



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

CUMANN SíCEOLAITHE ÉIREANN

***GUIDELINES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF POSTGRADUATE
ACADEMIC COURSES***

IN

HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

DATE: 5TH OF FEBRUARY 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	2
1.1	DEFINITION OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY	2
2.	GENERAL PRINCIPLES	3
3.	PROFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES AND VALUES	3
4.	COURSE OBJECTIVES	3
5.	COURSE CONTENT	4
	4.1 ACADEMIC CONTENT	4
	4.2 RESEARCH	4
6.	ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE COURSE	5
7.	STAFFING RESOURCES	5
8.	COURSE RESOURCES	6
9.	ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES	6
10.	ASSESSMENT	7
11.	QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES	7
	APPENDIX 1	8
	ACADEMIC POSTGRADUATE COURSES IN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY - ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE B	

1. INTRODUCTION

What follows sets out the Society's criteria for the accreditation of academic postgraduate courses in Health Psychology. Its objectives are to specify minimum standards and offer guidelines on good practice in this area.

1.1 DEFINITION OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Health psychology involves an examination of the way in which biological, psychological, and social factors affect health and illness. Health psychologists are concerned with studying the relationship between psychological factors (e.g. proneness to hostility), social/psychological factors (e.g., psychological stress) and illness (e.g., heart disease). Areas of practice include health risk behaviours and developing better ways of helping people to change their behaviours. Health psychologists are also involved in helping individuals to improve their health or to cope with chronic illness or unpleasant medical procedures.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The following general principles should govern any course established in this country to provide postgraduate training of health psychologists.

- 2.1 The primary aim of each course should be to provide postgraduate training which will
 - 2.1.1 Enhance the individuals knowledge of health psychology;
 - 2.1.2 Train individuals in health psychology research;
 - 2.1.3 Prepare individuals to undertake future professional training in health psychology.
- 2.2 Each course should provide fundamental academic training in health psychology.
- 2.3 Each course should be based on the basic scientist/practitioner model.
- 2.5 Courses should define their particular objectives and philosophy which are communicated to applicants. The course objectives should specify the roles a graduate will be able to fulfil on successfully completing the course.
- 2.6 Courses should have inbuilt flexibility to enable them to adapt to new developments in health psychology and related disciplines.
- 2.7 Courses should lead to the award of at least Master's level (HETAC level 8-9) or an equivalent qualification.

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.
- 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 parallel university procedures.
- 3.1.3 All stakeholders in the course should be made aware of psychologists' professional responsibilities under the Code.
- 3.1.4 The necessary formal procedures must be in place to ensure that individuals selected for the course that display unacceptable ethical standards in their professional work are not allowed to continue on the course.
- 3.1.5 Formal appeals procedures should be available to students who are judged unsuitable to continue on the course.

3.2. DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- 3.2.1 Courses should assist post-graduate students to value human diversity and understand the impact of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality on health and psychological wellbeing.

4. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Each course should enable graduates to:-

- 4.1 understand different theoretical frameworks and their applications;
- 4.2 develop a broad range of psychological expertise based on academic knowledge, research and skills;
- 4.3 develop an ethical approach to their work which includes a strong sense of scientific integrity and professional responsibility
- 4.4 understand the social, political and organisational context in which health psychologists work is relevant;
- 4.5 develop appropriate communication skills, both oral and written.

5. COURSE CONTENT

5.1 ACADEMIC COURSE CONTENT

- 5.1.1 Courses should have a comprehensive academic syllabus covering both psychological theory and its application.
- 5.1.2 The academic component should be designed specially for postgraduate students and a range of educational methods should be employed in the teaching process.
- 5.1.3 A substantial part of the academic content should be taught by the health psychology staff of the course, though some teaching by other psychologists and professions is desirable.
- 5.1.4 The breath of content on the course must be consistent with the academic knowledge outlined in Appendix A. Over all the academic coverage should clearly reflect the course content and the majority of topics will be covered in-depth.

The course must provide substantial knowledge and understanding of the following areas:

- 5.1.4.1 in-depth academic knowledge base (psychology);
- 5.1.4.2 academic knowledge base (other allied health and related disciplines);
- 5.1.4.3 application of psychological skills to health care;
- 5.1.4.4 research skills
- 5.1.4.5 professional and ethical issues

Note: an expanded list of each academic knowledge base is included in Appendix A

5.2 RESEARCH

- 5.2.1 There should be a formal teaching programme, which includes student assessment, on research methods that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- 5.2.2 During the course students should undertake at least one piece of research and report it formally. All research projects must be guided by theory.
- 5.2.3 A designated supervisor should be provided to the student. The supervision should be provided by a member of the course staff or the department/school of psychology.

5.2.4 Courses should identify a person who can act as a research co-coordinator with the responsibility for organising and monitoring the research project process.

5.2.5 The research project should be assessed separately.

6. ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE COURSE

6.1 COURSE COMMITTEE

6.1.1 The course should have a course committee on which head of the psychology department concerned, course director, course teaching staff and academic supervisors are represented and where the interests of each group are fully respected. Depending on the functions of the committee, students, psychologists, appropriate officers from the university and health agencies or other individuals may be represented.

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

6.1.3 Another major function of the committee should be to facilitate communications among all those involved in the course. The committee should be involved both in considering the long-term objectives of the course and in reviewing its selection and examination process. Other functions could be specific to the individual course.

6.1.4 In all cases it is essential that the roles and functions of the course committee be clearly specified and there should therefore be a written terms of reference for the committee.

7. STAFFING RESOURCES

7.1 Courses should have adequate staffing to provide effective academic input. This means sufficient staff with enough time allocated to carry out the required tasks: management; teaching; organising; research supervision and assessment and monitoring of students.

