International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology

INTRODUCTION

This International Declaration of Core Competences in Professional Psychology seeks to identify a set of internationally recognized and endorsed competences that can serve as the foundation for a coherent global professional identity and possibly an international recognition system for equating professional preparation systems, program accreditation, professional credentialing, and regulation of professional competence and conduct. The rationale and methods used to develop the Declaration are described in this Introduction while the uses, need for local adaptation, and potential impact of having this Declaration are described in Preamble to the Declaration itself.

"Competence" was the theme selected by the Organizing Committee in planning the 5th International Congress on Licensure, Certification and Credentialing, Stockholm, July 2013. The Congress' goal was to start a process "To promote the development of a global agreement on identifying the benchmark competencies that define professional psychology". The Congress was unusual in being by invitation only. 150 invitations were issued and 75 people participated in the Congress from 18 countries and 5 continents. International associations such as (in alphabetic order) the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP), the International Test Commission (ITC) and the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) were represented. The Congress also differed from previous ones in operating as an extended series of workshops. Most of the time was spent in highly productive small group discussions interspersed with plenary feedback and agenda-setting sessions.

Prior to the Congress a "Foundation Document", a "Statement", and documents on existing models on competence for psychologists had been distributed to delegates. A draft summary competence model had also been produced prior to the Congress through content analysis of a range of current national models. This was used as a stimulus for the group discussions. Through a subsequent series of iterative consultations, this summary model has formed the basis for the final "International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology" (hereafter called the Declaration). These documents, the Congress Report, a list of Work Group

and Reference Group members, and other documents referred to later in this Declaration can all be downloaded from http://www.psykologforeningen.no/foreningen/english/ipcp.

The Congress was a great success as an opening conversation about the guiding concept and the intended goal, and it ended in an agreement to establish "The International Project on Competence in Psychology" (IPCP) as a multi-stakeholder international project. There was a willingness of all the planners and participants to move beyond discussing regional and national differences and to begin exploring areas of common understanding and agreement that inspire the belief that this effort can be successful. A Work Group was established consisting of persons from Norway, United Kingdom, Romania, South Africa, China, New Zealand, Colombia, Canada, and the United States. In addition a network (Reference Group) was established, and at present consists of 275 persons from 77 countries.

The Work Group has held five face-to-face multiple-day meetings and produced three Progress Reports since the Stockholm Congress. Each Progress Report was sent out as a draft for comment to the Reference Group. In addition, members of the Work Group held open discussion meetings at two international congresses (ICAP2014 in Paris & ECP2015 in Milan) and at four regional conferences (Kampala, Durban, Armenia-Colombia, and Beirut). In the last round of consultations (December 2015) national and international psychological associations were also invited to comment. Special attention was given to the comments from IAAP and IUPsyS in this last round of consultations.

The Declaration itself contains four parts:

1. **Introduction**

   Describes the history and process of development.

2. **Glossary of terms**

   Provides the intended meaning of words used to promote a common understanding across an international audience.

3. **Preamble**

   Describes the purpose, scope, limitations, and potential applications of the Declaration.

4. **Core Competences in Professional Psychology**

   Presents the core competences.

The competences articulated in the Declaration are general, not specific. The Declaration is not a "standard", and not meant to be one. This document has no authority over any national or regional established standards. Meeting these competences does not qualify anyone to be a psychologist. However, the Declaration may provide a useful framework to support the development of standards or to support accreditation, education and training, or certification. Different organizations, communities, nations, and regions may use and adapt these

competences to better fit their local context. The expression, demonstration, or application of a universally endorsed competence could be quite different in a specific national or cultural context. The development of local or regional translations of these competences into specific education and training requirements is encouraged. Such outcomes may vary across cultures, thus capturing the variety of expression and richness of a diverse and international professional community.

The significance of the Declaration depends on its endorsement by organizations that have a mission in the practice of psychology at the international, regional, or national level. All such organizations are encouraged to explicitly endorse, adopt, and/or ratify this Declaration, to promote awareness, respect and understanding thereof, to absorb its principles in their own documents and practices, and to expand and adapt the scope of the Declaration to their own particular contexts.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

In this Declaration the following definitions apply:

Assessment: See Psychological Assessment.

Best practice: A method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is accepted as a quality benchmark for correct or accepted practice within a given socio-cultural setting.

Client: An individual, group, community, or organization using or receiving the professional services of a psychologist.

Competence: A combination of practical and theoretical *knowledge*, cognitive *skills*, *behaviour*, and values used to perform a specific behaviour or set of behaviours to a standard, in professional practice settings associated with a professional role. In some regions of the world, the term competency (pl. competencies) is used with the same meaning as the term competence (pl. competences).

