

Dear Members of the Health Service Panel of the Legislative Council,

I am writing to express my support for the DCP's proposal for registration standards for practicing psychologists. As a registered psychologist overseas, I have seen the value and the importance of formal registration; and I hope that my following comments will add weight to the debate for why it would be in the interest of clients and consumers, psychologists and other health professionals in Hong Kong to introduce formalized registration standards for the psychological profession.

With formalized registration in place, the public can be confident that they will receive competent care when seeing a psychologist. I currently practice in Australia, and here, there are several pathways to becoming a psychologist – either through post-graduate studies or through a period of supervised practice under an experienced psychologist. These registration pathways are all regulated by the Psychology Board of Australia, which ensures adequate training for those working as psychologists. As a result, this ensures safety for clients who are already vulnerable mentally. To illustrate this, imagine yourselves as clients with debilitating mental health symptoms and have finally plucked up the courage to seek professional psychological help. You would clearly like to be confident that you would be consulting a professional who is competent in evidence-based treatment, ethical and will assist you to the best of their abilities. For physical ailments, we would all like to see a doctor who knows what they are doing and who would help us in the best way that they can. This is no different to mental health difficulties. Stringent registration can therefore ensure safety for the public, that if they seek advice from a “Psychologist”, they can be confident that they are consulting an ethical and competent professional.

Regulated registration standards will also benefit psychologists. Thorough and standardized training can properly equip all new professionals for the nature of the work. For me, I believe much of my training was developed through practical learning with guidance from an experienced supervisor. If it was not for Board requirements, I would not have had the opportunity to receive professional feedback. This allowed me to develop as a clinician for practice with future clients. Secondly, Board requirements obligated me to gain placements working with individuals across the lifespan. This allowed me to develop thorough experience working with children to working with adults with complex needs, all of which prepared me for unsupervised practice post-graduation. Thirdly, standardised training and registration guidelines can safeguard the reputation of Psychologists. In many countries, including USA, Britain and Australia, Psychologist is a registration-bound profession. If Hong Kong introduces registration standards, this will further the reputation of Hong Kong psychologists in the eyes of not just within Hong Kong but also overseas. I believe that many clinicians currently practicing psychology in Hong Kong are anxious that the proposed registration standards will void their qualifications. My understanding is that the proposed standards will not necessarily bar them from working in the field, but that they may merely have to engage in further learning should they fall short of proposed registration standards. Nevertheless, the registration standards will ensure long-term professional growth and help preserve the reputation of the profession.

Finally, standardized registration will help further not just clients and psychologists, but other health professionals to help better clients' wellbeing. Especially in multidisciplinary settings, psychologists are an integral part of the team of professionals assisting clients. With standardized registration, other professionals can have the confidence that when they consult a psychologist, the psychologist would be able to offer competent knowledge in supporting client care.

Thank you for considering this letter. I have heard from friends working in the field in Hong Kong, about the lack of registration and the issues that can arise as a result of this. Hopefully the above comments have offered the panel some points for consideration as to the benefits of the proposed registration standards for psychologists.

Yours Sincerely

Joycelyn