



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND
CUMANN SÍCEOLAITHE ÉIREANN

GUIDELINES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF POSTGRADUATE
ACADEMIC COURSES
IN
SPORT, EXERCISE AND PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Society's criteria for the accreditation of academic postgraduate courses in sport, exercise and performance psychology are outlined in this document. Its objectives are to specify minimum standards, benchmark with other accrediting public regulatory and statutory bodies and to offer guidelines on best practice in postgraduate provision in this field. Sport psychology could be said to have a long past but only a short history (Kremer & Moran, 2008). Despite emerging as a topic of interest among psychologists over a century ago the discipline was only forged in the 1960s in the USA and Europe, with the International Society of Sport Psychology founded in 1965. Indeed, the APA Division of Sport and Exercise Psychology was only founded in 1986. The professionalisation of the discipline led to the establishment of a register of practitioners by the USOC in 1984. Four years later the *Journal of Sport Psychology* added the word "exercise" into the title. This strand emerged largely from the research on mental health and exercise (e.g., Morgan, 1985) and has evolved into a broad domain which is concerned with understanding exercise promotion and physical activity. These developments have been augmented by both statutory practitioner registers (e.g., HCPC, UK) and practitioner recognition schemes by national sport institutes (USOC register; Irish Institute of Sport Professional Members). In 2012, the Society, following the initiatives from a special interest group in this area recognised divisional status for sport, exercise and performance psychology

Recently, the division set out a framework for the development of postgraduate training in sport, exercise and performance psychology in Ireland. Consistent with its development in other countries, accreditation criteria were designed in light of the science-practice model. The criteria demand a standard comparable to existing postgraduate provision in other areas of professional psychology. To this end, the Society set the requirement that postgraduate education in sport, exercise and performance psychology should be pursued to a minimum of Masters degree level (or equivalent) and that the time taken to complete this study should normally be one calendar year full time study (or equivalent part time). In making this requirement the Society wished to ensure that the basic professional training for sport, exercise and performance psychology was to a level that enables students to be prepared for subsequent supervised experience.

1.1 DEFINITION OF SPORT, EXERCISE AND PERFORMANCE

Sport Psychology addresses the interactions between psychology and sport performance, including the psychological aspects of optimal athletic performance, the psychological care and well being of athletes, coaches, and sport organisations, and the connection between physical and psychological functioning (Martin, 2012).

Exercise Psychology is concerned with the behavioral, social cognitive, and psychobiological antecedents and consequences of physical activity.

Performance Psychology focuses on the psychology of human performance, in particular, professions that demand excellence in psychomotor performance (i.e., performing arts, surgery, firefighting, law enforcement, military operations) (Martin, 2012).

The objective of programmes should be to educate highly qualified researchers and professionals for the growing field of SEPP; for example, in the areas of motivation,

performance, behaviour regulation, and preventive interventions within sport and exercise. Masters level programmes in SEPP are required to address major challenges related to ill-health, well-being, sedentary life style, and the world of sports today.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

2.1 The following general principles should cover any course established in Ireland to provide postgraduate training in sport, exercise and performance psychology.

2.2 The primary aim of each course should be to provide postgraduate training that will enable the psychologist to progress through Stage 1 of their training, which is not a professional qualification. Stage 2 will require supervised experience for a period of three years to become professionally qualified by PSI as a sport, exercise and performance psychologist. Furthermore, because of the evolving nature of this field, ongoing continuous professional development will be necessary for sport, exercise and performance psychologists throughout their career.

2.3 Each course should provide three strands, conceptual and theoretical knowledge, research skills and professional skills training in sport, exercise and performance psychology. In order to become a Registered Psychologist of PSI, however, graduates from such courses must fulfill the normal requirements for registration.

2.4 Each course should be based on a model that includes theory, practical skills, research/evaluation skills, and has both group and personal development and reflective practice as an integral part of training.