Competency: Confusingly, the terms 'competence' and 'competency' (and their plurals: 'competences' and competencies') are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature. However, there are important differences in terms of nuances of meaning in the way these terms are used in some areas of practice. Because of this the term 'competence' is preferred in this document when referring to performance in relation to some standard. That is, in relation to whether someone is deemed competent or not. 'Competency' can have a broader more inclusive meaning than 'competence'. While 'competency' is often used, particularly in the USA, to have the same meaning, 'competency' is also used to refer to behavioural attributes (e.g., listening, decisiveness, attention to detail etc.) which are not related to some performance standard. Much of the use of 'competency' in the work and organizational psychology literature and in human resource management relates to the notion of a competency as a personal attribute. Competency models describe the desirable qualities people should have rather than the competence they have demonstrated through their performance.

Competences: Clusters of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes that enable a person to act effectively and to a defined standard in a professional practice situation.

Competencies: See Competency.

Constructs: Explanatory variables which are not directly observable; they form the building blocks of scientific theories and models and lie at the heart of psychological explanations and interventions.

Core (competence): A competence the possession of which is critical to the overall ability of a person to practise to an acceptable professional standard. Core competences are expected to be possessed by all those who claim competence in professional practice. It should be noted that additional competences may also be required, depending upon areas of specialism and socio-cultural settings, to ensure overall competence as a practitioner.

Cultural competence: Competent professional behaviour based on awareness of, knowledge about, and understanding of the cultural influences on psychological work. These qualities are necessary to perform professional psychological services which recognize the diverse worldviews and practices of both oneself and of clients from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence is focused on the understanding of self and other as bearers of culture that is influenced by historical, social, economic, and political determinants and the impact of that culture on how these factors influence psychological theories, models, and practices.

Cultural humility: Cultural humility requires that psychologists strive to achieve humbleness in their interactions with clients; recognize that they are not the expert, and that they actively commit to being self-reflective and self-critiquing. Cultural humility entails the active inclusion of others' cultural worldviews to develop authentic and respectful relationships; reflection on ones thoughts, feelings and behaviour about their client's cultural worldview, and commitment to engaging in a life-long learning process towards humility and respect for others.[1]

Culture: A collectively-learned repertoire consisting of intangible (e.g., worldviews, beliefs, symbols, ideas, values, codes of behaviour) and tangible elements (e.g., artefacts, tools, language, literature), characteristic for a human society, community, or group, which helps members of that society, community, or group to communicate, understand, and interpret expressions of that society, community, or group.

Diversity: An attribute similar to heterogeneity, signifying the presence and inclusion of individuals, groups, and cultures which are different from each other, but also including respect for and appreciation of those variables which define the differences.

Evaluation: A process describing in a structured manner some aspect of the quality of an entity or procedure. Depending on the approach, the process describes the presence or level of

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[1] The term was developed initially by Tervalon, and Murray-Garcia in 1998. The definition above includes the original term with additions. Tervalon, M. & Murray-Garcia, J. M. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117-125.

development of specific characteristics of the entity or procedures and compares these characteristics against a pre-specified standard.

Evidence: The available body of information indicating whether a particular professional action or professional decision in a particular context for a particular use has quality and relevance.

Evidence-based: Any concept or strategy derived from or informed by evidence from research or practical experience, that supports the quality and the relevance of a particular action or decision in a particular context for a particular use.

Intervention: A deliberate and structured process usually based on a theoretical or practice-based model and having an expected outcome. The process is one in which some action is taken through which it is expected that the individual or group of individuals involved will be changed.

Knowledge, Foundational: Facts and information, which are acquired through education and experience, which form the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject. In psychology, foundational knowledge refers to knowledge about psychological concepts, constructs, methods, and their limitations, both as theory and as practice; this knowledge refers to psychology in general and not as applied to specific practice areas of psychology. (See also Knowledge, Specialized.)

Knowledge, Specialized: Facts and information, acquired through education and experience, which form the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject. In psychology, specialized knowledge builds on and expands Foundational knowledge, and refers to specific areas of psychology, such as clinical, educational, work and organizational or others (i.e., to concepts, constructs, methods which are typical of or involve specific particularities when applied in those contexts). (See also Knowledge, Foundational)

Needs analysis: An analytic process run by a psychologist in order to understand or elicit from his/her client the actual or desired needs for the psychological service to be provided. Needs analysis informs the psychological service and guides it to goals which are relevant to the client or the client's problem.

Practitioner: An individual who as a result of qualification (oftentimes there is a requirement also for registration) practises a profession. When used in the context of Psychology, a practitioner is a person who is not only qualified (and, if needed, registered), but also practises the profession in applied settings, as opposed to adopting only such roles as administration, teaching, or research.

