objectives of this Programme, and
- **Keeping records** of how you have attempted to meet the needs of this programme

Choosing Your Objectives for Competency Improvement

The over-riding goal of the CCP is to ensure that psychologists are competent and fit to practice in the professional roles they undertake. However, the greatest overall benefit from this process will be gained if the psychologist treats it as an opportunity to guide enhancement of their abilities (ie "quality improvement"), rather than simply a tool to show that they are competent (ie "quality assurance"). The reflection – action – review cycle underpinning this process can powerfully assist professional development. Achieving optimal overall benefit from the programme will, however, require the psychologist to decide to use it as a tool to help them develop their competencies rather than treating it merely as a "box-ticking" exercise, and to choose CCP objectives that are as useful as possible for the psychologist and their clients.

One suggested approach to the self-assessment component of the CCP is to consider each of the domains specified in the document "*Core Competencies For the Practice of Psychology in New Zealand*" (N.Z. Psychologists Board, 2008). This document defines core competencies for the Psychologist scope of practice and core Cultural competencies, both of which are also regarded as core competencies for clinical and educational psychologists. It also defines additional competencies for psychologists practicing in the Clinical and Educational vocational scopes of practice.

The major areas of competence defined by this document (integrating those for clinical psychologists) are:

1. Discipline, knowledge, scholarship, and research
2. Diversity, culture, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi (including Awareness, knowledge,

- and skills as components of cultural competency)
3. Professional, legal, and ethical practice
 4. Framing, measuring, and planning (including assessment and formulation)
 5. Intervention and service implementation
 6. Communication
 7. Professional and community relations, consultation, and collaboration
 8. Reflective practice
 9. Supervision

While the levels defined in this document are those expected of a beginning practitioner, the range of areas of competence can give a good guide to areas to reflect on when developing a CCP. The breadth of these areas of competence alerts us to the fact that maintaining competence is a broader activity than simply developing more knowledge and skill in psychological assessment and interventions. Goals for the individual will vary widely depending on their role and their individual needs, so it is expected that goals for the individual will relate more to some areas of competency than to others. It is not expected that goals relevant to all of the areas above will be defined in any one year. However, if appropriate, it could be worth taking a multi-year perspective of having at least one goal pertaining to each of these competency areas during a multiple year cycle

How Much is Enough?

Given the variability in the nature and effort involved in plans to address various competency enhancement objectives (which, for instance, may vary from reading a paper or book about a particular topic up to undertaking a postgraduate qualification on that topic) it is hard to specify how many goals or activities may be required to be acceptable to the Board. Anne Goodhead (2009) from the Psychologists Board has stated that the Board does not wish to be pinned down to a particular number of tasks. She also stated that as the psychologist is required to be able to self-declare as competent, it would require whatever was necessary for that to be true. This, however, presumably would not excuse the psychologist who believes themselves as competent from not participating in Continuing Competence Programme activities at all.

Perhaps one approach which may help to determine what to include could be:

- 1) Identify any areas in which performance is falling below the expected levels of competence, and definitely make a plan to address each of these.
- 2) Recognise some other targets of competence development that may be of particular benefit, and, after undertaking the efforts involved to address the competency issues in 1), make plans to address further of these other targets as able.
- 3) To encourage ongoing competency enhancement across the core competencies described above, it may be worth endeavouring to set objectives that cover at least more than one three or four of these domains in any one year.

Depending on the needs identified through the self-reflection process, this could suggest the setting of a minimum of three or four different goals with associated plans to address them. Any self-aware psychologist is unlikely to have difficulty defining at least three or four areas in which they could do their job better. However, as the size and complexity of such goals can vary widely, this quantum would only be a very rough yardstick, and utilising the approach for determining goals specified above may provide a more accurate way of determining what would be of most benefit,

Recording Additional Activities

Opportunities for professional development, such as training courses, papers read, books read, or talks/discussions attended, often emerge quickly and without much advance warning. While these may be very useful, they will not necessarily either fit into the goals specified in the CCP, or be known about at the time of starting the CCP cycle. However, as they also constitute part of the persons' efforts to increase their competence, it is worth recording this activity as part of the CCP record. Such activities could include (but are not limited to):

- Courses, seminars, workshops etc attended.
- Professional papers or books read.
- Professional articles written/published.
- Professional interest groups participated in.

Such activities could be presented as a table or tables detailing information such as the title, presenters/authors, and date, duration and place of completion, as appropriate. To avoid duplication of effort, if this information is also recorded for another purpose (eg as part of a CV or an Annual Performance Appraisal or Credentialling process) the information prepared for that could likely be

included as part of your CCP in the format it was originally used. However, undertaking such activities would not be seen by the Board as an acceptable alternative to the "reflection - action - review" cycle specified in the Board's CCP process.

Declarations

The Board's CCP documentation indicates that when applying for their APC, the psychologist needs to sign a declaration that they are competent. The Board also indicates that if the psychologist is audited a declaration may be sought from the person with whom they discussed their CCP reflection and plan. Examples of these declarations are:

Declaration of Competence

I attest that my professional knowledge, skills, judgement, and diligence are such that I am competent to practice, and I am committed to undertaking continual competence development and have met the requirement of the Continuing Competence Programme in the last year.

