



Returning to Practice after a break of three years or longer

Revised 23/12/2019

The Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the “Act”), the legislation which regulates the psychology profession in New Zealand, requires the Board to be assured that a psychologist – who is registered but who has not held a practising certificate in the last three years – is competent to practise before issuing an Annual Practising Certificate (APC) (refer s 27). To meet this obligation the Board requires those psychologists, referred to here as “returners”, to supply certain information and may impose special conditions on their scope of practice. The Board may decide that an APC should not be issued until the applicant has fulfilled one or more conditions or may decide not to issue an APC to that applicant.

Return To Practice Policy

The Board’s policy is designed to meet its statutory obligations to protect the health and safety of members of the public by supporting and facilitating returners to make a safe transition back into competent practice. Any additional support and oversight requested by the Board is likely to be no more than what most responsible professionals would choose for themselves in order to be confident that they are maintaining safe professional practice. While each returner is responsible for their own competence and conduct, the profession has a collective interest in maintaining high standards to uphold the reputation of the profession.

The Board’s policy is intended to be remedial rather than restrictive. It is not intended to be a deterrent to returning to psychology practice, nor does it have a disciplinary function. The Board is appreciative of the assistance of senior and respected members of the profession as supervisors who may be involved to help refresh the returner’s skills and oversee their initial practice.

The Boards ‘Return to Practice’ (RTP) framework is a set of guidelines rather than firm rules. There are many variables to consider when assessing a returner’s application.

What Information Will Be Requested?

Before the Board considers an APC application, it will request that a returner who has been away from practice for longer than three years provides:

1. A letter stating their return to practice intentions, including the nature of the intended work and, if possible, the intended practice setting.
2. An up-to-date Curriculum Vitae, including professional development and professionally relevant activities undertaken since an APC was last held.
3. Evidence of any relevant practise in another country. This may include registration documents and a reference from a supervisor in that setting.

Factors Considered And Possible Outcomes

The information submitted will be considered to help us decide which of three optional outcomes best applies:

Option 1: APC issued with no further restrictions. (No additional information will be requested, other than the normal complete application for an APC.)

Option 2: APC issued once revision and supervision plans (based on the Board’s Continuing Competence Programme (CCP), see further information below) are submitted and approved. A condition is likely to be placed on the returner’s scope of practice that they must only practise with Board-approved supervision, and the supervisor will be requested to provide three-monthly reports for one year.

Option 3: APC issued only once further training or retraining is successfully completed. While each individual application will be considered on its merits, the threshold for Option 3 is approximately ten year's absence from active practice.

The following factors may be considered in our decision-making:

Competence enhancing factors:

- The degree to which knowledge and skills were consolidated after completing professional training.
- Any relevant experience in a related field of endeavour during the break from holding an APC in New Zealand.
- Activity which is likely to maintain knowledge and familiarity with current research in psychology.
- Resuming practice in a field similar to that practised in prior to the break from holding an APC.

Factors which are perceived as increasing the risk of loss of competence:

- An extended period of time away from practice with little or no engagement in activity relevant to professional psychology.
- Little consolidation of professional training prior to having a break away from the psychology profession.
- Greater duration of time away from practice as compared to the time spent in practice.
- An intention to resume practice in a different field of psychology than that practised in previously.

Supervision Plan

The reinstatement of regular supervision with a senior and respected member of the profession is regarded by the Board as a key component of ensuring competence and a safe return to practice. The proposed supervision plan should name the intended supervisor and show the frequency of meetings planned. It is accepted that in some circumstances it may not be possible to identify a named supervisor until an employment situation is established. If approved by the Board, the supervisor will be asked to provide oversight on our behalf by completing brief reports at 3-monthly intervals over the first year of returning to practice. These reports are intended as a communication channel to signal any concerns about competence, but can be kept very brief if there are no competence concerns.

The reports from the supervisor should include confirmation that the returner psychologist has developed revision plans and that learning goals are being enacted.

Revision Plan

The Board's Continuing Competence Programme (CCP) is used to provide a structure to the development of revision plans. The revision plan is expected to include confirmation from the supervisor that the returner has developed his or her CCP "starter" documents for the coming year; that is, to confirm that a self-reflective review of current competence, strengths and weaknesses has occurred. Any competencies which are identified as needing strengthening should be addressed by setting learning goals. The "Returner" should also develop learning plans to indicate how these goals will be progressed.

By following these CCP steps it is expected that supervision will offer the platform for returners to complete CCP structured revision plans to actively review their training needs, to develop plans for any extra reading, revision, and/or professional development activities, and to follow through on these plans. It is likely that returners will need to undertake extra professional development activities (as compared to the ordinary or routine development activities expected of all active psychologists) to support their revision. (Please note that the Board's Psychology Advisor can be consulted re the development of your revision plan.)

Continuing Competence Programme

The CCP must be completed each year by every psychologist who holds a current APC. The CCP steps provide the structure for a self-directed professional development programme for each practitioner. For returners, the CCP provides a RTP plan which will detail intended remedial action to address any perceived weaknesses, based on an up-to-date appraisal of skills and knowledge as related to the intended area of practice. Your CCP should be developed in conjunction with and will need to be countersigned by your supervisor.

The CCP instruction booklet and optional templates can be downloaded from the Board's website (www.psychologistsboard.org.nz) or can be requested from the Psychology Advisor (contact details below).

The Supervisor's Role

The Board is reliant on the supervisors of returners to ensure a safe return to practice. The supervisor is expected to give feedback to the returner and to engage in frank discussion about any perceived shortfall in current competencies. The supervision for returners is likely to be more frequent than that of a psychologist who has practised continually. Should a supervisor have serious misgivings about a returner's competence, these should promptly be reported to the Board (refer s 34 of the Act).

Contact Us

If you are considering a return to active practice, you are encouraged to approach the Board earlier rather than later so that your efforts are appropriately directed. Please contact the Psychology Advisor or the Registration Team at the Board office.

Email: info@nzpb.org.nz

Phone: 0800 471 4580