Professionalism: The level of excellence or competence, especially with respect to ethics and values, reflected in conduct, aims, and qualities, that is characteristic and expected from a practitioner.

Psychologist: A professional practitioner who is competent to carry out assessment and intervention related to psychological and behavioural variables, in order to improve the well-being or performance of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, systems, or society.

Psychological assessment: A systematic process that uses a combination of techniques and methods (such as tests, inventories, interview, observation) in order to evaluate various psychological and behavioural characteristics (e.g., traits, capabilities) of an individual or group of individuals.

Psychological evaluation: A systematic evaluation (see also Evaluation) of constructs (see also Constructs) which are psychological in nature.

Psychological intervention: An intervention (see also Intervention) developed through psychological methods and based on psychological theories or models in order to facilitate change in an individual, group, community, organization, system, or society.

Professional activities: Activities which are performed by a psychologist as part of his/her service to a client.

Professional behaviour: Professional conduct of a psychologist that conforms to the principles defined by a body of regulations to which psychologists are expected to abide. Professional conduct (or professional behaviour) is usually defined by professional bodies, but in some countries or regions it may be also defined by law. It refers not to activities per se, but to the underlying principles and values behind any professional activity, such as (but not exclusively related to) ethics, effective service, self-reflection, and self-development and others.

Psychological practice: The sum of professional activities undertaken by a psychologist. Psychological practice is done by a psychologist through a formal contractual relationship with clients with the psychologist acting as a service provider, and may in some countries and regions be regulated (e.g., subject to licensure or certification).

Professional psychology: An organized community of psychologists representing applied psychological best practice. These psychologists offer professional services to clients, focusing on the practical application of psychology.

Research: The systematic investigation of phenomena with the aim of increasing the body of knowledge or applying the current body of knowledge in new ways.

Skills, Basic: Learned abilities which enable a professional to carry out professional tasks with a certain minimum amount of proficiency, when applied to psychology in general. Basic skills are domain-general and refer to psychology in general and not as applied to specific practice areas of psychology. (See also Skills, Specialized.)

Skills, Specialized: Learned abilities which enable a professional to carry out professional tasks with a certain minimum amount of proficiency, when applied to own chosen area of specialization within psychology, such as clinical, educational, work and organizational, or others. Specialized skills build on basic skills, and use them in particular ways, as needed in those specific professional contexts. (See also Skills, Basic.)

Stakeholder: An individual, group, or organization that has an interest or a concern in a process or its outcome.

PREAMBLE

Psychology as a profession is practised around the world within the social, cultural, educational, political, and legal context of each country. Increasingly, psychologists study, practise, consult, collaborate, and communicate across international boundaries. Such changes have resulted in many benefits for clients, for societies, and for the profession itself. These benefits include the ability to determine the applicability of psychological knowledge and techniques with diverse populations, the ability to share different approaches and strategies for addressing common problems, and the ability to identify areas of unmet need and to deploy appropriate resources to these areas. However, given the unique cultural and legal contexts in which psychologists practise around the world and the expansion of their activities beyond national boundaries, new issues and challenges have emerged and created the need to develop a coherent international professional identity for psychologists.

Professional competences play a critical role in the professional work of psychologists and the quality of services provided by them. The global professional identity of psychologists may be enhanced by identifying a broadly recognized and internationally accepted set of core competences that define appropriate professional practice. Some of these competences may be obvious and are explicitly recognized worldwide, such as the competence for being an ethical psychologist. Others may be less explicit but still equally important.

Currently there are many different models for psychology education and training and multiple models for professional regulation in different countries and regions of the world. The timing and amount of focus on discipline-specific studies can vary by many years in different educational systems, as can the academic degree required for entry into the profession. The International Declaration of Core Competences in Professional Psychology identifies a set of internationally recognized and endorsed competences that serve as the foundation for a coherent global professional identity and possibly an international recognition system for equating professional preparation systems, program accreditation, professional credentialing, and regulation of professional competence and conduct.

The core competences presented in this Declaration are those expected of all psychologists providing services to clients at the time of entry to the profession. It is recognized and acknowledged that while these core competences serve as the basis for entry to the profession, the practising psychologist is expected to maintain continuing competence as the profession changes and practice evolves. It is also acknowledged that this Declaration describes the core competences related to the professional practice of applied psychologists. Some psychologists

work exclusively as scientists and academicians while others work as practitioners with a variety of client populations (including individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, schools, etc.). This Declaration describes the internationally agreed upon core competences related to the practice of psychology with any of these client populations and is not intended to describe or apply to psychologists engaged in teaching or research.

The competences articulated in the Declaration are general and not specific. Different organizations, communities, nations, and regions are recognized and encouraged to adapt these competences to better fit their local context. The expression, demonstration or application of a universally endorsed competence may be quite different in a specific national or cultural context. The development of local or regional translations of these competences into specific education and training requirements is encouraged. Such adaptations of these competences will likely produce variations across cultures, thus capturing the variety of expression and richness of a diverse and international professional community.

