The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

The PSI Process for the Accreditation of Postgraduate Courses in Psychology

September 2008*

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1.   *Introduction*

The Society invites institutions of higher education who are providing or seek to provide postgraduate education in professional psychology to submit their courses for accreditation by the Society. Through its accreditation procedures, the Society wishes to support courses in a period of self-study and peer review, thus enabling them to maintain the highest standards of postgraduate education and training in professional psychology. Accreditation procedures consist of examining documentation associated with the course and an on-site visit to meet with appropriate teaching staff, students, supervisors and other stakeholder partners.

The words course and programme can be used interchangeably to refer to post graduate training schemes in psychology throughout this document.

2.   *How does a new course make an application for accreditation?*

Course teams should seek approval from PSI before establishing a new postgraduate professional training course. This also applies to courses that undergo major change e.g. move from a master's course to a doctoral course. The PSI will acknowledge and consider the prior accreditation history of a course when reviewing an application for accreditation.

The first stage of a two stage application process is called *'Provisional Approval'* and not provisional accreditation which refers to a different accreditation stage.

Initially a paper based exercise is completed by the newly established course team where the course provides documentation showing how it will be aligned to the PSI accreditation criteria. This documentation is submitted to PSI and ideally reviewed <u>prior</u> to the first intake of students/trainees.

The second stage of the accreditation process is an on-site visit, at the mid-point of the first cohort i.e. in the case of a three year course after the course has been running for 18 months, or in the case of a two year course after one year.

Courses will not be required to pay the full accreditation fee when looking for provisional approval. A deposit should be paid at this stage which is counted toward the full fee. The full fee must be paid prior to the on-site visit taking place.

An accreditation panel is established which reviews the initial documentation and the same panel, having gained familiarity with the course and its aspiration undertakes the on-site visit.

3.   *How does an established course make an application for re-accreditation?*

A course intending to apply to the PSI for accreditation or re-accreditation should complete an accreditation application form (See Appendix I).

The application form must be accompanied by a short accreditation signposting document and can be supported by existing course documentation available on the web.

The Society anticipates that the accreditation process, from an initial application being received to the accreditation report being issued, should ideally be completed within eight months. Experience has shown that the process takes six to twelve months. PSI will correspond regularly with the course during this process.

The submitted accreditation document should show how the course team believe the course meets the Society's accreditation criteria for postgraduate courses in psychology. The document should be paginated and thoroughly proof read before being submitted.

The submitted document should contain the following information:

3.1   A statement of the course philosophy and orientation. This statement should be an explicit integration statement of the psychological and philosophical rationale for the course and how the structure of the course supports this philosophy.

3.2   The syllabus, including a description of formally taught modules, workshops, seminars and placements, together with the amount of time spent on each component.

3.3   Examples of any documentation given to the students on the course, e.g. reading lists.

3.4   A description of assessment methods and how they contribute to the final assessment with examples of exam papers, essay topics and other set work.

3.5   A list of placement locations used for the course, the criteria used to select placements and how placements are monitored and assessed. Examples of placement logs and supervisor assessment reports should be submitted from each year of the course.

3.6   Institutional criteria for selection of students, how students are selected and who is involved in the selection process. Recent statistics on the selected students and an indication of the number of applications for places each year should be submitted.

3.7   A description of how the course is structured and organised and lines of responsibility. A flow chart to illustrate the interconnections and roles within the course governance structure and including membership of committees and details of other stakeholders should   be submitted.

3.8   Membership of Board of Examiners.

3.9   Details of the External Examiner(s) and recent copies of reports from the External Examiner since the last accreditation visit or in the case of a new course all External examiner reports available.

3.10   A short Curriculum Vitae for course staff and other staff who make a significant contribution to the course as appropriate.

3.11   A statement of physical resources available to the course such as lecture rooms available, tutorial rooms, ICT facilities, library and administrative support.

3.12   In courses where placements are offered a statement of the minimum standards to ensure a safe and conducive placement environment should be included.

3.12   Course documents should be supported by the most recent Quality Assurance assessment for the host department for the course.

3.13   Documentation should include recent (within one year) minutes of meetings of

> The Board of Studies/Course Advisory Committee
> Supervisors and the course team
> The course team and students/trainees
> Any other relevant meetings

3.14   Any other relevant information as required by individual specialism accreditation guidelines.

3.15   Documents to be submitted:

- Documents should include links to course information on the web.

- An electronic copy of the submission should also be made available to PSI.

- 1 bound copy of the submission should be submitted.

It is important to note when considering the Society's accreditation guidelines that all accreditation criteria are regarded as essential.

4.   How are accreditation panels established?

Establishment of Postgraduate Accreditation Panels

4.1   Rationale for the composition of Panel:

The membership of an accreditation panel should reflect the various stakeholders of the profession for the course being processed for accreditation. Therefore there needs to be both academic and practitioner representation.

