

## Sport and Exercise Psychology Accreditation Route (SEPAR) Accreditation of Prior Experiential Competence (APEC) Reflections

Dr Claire Rossato, Dr Simon Crampton, Dr Paul Gorczynski, Kate Green, and Dr Denise Hill share their experiences of the APEC SEPAR route.

The aim of this piece is to provide some reflections on the recent SEPAR APEC route, in which it has just seen it's first cohort graduation. These reflections capture a brief account of candidate's experience based on their recent journey via this route.

### *Reflection 1*

Going through the SEPAR (APEC) programme was a very personally rewarding experience. It allowed me to eventually apply for HCPC registration and become a Registered Practitioner Psychologist in Sport and Exercise, but also provided stability during a turbulent public health crisis. The programme began when I applied in January 2020 and officially lasted until I received my certificate of completion in September 2021. I still meet with my group of fellow trainees on a monthly basis to check-in, discuss our research and practice, find ways to grow, and, perhaps most importantly, share a laugh. I have met some incredible individuals through this process.

As I'm sure everyone can attest, a lot happened in 2020 and in 2021! With growing uncertainty and fear brought on by the pandemic, my SEPAR (APEC) programme experience brought calmness to my life. Specifically, it brought routine, connection, opportunities for personal and professional growth, and the ability to focus on something that was meaningful to me. Perhaps most importantly, the programme allowed me to critically reflect on my previous work, examine what I was currently engaged in, think about how I wanted to better refine and grow my core competencies, and consider how I wanted to help shape my practice and see it evolve in the future. Critical reflection was instrumental to my overall development throughout my time spent in the SEPAR (APEC) programme. I loved the opportunity to think, write, and engage. Of course, and I cannot overstate this enough, I write all of this from a position of immense privilege. Boy... am I fortunate! I am very grateful to have had this opportunity during this difficult time, and to all the people who helped me along the way throughout this process. In particular, I am very thankful to Professor Richard Thelwell who acted as my supervisor.

**Take home message:** For anyone considering the programme, I would highly encourage individuals to think about how they can best engage in critical self-reflection and consider how it may facilitate growth in themselves and their practice.

### *Reflection 2*

Applying and embarking on the SEPAR APEC process, after seventeen years working in the elite sports industry, felt like a tremendous relief and the perfect time for a check-in with myself and my personal and professional development. Having started out as a Sports Science undergraduate, then completing a Postgraduate certificate in careers counselling for elite performers, a Masters in Psychological Coaching and a Masters conversion in Psychology, I was still unregistered and unaccredited within the HCPC or CIPD industries that I straddled across. Having worked, studied, and delivered across full-time employment in established organisations, I have always been supported by Performance and Clinical Supervision, as well as being a part of teams, that have included fully accredited professionals, but nonetheless felt vulnerable and exposed by a training route that left me behind the professionalisation of the industry I worked in. This training gave me the chance to review, reflect and document the work, study, and development I had done, alongside gain much needed accreditation to validate my experience and level of proficiency against industry standards. It

also enabled a unique opportunity for me to learn from regular work with group and individual SEPAR specific supervision, that offered a diverse, eclectic, and inspiring view on shared experiences and influences that were equally thought provoking as they were a stimulus for reflection, growth, and recalibration.

**Take home message** – Jump at the chance to do this if you get the opportunity, it is a unique experience to learn, review and be challenged in thought, process, and methodology by equally and differently experienced practitioners!

### *Reflection 3*

Having wanted to gain my HCPC registration for many years, I finally found myself able to embark on the journey. I was very excited to begin this, but I was unsure how my experience would unfold. Along with enrolling on the APEC, this was timed with the Covid-Pandemic and various lockdowns. For me this gave me a clear focus and I found the peer supervision group our supervisor created a real treat, and something I looked forward to each month. I felt that as time went on, our group were able to talk more opening regarding their experiences, which I found helped me work through various ethical issues but also gave me a space to share my experiences as a practitioner. Therefore, I felt that not only was I developing as a practitioner via this, but I was also taking advice from very experienced practitioners in the field.

