

Good practices for tutors and interns as part of professional internships

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Internship Committee (made up of representatives of the University of Bologna, the University of Parma and the Council of the Order of Psychologists of Emilia-Romagna) has met to discuss possible actions to improve the quality of professional internships. As well as assessing the facilities that apply to serve as internship sites and analysing their training projects, these good practices have also been drawn up to provide guidance to interns, tutors and internship sites alike.

This document stems from the need to clarify how the principles contained in the Code of Ethics - inalienable principles underpinning the profession of psychologist - must necessarily be applied both by interns preparing to enrol in the Order and by their tutors, who must transmit to their younger colleagues the ethical values and good practices underlying a correct professional conduct.

Indeed, all this is also provided for by the Convention on professional training courses signed by the above-mentioned bodies (published in full on the website of the Order of Psychologists: [click here](#)), which states, *inter alia*:

"Art. 5 Roles and tasks of the tutor

The tutor is entrusted with the following tasks for the entire duration of the internship:

- a) **Introducing the intern to different professional contexts:** relations with institutions, interpersonal relations and technical equipment;
- b) **Planning, with the intern, the details of the internship training project:** definition of objectives, methods and work phases. During this phase, the tutor shall take into consideration the intern's training curriculum in order to adapt the programme of activities to the skills possessed;
- c) **Checking the intern's experience through constant monitoring,** complementing the experience by helping with critical understanding, providing suggestions and pointing the intern in the right direction;
- d) **Carrying out, if necessary, supplementary teaching activities,** free of charge for the intern, on the basis of the evaluations that emerge from the experience assessments;
- e) **Drawing up the final evaluation of the internship,** which is a condition for awarding training credits in the cases provided for by the regulations. This evaluation shall take into account the results achieved by the intern and his/her ability to integrate into the Organisation in which the experience took place;
- f) **Training the intern in the application of the Code of Ethics** in professional practice;
- g) **Applying Article 33 of the Code of Ethics** (respect, loyalty and collegiality) in relations with the intern.

Art. 6 – Rights and duties of interns

Interns are first and foremost required to follow the indications of the Code of Ethics of Italian Psychologists and, with regard to timings and procedures, shall comply with the University's internship regulations.

They shall adopt an attitude and conduct appropriate to the profession for which they are undertaking the internship, the latter being their first hands-on experience of their future profession.

If interns feel that the experience does not comply with the conditions set out in this Regional Agreement and, in particular, that their right to learn, as set out in Art. 1, is insufficiently protected, they can report the situation to the Internship Office within two months of starting the six-month internship."

GUIDELINES

Guidelines for tutors

- In accordance with Law 56 of 1989, the main objective of internships is to develop the basic professional skills needed to carry out prevention, diagnosis, habilitation-rehabilitation, support and research in the field of psychology, aimed at individuals, groups, social bodies and communities (*Typical Tasks of the Profession of Psychologist* defined by the National Council of the Order of Psychologists, or CNOP: [click here](#)). The tutor thus aims to provide interns with an adequate level of preparation (which differs depending on whether the internship is aimed at registration in section A or B of the Order), covering both “how to work as” and “how to be” a professional psychologist, promoting training and the social responsibilities arising from professional practice (Article 3, Code of Ethics).
- In order for the interns to acquire the necessary professional skills, it is essential that they become gradually more independent. This requires the interns' professional activities to be carried out under constant supervision by the tutor. In particular, after an initial shadowing period with direct supervision (joint presence), the intern should be able to experience first-hand the typical tasks of the profession (indirect supervision) in areas strictly related to activities such as: prevention, psychological screening-assessment, habilitation-rehabilitation, support and research. Progressive independence is only possible with the tutor's assessment that the intern has acquired the appropriate skills.
- Tutors are obliged to promote respect for the dignity and rights of users by instructing the interns in practices and behaviour. They are responsible for the actions of the interns and shall in any case protect service users (Art. 4, Code of Ethics)¹.
- Tutors shall manage the training relationship with interns, while safeguarding their own professional independence, and shall be responsible for their acts and any foreseeable consequences of same (Art. 3, Code of Ethics).
- Aware of the specific nature of the profession of psychologist and of the importance of professional internships, tutors shall not delegate the training of interns to professionals other than psychologists.
- As part of their training activities, the psychologists shall stimulate in the interns an interest in ethical principles, first and foremost through their own professional conduct (Art. 20, Code of Ethics). Indeed, a professional internship is an essential moment in the training of young colleagues who are first experiencing the concrete application of rules and regulations studied abstractly as mere theoretical principles. With this in mind, it is important for interns to understand that the principles of the Code of Ethics are fundamental criteria for solving issues that routinely arise in professional practice.
- Aware of their guiding role, tutors shall set specific learning goals with and for the interns, monitoring their progressive attainment at set intervals. Where necessary, they shall fine-tune these goals with the interns, based on the results achieved.