7.2 The Course should have adequate administrative and clerical support.

7.3 COURSE DIRECTOR

- 7.3.1 The Course Director should be an academic psychologist with at least five years' full time (or equivalent) experience in the post of lecturer (or equivalent) in Psychology, and eligible for promotion beyond the career entry-grade for that post and hold or be eligible to hold full membership of the PSI Division of Health Psychology .
- 7.3.2 The Course Director should have the course as a major part of their duties. (In the case of two or more people who share organisational responsibility for the course, they should devote together a substantial amount of time to the course).

8. COURSE RESOURCES

The course should have appropriate facilities and resources including:

- 8.1 Teaching space of adequate size and quality for each cohort of students;
- 8.2 Access to computer facilities;
- 8.3 Adequate space to enable the course to be administered effectively, including office space for administrative staff;
- 8.4 Individual office space for academic staff;
- 8.5 Access to library facilities;
- 8.6 Access to a range of psychometric tests;
- 8.7 Adequate storage for efficient operation of the course;
- 8.8 Access to common room or similar facility for students.

9. ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

- 9.1 Only those graduates who hold academic awards which are recognised as satisfying at least the minimum qualifications for Graduate Membership of the PSI are eligible for the inclusion on the Postgraduate Academic Course. University authorities may set their own standards for entry to the course over and above this.
- 9.2 Vacancies on the course should be nationally advertised and the selection of candidates should follow the principle of "open competition".

10. ASSESSMENT

While the actual procedures of assessment will be at the discretion of each psychology department concerned (necessarily adhering to the requirements of the relevant degree conferring institution), the following principles should govern the procedures.

- 10.1 Courses should insure that no compensation is allowed across modules.
- 10.2 An external examiner(s) of high professional and academic standing should be involved in all areas of assessment.
- 10.3 There should be a formal appeals procedure considering formal complaints from trainees regarding the decisions of Boards of Examiners. Students should be made aware of these at the beginning of the course.

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

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

**ACADEMIC POSTGRADUATE COURSES IN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY
ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE BASE**

1. FOUNDATIONS

1.1. Foundations of health psychology

- 1.1.1. Historical overview of health psychology
- 1.1.2. Current theories and approaches in health psychology
- 1.1.3. Overview of related disciplines (such as medical sociology, health policy, and health economics)
- 1.1.4. Socio-cultural influences on health
- 1.1.5. Epidemiology (including mortality/morbidity; bio-statistics; health inequalities).

2. PSYCHOSOMATICS

2.1. Psychosomatic influences on health

- 2.1.1. Biological mechanisms of health and disease
- 2.1.2. Psychosomatic pathways to disease
- 2.1.3. Stress, health, and illness (models, moderators, and management of stress)
- 2.1.4. Social support and coping
- 2.1.5. Placebo

2.2. Individual differences in health and illness

- 2.2.1. Personality and health and illness (including optimism, neuroticism, health-relevant typologies)
- 2.2.2. Dispositions and health (including locus of control, self-efficacy)
- 2.2.3. Affectivity and health (including emotional expression, negative affectivity)

3. BEHAVIOUR AND COGNITION

3.1. Health-related behaviour

- 3.1.1. Theoretical models
- 3.1.2. Protective behaviour
- 3.1.3. Screening
- 3.1.4. Adherence

3.2. Health-related cognitions:

- 3.2.1.** Perceiving symptoms
- 3.2.2.** Perceiving risk
- 3.2.3.** Illness and treatment perceptions
- 3.2.4.** Efficacy and control, attributions
- 3.2.5.** Health beliefs
- 3.2.6.** Healthcare decision making

4. APPLIED CONTEXTS

4.1. Chronic illness and disability

- 4.1.1.** Coping with chronic illness/disability
- 4.1.2.** Pain (including theories of pain, management of pain)
- 4.1.3.** Interventions in chronic illness/disability
- 4.1.4.** Care-giving in chronic illness/disability contexts

4.2. Health care contexts

- 4.2.1.** Communication in health care contexts
- 4.2.2.** Hospitalisation
- 4.2.3.** Preparation for stressful medical procedures

4.3. Applications of health psychology

- 4.3.1.** Designing interventions
- 4.3.2.** Outcome evaluation
- 4.3.3.** Health education and health promotion (including in occupational, community, and media contexts)
- 4.3.4.** Targeted interventions (e.g., for cardiovascular disease, cancer, HIV)

5. CURRENT ISSUES

5.1. Lifespan, gender and cross-cultural perspectives

- 5.1.1.** Cross-cultural perspectives
- 5.1.2.** Gender and health
- 5.1.3.** Children and health
- 5.1.4.** Families and health
- 5.1.5.** Lifespan changes in health and illness
- 5.1.6.** Death, dying and bereavement

5.2. Professional issues

- 5.2.1.** Professional ethics (theory and regulation), legal and statutory context
- 5.2.2.** Inter-professional relations
- 5.2.3.** International perspectives

6. RESEARCH

6.1. Research methods

- 6.1.1.** Experimental and quasi-experimental designs
- 6.1.2.** Cross sectional and longitudinal designs
- 6.1.3.** Case studies
- 6.1.4.** Data analysis (quantitative and qualitative)
- 6.1.5.** Contexts of research (laboratory, epidemiological, public health, and clinical)
- 6.1.6.** Threats to validity

6.2. Measurement in health psychology

- 6.2.1.** Measurement of process
- 6.2.2.** Outcomes measurement
- 6.2.3.** Measurement of individual differences
- 6.2.4.** Health-related quality of life

6.3. Empirical Research Project

- 6.3.1.** Preparation, execution, and reporting of empirical research