The Society has a strong interest in the process and should draw from the internal expertise that looks after the interests of the profession. A nominee of the committee of the Division representing the profession should be appointed.

It would also be beneficial in terms of the amount of work to be undertaken to have representation from the ordinary membership of the profession. The number of such members should be flexible depending on the demands of the particular accreditation

being undertaken. Cognisance should be taken of the differences that exist within specialisms when establishing an accreditation panel.

In light of these considerations, panel membership will consist of the following:

- One nominee of the relevant Division
- One Senior Academic Psychologist – an academic appointee with experience in teaching in the requisite field who is independent of the course/college seeking accreditation. This nominee can be from outside of Ireland
- One Senior Practitioner Psychologist – a psychologist of a least senior grade with experience of providing training in the requisite field who is independent of the institution seeking accreditation
- One Member from the general Division membership/profession with experience of delivering or contributing towards a postgraduate training course.

Three members of the panel should have relevant expertise in the specialisation being accredited.

4.2 Number of Psychologists per panel:

The minimum number of psychologists on the panel shall be four psychologists to include the membership set out above and the maximum number of psychologists will not be greater than six.

4.3 Chair of Panel:

The Chair of the panel should normally be someone who will be au fait with current accreditation guidelines and other relevant processes and protocols within PSI. It is desirable but not essential that the Chair of the accreditation panel will have been a member of a previous accreditation panel. The Director of Professional Development cannot act as Chair of a panel.

The duties of the Chair of the panel will be to chair meetings of the panel.

4.4 Executive Officer:

The Director of Professional Development will act as executive officer to each panel, and his/her responsibilities, among others, will be to:

1. discharge the administrative tasks for the panel
2. facilitate all communication between the panel and the course during the accreditation process
3. act as communication link between the panel and relevant PSI structures
4. act as communication channel between the panel members
5. set and maintain the timeline for the completion of the task.
6. ensure that all accreditation and provisional approval practice is carried out in a fair and consistent manner.

5.   *What is the structure of the on-site accreditation visit?*

The accreditation panel will meet to discuss the course and the documentation received prior to the on-site visit. The on-site visit lasts for one day and begins with a private panel meeting which is followed by a meeting with the course team and then with other stakeholder groups throughout the day.

The accreditation panel will meet the following groups as appropriate, depending on the nature of the course

- Course team
- Head of Department
- Representatives of the University management
- Representatives of employers/sponsors or representatives of employers of graduates where applicable
- Trainees/Students from each year of the course
- Representatives of recent graduates from the course
- Placement supervisors where applicable

Prior to the on-site visit all courses will be asked to contact stakeholders and inform them as part of the accreditation process that the accreditation panel are interested in their views of the course. All views must be submitted in writing and must be signed. The collection of accreditation information from third parties is a transparent process and persons who make submissions must be informed that such submissions will be made available to the course team who will have a right to reply to issues raised.

Before the on-site visit and after the visit all communication between the course team and the accreditation panel must be conducted through the PSI office rather than directly between the course and the accreditation panel.

6.   *How long does it take to get a decision on the accreditation application?*

An accreditation report is normally completed and issued within eight months of the accreditation application being made.

7.   *What does the final accreditation report look like?*

The accreditation panel evaluates a course against the relevant PSI accreditation criteria for the particular psychology specialism. The accreditation panel submits a detailed accreditation report outlining the extent to which the course meets the accreditation criteria. The initial draft of the report, without the recommendations, is sent to the course team for comment on the factual accuracy of the report. The report will, if necessary, be amended following initial feedback from the course team. The accreditation panel then send the full report, with recommendations, to the course team for written comments. This process gives the course a right of reply prior to the report being sent to Council. The final report and the comments from the course team are submitted to Council. The decision to award accreditation to a course rests with Council.

A template for an accreditation report is outlined in Appendix II.

8.   What are the potential outcomes of an accreditation application?

The following recommendation options are available to an accreditation panel:

8.1   Full accreditation awarded to cover five cohorts of students/trainees.

8.2   While full accreditation is the default position, provisional accreditation can be awarded if specific conditions can be met within a set timeframe.

Provisional accreditation - a decision making guide.

a.   Panel to consider
        -      all accreditation criteria and the extent to which they have been met and their impact on the overall quality of the course
        -      the developmental stage of the course
        -      resources available to the course vs. resources needed by the course
        -      the time frame necessary to meet accreditation criteria
b.   Panel to provide a written account of their decision making process to include a rationale for their recommendation.