The significance of the Declaration depends on its recognition and promotion by organizations that have a mission in the practice of psychology at the international, regional, or national level. All such organizations are encouraged to explicitly endorse, adopt, and/or ratify this Declaration, to promote awareness, respect, and understanding thereof, to absorb its principles in their own documents and practices, and to translate, adapt, and expand the scope of the Declaration to their own particular contexts.

CORE COMPETENCES IN PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

PSYCHOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS UNDERPINNING THE CORE COMPETENCES		DESCRIPTIONS
KN **Possesses the necessary knowledge**		
	KN1	Has the necessary foundational knowledge of psychological concepts, constructs, theories, methods, practice, and research methodology to support competence
	KN2	Has the necessary specialised knowledge of psychological concepts, constructs, theory, methods, practice, and research methodology relating to own areas to support competence
SK **Possesses the necessary skills**		
	SK1	Has the necessary basic skills to support competence in psychological practice
	SK2	Has the necessary specialised skills to operate in own areas of psychological practice to support competence

PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR COMPETENCES		DESCRIPTIONS
PE **Practices ethically**		
	PE1	Applies relevant ethics codes in one's professional practice and conduct
	PE2	Adheres to relevant laws and rules in one's professional practice and conduct
	PE3	Resolves ethical dilemmas in one's professional practice using an appropriate approach

AP	**Acts professionally**		
		AP1	Follows accepted best practice in psychology
		AP2	Maintains competence as a psychologist
		AP3	Operates within the boundaries of one's own competence
		AP4	Consults peers, supervisors, or other relevant sources when appropriate
		AP5	Makes referrals to relevant others when appropriate
		AP6	Chooses appropriate courses of action in response to unpredictable and complex events

ER	**Relates appropriately to clients and others**		
		ER1	Establishes, maintains, and develops appropriate working relationships with clients and relevant others
		ER2	Establishes, maintains, and develops appropriate working relationships with colleagues in psychology and other professions

WD	**Works with diversity and demonstrates cultural competence**		
		WD1	Works with knowledge and understanding of the historical, political, social, and cultural context of clients, colleagues, and relevant others
		WD2	Demonstrates cultural humility
		WD3	Identifies, acknowledges, and respects diversity in relevant others
		WD4	Recognizes the impact of one's own values, beliefs, and experiences on one's professional behaviour, clients, and relevant others
		WD5	Works and communicates effectively with all forms of diversity in clients, colleagues, and relevant others
		WD6	Is inclusive of all forms of diversity in working with clients, colleagues, and relevant others

EP	**Operates as an evidence-based practitioner**		
		EP1	Adopts an evidence-based orientation to the provision of assessments, interventions, service delivery, and other psychological activities
		EP2	Consults psychological and other relevant research to inform practice
		EP3	Recognizes the limitations of the evidence available to inform practice
SR	**Reflects on own work**		
		SR1	Evaluates the efficacy of one's activities and service provision
		SR2	Reflects on and implements areas for improvement in one's practice
		SR3	Reflects on one's own values and beliefs and the impact they may have on one's practice
		SR4	Validates reflections with peers or supervisors, when appropriate

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES COMPETENCES			DESCRIPTIONS
SG	**Sets relevant goals**		
		SG1	Develops goals based on needs analysis
		SG2	Aligns goals with those of clients and others
PA	**Conducts psychological assessments and evaluations**		
		PA1	Identifies assessment or evaluation needs in individuals, groups, communities, organizations, systems, or society
		PA2	Selects, designs, or develops assessments or evaluations, using methods appropriate for the goals and purposes of the activity
		PA3	Delivers assessments or evaluations, including administration, scoring, interpretation, feedback, and reporting of results

PI	Conducts psychological interventions		
		PI1	Plans and carries out psychological interventions with individuals, groups, communities, organizations, systems, or society
		PI2	Designs, develops, and evaluates the potential usefulness and effectiveness of psychological interventions, using methods appropriate for the goals and purposes of the intervention
		PI3	Integrates assessment and other information with psychological knowledge to guide and develop psychological interventions
		PI4	Evaluates the usefulness and effectiveness of one's own interventions
		PI5	Uses evaluation results to review and revise interventions as necessary
		PI6	Provides guidance and advice to other relevant parties involved in the psychological intervention

CO	Communicates effectively and appropriately		
		CO1	Communicates with diverse audiences as necessary for the effective conduct of one's professional activities
		CO2	Provides relevant and clear feedback, reporting and guidance to clients and relevant others
		CO3	Provides clear and objective information on psychological matters to relevant audiences