

Submission in relation to:

(e) Mental health workforce issues

I would simply ask that an evidence based approach is applied to the workforce qualifications and training of psychologists and treatment of psychologists in systems such as Medicare. Clearly different groups of psychologists have different interests and those who are currently treated more favourably wish to maintain their status while others push for equity. The best interests of the Australian public are served by having a range of competent practitioners providing services aimed at not just the alleviation of suffering but the promotion of mental health so that individuals, groups, organisations and communities can flourish.

There is currently a lot of rhetoric around what is the 'best' training. Can we please use an evidence based approach to determine competency. Where is the evidence that says one type of psychologist is better or more effective than another in delivering psychological services and achieving outcomes? If we don't know enough right now then let's put mechanisms in place to find out and in the meantime work with the assumption that all psychologists, albeit trained via different pathways, are competent to provide psychological services and will do so in an ethical manner.

I will share a personal experience that illustrates for me a problem with the current assessment of competency used by the APS.

I have come from a related field and moved over to psychology later in life. I have completed a Masters degree in Psychology and have many years of solid work experience in the field. As a mature age student I completed the degree over four years part time while working full time in the field with other fine psychologists. After completing the Masters degree I became fully registered as a psychologist shortly before the legislation changed to national registration. Around this time I also applied for college membership using the alternate pathway providing ample evidence of my competencies through my training and real world experience and a willingness to provide more information. As part of the Masters degree I was assessed by all of my placement supervisors as fully competent/job ready and had clearly integrated my previous experiences with the more recent focus on psychology. However I received a phone call to advise that because of the timing of my full registration the APS would reject my application on this basis without looking at the details and that they had been instructed to take this approach by the PBA. I later received a letter stating that I was rejected because "in reviewing your application the College Membership Committee determined that you did not provide evidence of specialist knowledge and skills commensurate with standard route entry qualifications". The recommendation was that I repeat my real world experience but this time under the supervision of a College member for 2 years and then I would be deemed entry level competent and possessing specialist knowledge and skills. I was disappointed that despite doing the Masters degree and having extensive work experience that I was treated as if I was a graduate with no life or work experience, no consideration was given to prior experience (which I thought was the purpose of the alternative pathway). Therefore I find it difficult to trust the current system of College membership for the determination of competency; it is seriously flawed in its assumptions.