8.3   Accreditation not awarded at this time.

9.   How long is a course accredited for?

The Society has adopted a policy of accrediting a course to cover a defined number of cohorts of students or trainees. In practice this means that if a course is awarded full accreditation all cohorts on the course within a particular period of time would graduate from an accredited course. The following wording is used:

"This accreditation covers five trainee cohorts commencing with that of the academic session 200X/XX"

For example: "This accreditation covers five trainee cohorts commencing with the of the academic session 2008/2009"

This accreditation period would span the years

1.   2008/2009
2.   2009/2010
3.   2010/2011
4.   2011/2012
5.   2012/2013

If re-accreditation is sought, application should be made to PSI in early in the 2012 /2013 academic year to ensure completion of the process before the entry of the next cohort i.e. 2013/2014.

In awarding accreditation, the Society would consider it a breach of the accreditation agreement if, during the period of cohort accreditation, the Society was not informed of the occurrence of substantial changes that impact on the quality a course and affect the accredited cohorts. Failure to do so may result in the removal of accreditation.

10.   *How much does an accreditation application cost?*

The current accreditation application fee for post-graduate courses is €4,000. The accreditation fee covers accommodation, travel, some meals for panel members and administration and postal expenses concerning the accreditation documentation.

This policy was approved by PSI Council on *19th of September 2008* and will be reviewed within a five year period. The policy was updated in March 2017.

Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

The Psychological Society of Ireland

Accreditation/Re-accreditation application form

Name of the course seeking accreditation:

Name of University or Institution:

Accreditation application: Re-accreditation application:

Signed:

—— _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Course Director

For office use:

Date application received

Supporting document supplied   Hard Copy   Email/web link

Accreditation fee included

Appendix II

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

Report of the Accreditation Panel
for the _____
Course in _____Psychology
at

_____

The Psychological Society of Ireland
Floor 2
Grantham House
Grantham Street
Dublin 2

Ph 01 4749160
E-mail info@psihq.ie

Date: _____   _   _ __

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1.   Introduction

The _____   __ Psychology was established at _____ _ _ _ in ____.

This report outlines the PSI accreditation process in accordance with the PSI Guidelines for the accreditation of postgraduate courses in _____ _ _ Psychology. Details of the panel membership and the accreditation methodology are outlined. The accreditation guidelines are used to structure the report of the panel.

1.1   Panel Membership

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1.2   Date of Accreditation Visit

2.   Accreditation Methodology

1. Panel Members received documentation submitted to PSI by _____ prior to the accreditation visit.
2. Items for clarification and exploration were identified by Panel members and additional documentation was sought from the course team.
3. On the accreditation visit Panel members met and interviewed the following relevant stakeholders:
    a. Core Course team members from the _____ __
    b. Wider course team
    c. Head of Department of Psychology/others as appropriate
    d. Current cohort of students
    e. Course graduates
    f. Supervisors (where applicable)
4. Panel members drafted a report based on the PSI Accreditation Guidelines for the assessment of postgraduate academic courses in _____ _ __ Psychology.
5. Clarifications in relation to factual accuracy were sought from the course team after the panel had deliberated on results from the accreditation assessment.
6. The report follows the accreditation criteria and comments from the accreditation panel are included where deemed necessary.

3.   Course Strengths

The panel notes that the _____ ___Psychology course has the following strengths:

4. Results of Accreditation Assessment

The following highlights the performance of the course against the PSI accreditation criteria and also outlines assessment comments from the panel.

This section of the report will outline each of the accreditation criteria in turn and indicate whether or not the accreditation panel believe the course meets the individual criteria.

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.

Criterion met:

Panel comments:

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.

Criterion met:

Panel comments:

1.3 etc

1.4 etc

5.   Essential Requirements

Core Purpose and Philosophy

Criterion 1.1

1.   The course must be strengthened by developing a clear statement of its core purpose. This should include a statement of the programme aims and objectives including student learning outcomes.

Criterion 1.2

2.   The course must be strengthened by developing an explicit stated core philosophy (including an explicitly stated academic coherence). This will include a statement of the foundations of the programme, its orientations and values.

3.   etc

4.   etc

6.   Recommendations to strengthen the course

Programme Content

Criterion 2.1.1

1.   The course could be strengthened by ensuring that broader coverage is given to topics such as _____ _ _ _ _ _ __ in the   academic programme.

2.   etc

3.   etc

7. Panel's conclusion and overall recommendation

The accreditation panel, having met with the course team and relevant stakeholders and after reading a substantial amount of documentation, have given significant consideration to the application by the _____ Psychology at ___ _ _ _ _ _for accreditation.

The panel recommend that the _____ _ _ _ _ Psychology course be awarded ___ _ _ _ _ _at this time. The panel further recommends that ___ _ _ _ _ -__

In awarding accreditation, the Society would consider it a breach of professional behaviour if, during the period of cohort accreditation, the Society was not informed of the occurrence of substantial changes that impact on the quality a course and affect the accredited cohorts.