Although, the end goal was to gain HCPC registration, I felt that the experience gained outweighed the end goal. It was a great time to reflect on my own practice, refresh and learn from others. This really did help open my eyes to various different approaches and made a good place for reflection.

**Take home message:** I would encourage anyone to take up this opportunity. You will take something from the experience that may help you to become a more effective practitioner, and as a bonus gain your HCPC registration.

### *Reflection 4*

I have been working as a Sport and Exercise Scientist (Psychology Support) for far longer than I care to remember, but when the SEPAR process was created, it was a 'game changer'. That is, it enabled me to gain HCPC registration expediently, as I was able to complete the SEPAR process in just under 2 years (APEC). This meant the process was not overly burdensome in terms of time and finances - something very much appreciated as a full-time academic and part-time applied practitioner. In addition, my previous applied experience, knowledge, and sport science qualifications were recognised and valued within the SEPAR process, meaning that I didn't have to 'start again' in terms of my training and pursuit of HCPC registration.

I was lucky to secure Professor Richard Thelwell as my supervisor, which led to a highly supportive and empathetic working relationship. As well as providing one-to-one guidance and providing the inevitable last-minute review of my work, Richard organised peer support sessions, where all his supervisees would meet, share experiences, and provide mutual support. He also took the time to bring into the group guest speakers from across the globe, who provided challenging discussions and debate. Hence, an important take home message from my supervisee experience, is for SEPAR candidates to ensure they are working with a supervisor who has the capacity to provide a similar experience to the one I was afforded.

As a 'long in the tooth' practitioner and academic, I will be honest and admit to being reticent about undertaking parts of the SEPAR process. So, for sure, I did experience many moments of imposter

syndrome during the peer-support sessions with my much younger and far more enthusiastic co-supervisees. Indeed, as a practitioner who works predominantly in golf, I was rather irritable about the requirement to work with differing clients (i.e., coaches) to extend my competencies. I was also highly cantankerous about documenting and reflecting extensively on my work, while also having to write an extended philosophical piece and case study for the final submission.

However, it was all worth it. By pushing myself out of my comfort zone, within a highly supportive and challenging environment, I was able to recognise my strengths, while also develop my skill set beyond my expectations. I have also engendered meaningful working relationships which will remain important to me and my personal / professional development. I note that my confidence as a practitioner has never been higher, meaning that the SEPAR process is proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks.

**Take home message:** I note that my confidence as a practitioner has never been higher, meaning that the SEPAR process is proof that you can teach an old dog new tricks.

### *Reflection 5*

Looking back over last 18 months on the SEPAR (APEC) programme it is remarkable how quickly the time has flown by but also how enjoyable and fruitful the journey has been. On embarking on the programme in spring 2020 it was hard to foresee how it would be possible to integrate the programme of work into what was an incredibly busy year with preparations for the Tokyo Olympic Games well underway. Cue COVID, almost simultaneously with the commencement of the programme and off we went on monthly Zooms and sharing insights across a wide range of topics, current affairs, issues in professional practice and of course, coping and adjusting to a new COVID world. Whilst it was an inevitable barrier to connecting in person, we quickly formed a shared sense of purpose and camaraderie with a clear intention of never letting a global pandemic get in the way of learning, so we didn't.

It was welcome to see some familiar friendly faces from my previous days in university, and colleagues from previous roles which brought a sense of comfort and reassurance on what was a daunting opening Zoom. That being said, I feel fortunate to be part of a group of fantastic practitioners of various backgrounds, interests and expertise which extended beyond the sphere of sport psychology, into clinical and health domains. The opportunity to engage with group supervision outside of my current sphere of practice and broaden my perspective with practitioners with different specialisms and interests undoubtedly added to rich variety and depth of discussion. The cognitive diversity that stemmed from the cultural, personal, and professional differences between members resulted in such rich discussion, debate and creative exploration around common issues or unique challenges that we each in turn presented through the course.

**Take home message:** The opportunity to reflect, connect and converse around personal experiences, explore differences in approach and understanding of critical issues was such a privilege to be a part of and truly enriched the journey.

#### Author Profile:

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