Using Delphi Methodology to Define Curriculum Content for Educational Psychology Training

Dr Sandra Dunsmuir, University College London

Dr Cathy Atkinson, University of Manchester

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The Delphi Method (Dalkey, 1969)

• Named after the ancient Greek oracle at Delphi from which prophecies were given.
• Developed by the Rand Corporation in the early 1950s working on defence research. Techniques developed to gain group consensus from military experts on a very sensitive problem.
• Delphi method gives a quick and efficient way to access thoughts of knowledgeable people.

• Group communication among experts who may live far apart
• A series of written questionnaires, answered anonymously
• Group and individual responses provided
• New questionnaire gives the chance to change views and responses
• Process ends when consensus is achieved
How did we use it?

- Agreeing competencies for trainee educational psychologists working with young people aged 16-25

- Defining Competencies for Postgraduate Professional Doctorate Programmes in Educational Psychology
Developing a competency framework for the initial training of educational psychologists working with young people aged 16-25

- Legislative changes in England have meant the role of the educational psychologist (EP) has been extended to working with young people up to the age of 25.
- Limited literature internationally pertaining to how EPs might support post-school learners (Mackay, 2009)
- Important to collect expertise from within the EP profession in order to develop curriculum

Delphi poll, first round:

- Twenty-eight respondents selected via a posting on main professional electronic discussion forum for UK EPs.
- All participants were practitioner EPs with more than six years’ experience working in universities (8%); senior/specialist local authority posts (50%); or independent practice (42%)
- Delphi questionnaire sent as online survey
- Experts invited to provide their ideas about potential curriculum content in six areas: Content, Legislation and Policy, Assessment, Interventions and Outcomes, Development and Transition.
Example: Section 2 – Legislation and policy

2. Legislation and policy
   a) What aspects of legislation, policy and good practice guidelines should be included in the training curriculum for educational psychologists working with 16-25 year olds?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Extremely Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Mental Capacity Act (2005)</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Disabled Students Allowances (DSA).</td>
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b) Any other comments about ‘Legislation and policy’?
## Section 2 - Legislation and policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your Response</th>
<th>Collated Group Response % (n)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Mental Capacity Act (2005)</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Autism Act (2009) and Autism Strategy (2010)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disabled Students Allowances (DSA)</td>
<td>5</td>
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Each participant received:

- Quantitative group results – all collated responses under the six categories, and descriptive data summarising the overall importance ratings associated with each one.
- A summary of their own responses to highlight their individual position in relation to collated group responses.
- All qualitative comments.
Delphi poll, second round:

- All 24 participants were then asked to respond to this new information in a second round of Delphi polling according to whether item was:
  1. Essential within new training curricula for EPs working with young people aged 16-25 years.
  2. Captured in existing 0-19 curricula, but needing extension to address the needs of this older population.
  3. Not relevant within the existing role of an EP, or the new extended role.
- After the second round of Delphi polling there was over 95% consensus items that were seen as essential in a new training curriculum and those already being covered in existing curricula (Delphi method should achieve 70-80% according to Hasson, Keeney & McKenna, 2000).
- Competencies refined by expert group of eight EPs via face-to-face meeting

Example: Legislation and Policy

- Mental Capacity Act (2005)
- Disabled Students Allowances (DSA)
- Equality Act (2010)
- Children and Families Bill, EHC plans, tribunals
- Disability Legislation (e.g., Carers & Disabled Children Act, 2000)
- Children & Leaving Care Act (2000)
- Mental Health Act
- Consent and decision making - good practice guidance
- Guidance on safeguarding and sexual exploitation
- Rose Review 2009, Valuing People 2010

Legend:
1. Essential in new training curricula for EPs working with YP aged 16-25 years
2. Should be captured in existing 0-19 curricula but will need extension
3. Not relevant within the existing role of an EP, or the new extended role
To find out more detail, go to https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ospa-project/competencyframework.html

OSPA Project
Objective Structured Professional Assessments
A collaboration between University College London, Southampton University
and Manchester University

Working with Young People Aged 16-25 - Competency Framework

Professional competence and fitness to practice

Kaslow et al. (2004) proposed that competencies consist of discrete knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Given the reciprocal relationship between professional competence in the workforce and initial training curricula, there is a need to ensure that definition of competence is undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders (practicing educational psychologists, service managers, university tutors), deriving both foundational and functional competencies (Rodolfa et al., 2005). Foundational competencies are necessary to perform the core functions of psychological practice, such as application of ethical frameworks, knowledge of scientific principles and awareness of cultural diversity issues. Functional competencies can be observed in a psychologist’s professional performance in terms of sets of behaviours.

