

An inclusive approach to uphold professional standard—ensuring fair access to the Accredited Registers



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Subcommittee for Accredited Registration of Clinical Psychologists
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Dr Kitty Wu is a Fellow of the Hong Kong Psychological Society, the Chair of the Subcommittee on Accredited Clinical Psychology Training of Division of Clinical Psychology, Hong Kong Psychological Society. She was awarded with the Chief Executive's Commendation for Community Service for her contribution to the rescue operations after the Sichuan Earthquake and the Hong Kong Humanity Award for her application of trauma psychology in humanitarian work. She is serving as a senior clinical psychologist in the Hospital Authority.

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According to the government, the Pilot Scheme of the Accredited Registers for Healthcare Professions (AR Scheme) will operate under the principle of “one profession, one professional body, one register”. Members of the accredited professional bodies will receive Certificates of Registration, and they can also use a specified title on their name cards. As such, the public can make informed decisions by looking up the registers of healthcare professionals through the accredited bodies.

DCP Public Education Booth at the Genrontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit (16-18 June 2017)



DCP Public Education Booth at the Genrontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit in 2017. Photo credit: DCP

Such requirement means that clinical psychologists need to be members of the accredited body, if they want to be found by the public in the registers. Although the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) of The Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS) – one of the applicants for AR Scheme under the clinical psychologist profession – has a long history since 1982, not all of the clinical psychologists in Hong Kong are registered as their members.

A quick recap of the first part of our interview with Dr Charles Wai-Ho Pau, Vice Chair (Membership & Professional Standard) of Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) at Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS) and Dr Kitty Wu, Chair of the Subcommittee on Accredited Clinical Psychology Training of DCP, HKPS, in which they shared with us the significance of AR scheme and how they intend to utilise this opportunity to protect public's interest.

In this second part of the exclusive interview, Pau and Wu will dive into the details of their proposal for AR Scheme—including an inclusive approach on the transitional arrangement of the AR for all clinical psychologists.

A Master's or Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from a local university; or equivalent

“If this AR Scheme is initiated by the government, shouldn't we follow the government's standard?” questions Wu. “If the goal of introducing the AR Scheme is to enable the public to make more informed decisions – while protecting the public's interest – then, we should uphold the local standard of clinical psychologists,” she adds.

According to the job requirements of a clinical psychologist position listed on Hospital Authority's (HA) website, a candidate needs to acquire a Master's or Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from a local university; or equivalent.

Requirements

1. A Master's or Doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from a local university; or equivalent.
2. (a) Grade E in English Language (Syllabus B) and Chinese Language in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, or equivalent; OR
 (b) Level 2 in English Language and Chinese Language in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, or equivalent.
3. Fluency in written English and Chinese as well as spoken English and Cantonese.

Job requirement of a clinical psychologist shown on HA's website.

“I have a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from the University of Hong Kong (HKU). At that time, the programme was accredited by the British Psychological Society,” recalls Wu. “After 1997, when Hong Kong was returned to China, HKU developed a robust external examiner mechanism, with DCP as an independent body to review the program, in order to ensure students can uphold and align with the previous standard.”

“We are not trying to exclude clinical psychologists graduated from overseas. As long as they can prove having equivalent experience, we welcome them to be our members,” asserts Wu. “Indeed, nearly 20% of our members are trained overseas.”

DCP: The Members (n= 521 as at Sept 2017)



Source: Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) at Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS)

Utmost importance in upholding the standard of supervised clinical practice

Apart from which school the clinical psychologist is graduated from, Pau emphasised a professional training standard is of utmost importance in upholding the service provided by clinical psychologists. This includes the standard of the supervised clinical placement that students need to complete for graduation.

“We can break this down into three components. First is coverage, whether the clinical placement provides students the opportunities to take care of patients of a wide age span, with different problems encountered in different service settings that they need to deal with. Secondly, whether the placement is conducted with the supervisor on-site. Third is about the quality of supervisors. Are these supervisors the employed and practising clinical psychologists who are accountable to the service provided to clients of the placement settings? Are they qualified clinical psychologists?” enlightens Pau.

Students are required to complete at least 220 days of supervised practicum over two years, covering 5 blocks of placement. The 5 blocks should include 3 core ones and 2 electives. The Core Placements will include the following service areas: (1) Adult Psychiatry/Psychology, (2) Child and Adolescent Psychiatry/Psychology, and (3) Service for people with chronic mental illnesses or impairments such as intellectual disability. The Elective Placements may involve further training in one of the three core placements mentioned above, or chosen from among the fields of Forensic Psychology, Health/Community Psychology, Elderly Psychology, Social/Family Services and Neuropsychology, etc.

Coursework requirements shown on CUHK (Department of Psychology)'s website.