2.5 Proposers of courses should make detailed statements about the philosophy of the courses that they are offering. The statements should include references to the theoretical orientation(s) of the course, the range of skills the course wishes to develop, the role of group and personal development and reflective practice, the provision for research and evaluation skills and the distinct graduate attributes.

2.6 Each course should enable students to become acquainted with different theoretical frameworks of sport, exercise and performance and their applications.

2.7 Courses should foster in students a strong sense of professional and ethical responsibility, scientific integrity, personal awareness and advocacy for the discipline.

2.8 Courses should foster a deep understanding of the important links between theory and practice in the area of sport, exercise and performance psychology.

2.9 Each course should be based on the scientist-practitioner model.

2.10 Courses should have inbuilt flexibility to enable them to adapt to new developments in sport, exercise and performance psychology and related disciplines.

2.11 A high level of communication between staff, students and other stakeholders should prevail, so that students can freely discuss with staff different aspects of the course, while staff should keep students informed about their progress.

2.12 Courses should have an in-built annual review structure which must involve student feedback in addition to meeting institutional requirements.

2.13 Courses should lead to the award of a minimum of a postgraduate degree at Masters level (NFQ Level 8-9) or equivalent qualification.

2.14 Course should be of at least one full calendar year duration or part-time equivalent.

3. PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

3.1. STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

3.1.1 The PSI *Code of Professional Ethics* must be central to the ethos of the course. In addition, comparable ethical code documents, for example, the BPS *Code of Ethics and Conduct* and the sport psychology specific Association of Applied Sport Psychology *Code of Ethical Principles and Standards* should be highlighted to ensure a consideration of ethical standards in both professional activity and research.

3.1.2 The PSI's Code of Professional Ethics should be used as a reference in all cases where judgments regarding professional ethics are being made. Due regard should be given to the comparable ethical code documents and parallel local university research ethics committee procedures.

3.1.3 All stakeholders in the course should be made aware of psychologists' professional responsibilities under the Codes of Conduct.

3.1.4 The necessary formal procedures must be in place to ensure that any individuals selected for the course that display unacceptable ethical standards in their course work are not allowed to continue on the course.

3.1.5 Formal appeals procedures within the university should be available to students who are judged unsuitable to continue on the course.

3.2 DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

3.2.1 Diversity is defined broadly and includes (but are not limited to) race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, physical capacities, and sexual orientation.

3.2.2 Courses should assist postgraduate students to value human diversity and understand the impact of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality on health, psychological wellbeing and performance.

3.2.3 Understanding the implications for engaging in research and practice with diverse populations should be integral to each programme. Guidelines for working with diverse groups and appreciating diversity as a practitioner should be a component of core content on professional practice and ethics.

3.2.4 The programme philosophy should make clear provisions for how they will provide for considerations of diversity and cultural competence.

4. COURSE CONTENT

4.1 Courses should have a comprehensive academic syllabus covering psychological theory, research methods and application.

4.2 The academic component should be designed specifically for postgraduate students and a range of educational methods should be employed in the teaching process.

4.3 The majority of the academic content should be taught by the core staff on the course, though some teaching by other psychologists and accredited professionals is desirable. For example, this may include practitioners from the sport sciences and sports medicine who are appropriately recognised by professional bodies (e.g., Irish Institute of Sport, Soc. for Chartered Physiotherapists) contributing to interdisciplinary enquiry.

4.4 The course must provide substantial teaching in the following core areas:

- Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology in Practice
- Research and Research Methods
- Ethics in Applied Psychology

In-depth academic knowledge base¹ in the following domains:

¹ Note: an expanded list of the academic knowledge base – drawn from the BPS DSEP model is included in Appendix A. This comprehensive list includes content that currently is designated as important in the area of sport, exercise and performance psychology. To provide course directors with the flexibility to design course content suitable to differing

- Perception and Cognition (including neuroscience)
- Psychological Skills and Strategies
- Developmental Processes
- Social Processes
- Well Being and Mental Health (including biology of behaviour)
- Individual Differences
- Other cognate disciplines, e.g., elements of organisational psychology).