The curriculum for training EPs to work with 16-25 year olds has been devised to develop functional competencies and contains three elements:

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New knowledge required for working with 16-25 year olds</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Process skills required to deliver psychological services in relation to 16-25 year olds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Existing knowledge that needs extension to work with 16-25 year olds</td>
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Defining Competencies for Postgraduate Professional Doctorate Programmes in Educational Psychology

- **Task:** to define academic and professional practice standards.
- **Method:** Delphi technique used to review of British Psychology Society (BPS) standards for accrediting doctorate programmes in educational psychology.
- **Participants:** Individuals with a range of expertise in educational psychology training and practice
Participants

- Programme directors from across the UK – Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England (n=7)
- Principal educational psychologists from different sorts of service (e.g. large and small; urban and rural) (n=8)
- Placement supervisors/programme tutors (n=6).
Process

• The first round draft competencies were developed by a small working group, who reviewed national and international equivalent competency frameworks (e.g. NASP, APA, BPS Division of Clinical and Counselling Psychology)
• The Delphi poll set up as an online questionnaire
• Participants were sent the link to the survey in an e-mail and asked whether they considered that proposed competencies should be included, deleted or amended
• If they selected ‘amend’, they were invited to propose alternative wording to describe the competence
Results

- Results were collated and individualised reports prepared.
- Where 80% or more participants recommended keeping a competence, it was retained. Competencies were deleted where this was recommended by 20% or more respondents.
- Proposed amendments were combined into new competency statements.
- The second round of the Delphi Poll therefore asked participants to review the revised competencies and to make judgements about which form of words they preferred, by selecting either ‘Yes' or 'No.'
Section 1: Promoting Development and Education

By the end of their programme, trainee educational psychologists will:

1.1 understand individual differences in developmental progression by demonstrating knowledge of theories of psychology relevant to:
   - cognitive development and learning,
   - language and communication,
   - social emotional development and behaviour,
   - mental health,
   - physical and sensory development, and
   - literacy and numeracy learning.

1.2 demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the structures and systems to support learning and development for children, young people and young adults aged from 0-25 years.

1.3 demonstrate knowledge and application of pedagogic practices and their conceptual and evidential bases, taking account of normal progression and development, and the modifications necessary to support effective learning and development for children, young people and young adults with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

1.4 demonstrate knowledge of biological, cultural, and social influences on learning, cognitive, and developmental processes, and application of evidence-informed curriculum and instructional strategies.

1.5 demonstrate understanding of biological, cultural, and social influences on development, and knowledge of evidence-informed strategies to promote social-emotional functioning and mental health.

1.6 demonstrate knowledge of school and systems structure, organisation and theory, general and special education, technology resources, and evidence-informed educational practices that promote academic outcomes, learning, social development, and mental health.

1.7 demonstrate skills to work collaboratively with children, young people and the adults who care, work, and plan for them to develop and implement practices and strategies to create and maintain effective and supportive learning environments.

1.8 demonstrate an understanding of issues relating to mental capacity and consent in relation to work with 16-25 year olds.

1.9 demonstrate knowledge of parenting and family functioning and evidence working in partnership with parents and carers.

Section 2: Personal and Professional Values, Ethics and Skills

By the end of their programme, trainee educational psychologists will:

2.1 demonstrate professional and ethical practice which adheres to the British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and Conduct and the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Ethics and Performance.

2.2 apply knowledge of, and demonstrate the ability to operate effectively within, the legal, national and local frameworks for educational psychology practice.

2.3 work ethically and effectively at an appropriate level of autonomy, with awareness of the limits of competence, and accepting accountability to relevant professional, academic and service leaders/managers.

2.4 demonstrate awareness of role boundaries and limits to legitimate professional expertise.

2.5 challenge views and actions judged potentially harmful to the child/young person.

2.6 demonstrate knowledge and understanding of safeguarding policy and procedures for children, young people and vulnerable adults in order to intervene and support appropriate others.

2.7 take appropriate action to address and resolve tensions where there is a conflict between personal and professional values and policy/cultural expectations for professional practice.

2.8 demonstrate the ability to identify and communicate personal values and reflect honestly on the implications for their professional practice.

2.9 ensure that they seek, secure and make effective use of supervision, consultation and other resources to improve and extend knowledge, understanding and skills.

2.10 demonstrate awareness of personal health and well-being and seek support as appropriate, sharing relevant information regarding health status or personal circumstances which may hinder effectiveness with the appropriate person (e.g. service manager and/or supervisor), with due consideration for personal-professional boundaries.

2.11 be able to recognise unethical or malpractice and follow the appropriate organisational and professional procedures to respond.
DECP training committee competencies

- Section 1 - Promoting Development and Education
- Section 2 - Personal and Professional Values, Ethics and Skills
- Section 3 - Diversity and Cultural Differences
- Section 4 - Consultation
- Section 5 - Psychological Assessment and Formulation
- Section 6 - Psychological Intervention and Evaluation
- Section 7 - Service Delivery and Organisational Change
- Section 8 - Training and Development
- Section 9 - Research and Enquiry
- Section 10 - Transferrable skills
Conclusions from both projects

- The Delphi technique has been useful in defining and agreeing competencies in two different contexts.
- It has offered an effective means of tapping the views of EPs with expertise.
- Delphi has been shown to be an efficient way of establishing clear consensus in a group without bringing its members together for meetings.
- It can be recommended for making data-based decisions about issues relating to professional psychology training.