Third Party Declaration

I _____ attest _____ that _____ discussed their self-reflective review, Continuing Competence Programme, and resultant learning goals with me, and I have been in a position to observe the above-named psychologist's practice and/or I have sufficient professional contact with the above-named psychologist to attest to their standard of practice and fitness to practise.

While the Third Party Declaration may not be needed unless the psychologist is audited, developers of some models have decided it is better to collect this information at the time rather than needing to gain it retrospectively if they are audited.

Models for Planning and Recording Your CCP

Electronic versions of a variety of models for recording CCP planning and activities are available from the NZCCP website <http://www.nzccp.co.nz/continuing-competence-programme-nzpb/>. These can be downloaded and modified as required. Additional models may be added as they become available. Models that are currently available are described below:

CCP1

This is a straightforward model that uses one page per goal defined within the CCP and briefly records the process from content of

self-assessment through objective, learning plan, measure, activities, and re-assessment.

CCP2

This model moves away from the tabular format of most models presented here, instead using a more narrative approach of paragraphs describing the reflective review of the last year, defining needs and objectives, and prioritising and planning competence enhancement activities related to the objectives. The second part is completed later, and details activities completed, planned activities that were unable to be completed, and outcomes of the activities. This model also details additional competence enhancement activities. It includes the psychologist's declaration of competence and a third party (eg supervisor's) declaration that the plan had been discussed with them.

CCP3

This model includes a preamble section that outlines the steps in the CCP process as defined by the Board. It then outlines "Domains of Practice" (some related to the Board's core competencies, some more specific to the individual's type of work), and details competencies and professional and ethical issues related to each domain. Following their reflection, the psychologist completes a table that specifies the identified need, competence enhancement objectives, and the learning related to different domains of practice. A second table records activities undertaken, the date and evidence of completion, and its impact on practice for each objective developed in the first part of the process.

CCP4

This model specifies a number of skills regarded as important in clinical psychology (some general, some setting-specific) and asks the psychologist to rate their own competence on this using a three point scale (D = to develop, C = Competent, S = Strength). As presented, the skills tend to focus around clinical assessment and intervention skills but could be broadened to include other aspects of the psychologist role. The psychologist is asked to specify a competency maintenance /advancement plan for as many of the skill areas as are needed. A separate table records and describes the professional activities undertaken, including its relevance to the learning difficulties. A third table acts as a supervision log. The final step involves the psychologist reassessing their learning objectives for this period, and feeding back the outcomes of their CCP.

CCP5

This model asks the psychologist to record their self-reflection on each of the Core Competencies as defined by the Board document in a table. A separate table is then used to record the objectives, learning plan, activities implemented, and evaluation of outcomes.

CCP6

This model asks psychologists to rate their level of competency on a 1-5 scale (1=low, 5=high), for each of the areas covered by the Board's Core Competency document. It then asks the psychologist to define the actions required to address any issues. The psychologist is asked to consider ethical issues (knowledge, issues that have arisen, and how they have been dealt with) and any areas to review. Based on these deliberations, they are asked to develop a learning plan.

CCP7

This model suggests a wide range of records that could be regarded as evidence of competence enhancement, although not necessarily related to the self-reflective process. It then asks the psychologist to record the outcomes of the self-reflective review with a narrative description. It then defines objectives and actions for the coming year in terms of objectives, learning targets, application in practice, date achieved, and review of achievements.

CCP8

This model provides a preamble which describes the steps in the Board's CCP process in considerable detail. It then presents separate pages relating to each of the major areas of competence defined in the Board's Core Competency document. Each page describes the area of competence and then asks the psychologist to identify the Challenges, the Ethical issues, their Goal, their Plan to achieve the goal, and their Review of the Outcome. Some people have defined for themselves at least one goal from all the major areas of competence in one year, but this model could equally involve defining one or more objective from some areas of competency, and not in other areas.

Summary

This article has summarised the requirements of the CCP that the Psychologists Board expects all New Zealand Psychologists to have undertaken by the time they apply for their 2010 APC. A number of suggestions for how psychologists may undertake this activity, and a number of models that could be used to record CCP planning and activities are described.

The Board has expressed reluctance to present a specific format for recording CCP due to its concern that this might overly constrain the ability of psychologists to tailor their CCP to their own needs. As described above, the Board has elected not to comment on this paper or the suitability of any of the approaches described. However, it is hoped that the variety of options presented here, and the freedom for psychologists to take from different formats, modify them, and add new components as appropriate for them, will encompass the flexibility of approach the Board has sought, while meaning that each psychologist does not need to "reinvent the wheel" in relation to how they plan and record their CCP. Additional components discussed above could be usefully appended to many of these forms.

While there is no guarantee that these formats will be ultimately acceptable to the Board, all seem to guide and reflect the type of structured process that has been outlined by the Board, and, if completed with reasonable diligence, may provide a CCP that is satisfactory to the Board when auditing of completion of CCPs is undertaken in 2010.

References

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