¹ "Form 1" to be submitted to the service user, in which the tutor informs the user of the presence of the intern.

Guidelines for interns

- At the start of the internship, interns are required to acquire and be guided by the principles of professional decorum and dignity (Art. 38, Code of Ethics).
- Aware of the importance of informed consent for legitimising any psychological service, and in any case in compliance with the principle of transparency underpinning any professional relationship, interns shall avoid misleading users regarding the figure of the psychologist and that of the intern (Art. 24, Code of Ethics).
- Aware of the fact that the prohibition of mixing professional and private life is key to the psychology profession, interns shall inform their tutor of any ongoing or past relationships with users, and shall refrain from participating in any activity concerning such users (Art. 26-28, Code of Ethics).
- Any information acquired about users during the internship is covered by professional secrecy, and interns - just like professional psychologists - are bound by this ethical requirement (Art. 11, Code of Ethics)². In the event of collaborating with other subjects also bound to professional secrecy (as part of supervision work, interviews and/or team meetings), the only information that can be shared - if necessary with the user's consent - is that strictly needed for the type of collaboration in question (Art. 15, Code of Ethics).
- Interns should always bear in mind the limits of their training, which is still incomplete, and shall be responsible for studying and implementing recognised scientific methods and instruments (Art. 5, Code of Ethics).
- Interns shall comply with the principles connected with collegiality and, therefore, shall avoid expressing inappropriate criticism or negative opinions about the work of the tutors and the facilities in which they conduct their work (Art. 36, Code of Ethics). Instead, they shall discuss any doubts or perplexities directly with the tutor and, in any case, in the event of detecting cases of professional misconduct, they shall promptly notify the competent Order.
- In compliance with the social role of the psychologist, interns shall be careful about how they present themselves to third parties, avoiding, for example, clothing that is not appropriate to the work context.

² "Form 2" to be signed by interns, in which they undertake to respect confidentiality and professional secrecy.

ANNEXES

*'Form 1' below may be used at the discretion of the tutor and the internship site.
However, it is important that users be given clear, comprehensive information about the intern's presence, so that they can give their consent, also just verbally.*

FORM 1

I, the undersigned, Dr _____ (tutor), having duly informed the user verbally on the nature and role of the professional internship provided for by Presidential Decree no. 328/2000 as a prerequisite for admission to the state examination for graduates wishing to enrol in the Order of Psychologists,

HEREBY ASK

Mr/Ms _____ (user/customer) to **consent** to Dr _ (intern), a graduate in Psychology, attending meetings and helping to manage the psychological service, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant internship project, within the context of which I am acting as "tutor".

To this end, please note that:

- the intern's role is exclusively one of training and professional development;
- I, the undersigned, am personally responsible for the professional services delivered, even if partially delegated to the intern;
- the intern is bound to professional secrecy and has signed an agreement to maintain the strictest confidentiality regarding any information that should come to his/her attention in the course of or as a result of the internship, in compliance with current regulations;
- this consent may be revoked at any time.

(Dr _____)

Signed in acknowledgement, confirmation and acceptance

(Mr/Mrs _____)

FORM 2

I, the undersigned Dr _____ (*intern*), duly informed by my tutor, Dr _____, of the legal and ethical provisions protecting confidentiality and professional secrecy

HEREBY AGREE

to strictly apply and abide by same, refraining from reporting to third parties any news, facts or information learned in the course of my professional internship and undertaking to maintain the utmost confidentiality at all times.

(Dr _____)