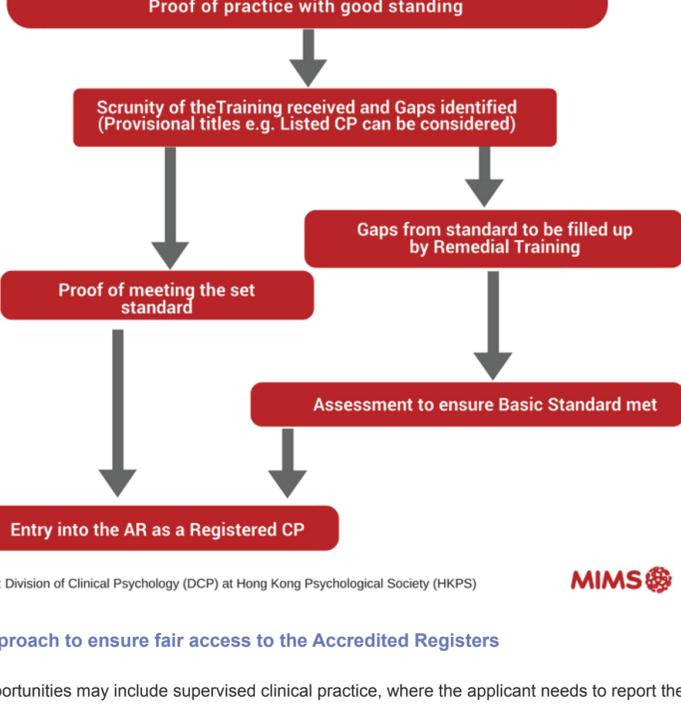
Nonetheless, Pau and Wu understand there may be overseas applicants whose training fall short of the standard of training in Clinical Psychology. For this, they say DCP is willing to provide resources such as supervised clinical practice, remedial training course and clinical placement to fill the gaps in the training.

“We understand remedial training and assessment for ensuring standards for protection of public are as important as grandfathering conditions for ensuring inclusiveness,” says Wu. “Therefore, for consideration of training needs and impact of grandfathering conditions, we advocate the need for reliable information from applicants holding overseas qualifications to prove that they have met local standards.”

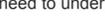
Wu says they also took reference from the Local Registration Scheme for Chinese Medical Practitioners, Optometrists, Physiotherapists and Occupational Therapists, and these professions tend to take care of the professionals who have had practising experience or are already practising when they launched the Registration Scheme.

“Hence, for those who slightly fall short of local standards, they will need to show us proof of practice with good standing. This includes working experience at NGOs. Then, we will provide training opportunities for them to fill the gaps,” she continues.

An Inclusive Approach for the Transitional Arrangement of the AR for CPs



Source: Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) at Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS)



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These training opportunities may include supervised clinical practice, where the applicant needs to report the case to an experienced clinical psychologist. “Even licensed or registered clinical psychologists also need to undergo this practice in the form of continuous education,” says Wu.

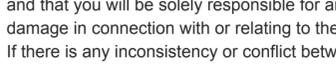
For clinical psychologists who lack relevant experience in core service area in previous training, Wu admits simply undergoing supervised clinical practice may not be sufficient. In this case, take care of children, may be provided to the applicants. “For instance, if the applicants want to work at NGOs and take care of children, but they do not have experience in serving children or adolescent before, then we will try to arrange clinical placement for them such that they can be properly trained,” explains Wu.

Wu also raised one example to illustrate why these applicants should undergo placement prior to joining the field. “These applicants might not know how to conduct an IQ test. What we are worried is that our society has been validating these psychological tests for years, and it requires us much efforts to develop these tests and keep them confidential. If the tests are not properly carried out or even leaked out, parents might ask their children to practise the test to score better results. In this case, the test would be completely ruined,” Wu warns.

Additionally, Wu says they are designing some remedial training courses for overseas psychologists. “Again, taking the IQ test as an example, there is a significant difference in carrying out the test using different languages. Therefore, we can provide courses to these overseas applicants for them to understand the practice in Hong Kong,” she adds.

“In summary, for local applicants who have completed local accredited postgraduate training in Clinical Psychology, and applicants who have completed postgraduate training in Clinical Psychology accredited by recognised international bodies with a license to practice in the country where the qualifications of clinical psychology is conferred, they can attain the Registered status without going through extra training. For those whose training fall short of the standard of training in Clinical Psychology, we can provide extra training for them to fill the gaps,” summarises Wu. “We hope this arrangement can clear the confusion of which programme to study for those who are interested in joining the field of Clinical Psychology in the future. Looking forward, this can ensure a steady supply of clinical psychologists in Hong Kong, while also upholding the professional standard of our services.” MIMS

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