4.5 At least one specific research methods module should ideally be included in the core content. It is also desirable to embed elements of research methods across all modules, where appropriate.

4.6 Contemporary issues should be highlighted and this should include reference to recent position statements and commentaries by PSI and key stakeholder organisations (e.g., See Appendix C).

4.7 Students must complete a comprehensive research project during the course of postgraduate learning.

4.8 The research can employ a variety of methodological approaches to sport, exercise and performance psychology, for example, quantitative or qualitative methodologies, both single or multiple subject designs, applied case studies or global outcome research studies, etc.

4.9 Research projects may be presented either as a dissertation (e.g., minimum 10,000 words excluding appendices) or in the format of a published scientific article (e.g., 5,000 words).

4.10 Each research student will have a minimum of one main supervisor, who is a member of core staff. A second supervisor may be included and this supervisor may provide multi-disciplinary perspective and thus be a professional other than a psychologist.

5. ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE COURSE

5.1 Learning experiences on the course can include face-to-face university based teaching, collaborative learning and e-learning.

5.2 The course should have an independent Course Committee that reports to the Dept./School that runs the course. It should normally comprise the course director and other core staff to

professional philosophies, directors are advised that while coverage across all is required, this can be embedded across a range of modules.

oversee the day to day running of the course, and ensure that the interests of each group are fully represented.

5.3 The major function of the Course Committee should be to facilitate communications among all those involved in the course. The Course 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 but in the interests of good governance the Course Committee should meet at least once per semester.

5.4 The course committee should seek to ensure good practice on the course and the smooth operation of the course.

5.5 In all cases it is essential that the roles and functions of the Course Committee should be clearly specified and that there are published terms of reference. The roles, functions and terms of reference of the Committee should be communicated to all the course stakeholders.

6 STAFFING RESOURCES COURSE DIRECTOR

6.1 SEPP psychologist(s) with substantial professional experience and at least five years' full time (or equivalent) experience in the post of lecturer (or equivalent) in Psychology should be appointed as Course Director(s) and have overall responsibility, within the university structure for course organisation and structure. Course Director(s) should be registered members of the Psychological Society of Ireland and possess full membership of the Division of Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology.

6.2 The Course Director(s) must have the course as a major employment commitment and course organisation should be recognised as an important component of the post.

6.3 The Course Director(s) and core academic staff must engage in ongoing continuing professional development in the area of SEPP.

6.4 The Course Director(s) must have an ongoing professional engagement in SEPP applied practice (e.g., mentoring or consulting).

6.5 There should be a clear channel of accountability for Course Directors clarifying their posts within the institutions in which the courses are run.

TEACHING STAFF

6.6 The majority of the teaching should be conducted by the course team. All of the course team should be registered members of PSI and full members of the division of sport, exercise and performance psychology or equivalent.' A ratio of student-staff ratio of 9:1 is recommended and this applies to staff with a specialism in sport, exercise and performance.

6.7 Other individuals with specialist expertise may more appropriately teach certain sections of the academic programme or may provide a multi-disciplinary perspective. These staff should be eligible for Registered Membership of the Psychological Society of Ireland or be recognised as accredited by a professional accrediting body in their discipline (e.g., Irish Institute of Sport accredited Biomechanist).

6.8 Courses should have adequate staffing to meet course design, development and delivery needs. This means accredited staff with enough time allocated to carry out the required tasks: management; teaching; organising; research supervision, assessment and quality assurance.

6.9 Courses should have adequate administrative support.

LIAISON BETWEEN CORE TEACHING STAFF AND OCCASIONAL LECTURERS

6.10 It is imperative that close liaison is maintained between core teaching staff and occasional lecturers if an integrated comprehensive course is to be provided.

6.11 Regular meetings should be held between such staff and ideally an induction process be developed for staff that are providing significant contributions to the overall programme.

6.12 All course 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.

7. COURSE RESOURCES

The course should have appropriate facilities and resources including:

7.1 Teaching space of adequate size and quality for each cohort of students;

7.2 Access to computer facilities, study room facilities and an operational online learning environment;

7.3 Adequate space to enable the course to be administered effectively, including office space for administrative staff;

7.4 Individual office space for academic staff;

7.5 Access to a wide range of relevant and contemporary books and journals in sport, exercise and performance psychology; and relevant research databases.

7.6 Adequate laboratory space for conducting psychological experiments;

7.7 Access to a range of psychometric tests that are appropriate for use with client cohorts in sport, exercise and performance psychology;

7.8 Adequate storage for efficient operation of the course;

7.9 Adequate bespoke space for practitioner training.

8. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

8.1 Graduates who hold academic qualifications that are recognised as satisfying at least the minimum qualifications of Graduate Membership of PSI are eligible for inclusion on postgraduate professional training courses for performance psychology. Students who don't meet these requirements may be co-taught with those on accredited programmes. However both programmes should be distinguished by different degree titles (e.g., Applied Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology PSI Accredited; Coaching and Performance non-accredited). Institutions' running these courses may set their own standards for entry to the courses over and above this.

8.2 Vacancies on courses should be widely advertised and the selection of candidates should follow the principle of "open competition."

8.3 Courses should provide to prospective applicants detailed descriptions about the following: Philosophy of the course that should include theoretical orientation(s) of the course; the learning outcomes of each module, the range of graduate attributes that the course wishes to develop; and the role of personal development and reflective practice. 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. The course should be an Equal Opportunities provider.

8.4 In addition to the academic criteria for selection to the course, selectors should also pay attention to personal qualities required to meet the demands both of the personal/group development aspects of the course and the eventual role as a performance psychologist. Such demands and the personal qualities required to meet those demands must be explicit and a mutually agreed method of evaluation must be applied.

8.5 A group comprising the core teaching staff should carry out the selection procedure.

8.6 The selection procedure should be evaluated periodically and student feedback from both successful and unsuccessful candidates should be sought.

9. ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE

9.1 The following principles should govern the procedures of candidate performance assessment.

9.2 The following areas should be assessed:

9.2.1 conceptual knowledge

9.2.2 methods of research, evaluation and intervention

9.2.3 professional skills

9.3 The student should demonstrate competence in each of these three areas (9.2.1, 9.2.2, 9.2.3 above). Recognition of prior learning should also be considered in the selection process based on local institutional guidelines.

9.4 Knowledge and skills developed during the course should be assessed through appropriate methods. Although these methods of assessment may vary depending on the philosophy of the course, each course should strive for a variety of methods, e.g., written examinations, research project, research essays, group presentations, case reports, video and audiotapes, tutor/peer/self assessment techniques.

9.5 Both formative and summative assessment should be used and students should be given appropriate and timely feedback about their performance.

9.6 The procedure and criteria for assessment should be explicit.

9.7 The assessment of research and evaluation skills should be based on a research project or dissertation.

9.8 There should be a formal appeals procedure, which should be made known to the students.

10. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

10.1 The course should engage in a quality assurance process, possibly as part of the host institution's existing structure, to ensure that the views of all stakeholders are sought and contribute to the development of the course.

10.2 External examiners of high professional and academic standing in sport, exercise and performance psychology will be required to quality assure the programme on an annual basis and this should be augmented by periodic University review processes. The external examiner should be a registered member of the Psychological Society of Ireland or equivalent, with appropriate expertise relating to sport, exercise and performance psychology.

11 EVALUATION OF COURSE

11.1 The Psychological Society of Ireland as the body representing psychologists in Ireland reserves the right to approve or reject any professional training course in psychology. This document shall be used as a basis for the assessment of all courses in sport, exercise and performance psychology.

APPENDIX A

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE BASE

(Extract from Standards for Masters programmes in Sport and/or Exercise Psychology

Approved: May 2014 see

http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/PaCT/spex_psychology_stage_1_approved_may_2014.pdf