

Counselling psychologist

Job Description

Counselling psychology is a branch of applied psychology concerned with the integration of psychological principles and therapeutic processes. It adopts a reflective practitioner approach combining understanding both from formal psychological enquiry and from the interpersonal relationship between practitioner and client.

Counselling psychologists work therapeutically with clients that may have a variety of problems, difficulties and life issues. These may include: bereavement; the effects of childhood sexual abuse; relationship breakdown; domestic violence; major trauma; and/or symptoms of psychological disorder such as anxiety and depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder or psychosis. They work collaboratively with people, exploring underlying issues to empower them to consider change.

There are many similarities to the work conducted by clinical psychologists. The major difference is within the training. The training required to become a chartered counselling psychologist is much more focused on personal insight and the relationship with the client. Another difference is that clinical psychologist trainees are paid while they train and counselling psychologist trainees pay their own fees and expenses and therefore have more flexibility in their training.

Typical Work Activities

Counselling psychologists aim to help individuals make decisions for themselves to improve their sense of personal wellbeing and alleviate distress. The work is concerned with the application of psychological theories and techniques to help people deal with everyday problems associated with life events. Contact is mainly in a community/social, health/medical or organisational setting with the following clients:

- individual adults or children;
- students and young people;
- families and couples;
- older people.

Tasks typically involve:

- working with individuals, groups and/or organisations, applying psychological principles and understanding, with the objective of assisting them to change, improve, understand or better manage their situation;
- building relationships with clients: 'being with' rather than 'doing to' the client;
- offering advice on how best to work with a client, usually when employed on a consultancy basis;
- undertaking research, either individually, or as part of a team;
- performing assessments, including assessment of mental health needs, risk assessment and psychometric testing;
- formulating psychological explanations of the cause and maintenance of psychological difficulties;
- planning and implementing therapy, together with the evaluation of the outcome of therapy;
- writing reports and record keeping;
- overseeing the management of services and staff;
- receiving ongoing personal therapy and supervision.

The work may also involve teaching, supervising and training other counselling psychologists, applied psychologists, assistant psychologists and related professionals.

Work Conditions

- Based upon nationally agreed scales for clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists working in The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk) should expect to receive a starting salary of £28,313 - £37,326 (band 7).
- Salaries can rise depending on age, experience, specialism and level of responsibility to £75,114 (band 8d).
- Senior, experienced psychologists, managing departments with responsibility for the psychology service and its staff, earn from £50,616 - £75,326 (all salary data taken from 'Pay Circular (Agenda for Change) April 2007').
- For counselling psychologists working as lecturers, nationally agreed lecturers' scales apply.
- Working hours are flexible and usually 8.30am to 5pm if working within the NHS.
- Many counselling psychologists are self-employed, or work partly for the NHS and partly for themselves. Freelance salaries vary but hours of work can be arranged to suit, although they will be driven by client requirements, often requiring work outside office hours.
- Counselling psychology is currently a predominantly female profession.
- There are good opportunities for part-time work, career breaks and job-sharing.
- Counselling psychologists often work as part of a multidisciplinary team.
- Jobs are available throughout the UK but are concentrated in larger cities. Some health authorities prioritise psychological therapy, making more jobs available.
- Due to long waiting lists and the emotional demands of clients, the working environment can be stressful.
- Travel within a working day is occasionally required, especially once a reputation has been established.

Entry Requirements

The training route for a chartered counselling psychologist is as follows:

- Step one is obtaining the Graduate Basis for Registration (GBR). This is granted upon completing an appropriate accredited degree in psychology (one to four years). If your undergraduate course is not accredited or is in a subject other than psychology, it is possible to obtain the GBR by sitting the qualifying examination of the British Psychological Society (BPS) (www.bps.org.uk), obtaining an appropriate society-accredited postgraduate qualification, or taking an appropriate society-accredited conversion course (see the BPS website).
- Next, candidates have two options to gain eligibility to register as a chartered counselling psychologist, both requiring three years full-time or equivalent part-time and leading to the same competence. One option is to complete a BPS-accredited postgraduate doctorate in counselling psychology (DPSych). The other option is the independent route, where, by building up evidence of training with the help of a coordinator, you obtain the Qualification in Counselling Psychology (QCoP) and eligibility to register as a chartered counselling psychologist. DPSych is the most common training route. Details of accredited courses are given on the BPS website.

Entrance with an HND only is not possible.

Entry to postgraduate courses is becoming increasingly competitive, with courses requiring a good first degree, relevant paid or voluntary work experience, and often some counselling skills qualifications. Assistant counselling psychologist vacancies are rare and competition is fierce. Potential candidates should consider looking for paid work and volunteer placements in a supportive role. These types of vacancies can generally be found in the non-profit, health and human services sectors. Evidence of long-term volunteering is also beneficial, as this demonstrates the ability to be emotionally robust.

Candidates will need to show evidence of the following:

- interpersonal and psychotherapeutic skills;
- a willingness to be open;
- the ability to explore issues with clients;
- a broad, reasonably sceptical view of all theoretical argument;
- a healthy curiosity and research-minded approach to thinking;
- analytical skills;
- the ability to look at how and why things are, or are not, working with clients;
- independence and self-motivation;
- self-awareness, self-knowledge, security and self-belief;
- the ability to work under pressure.

Postgraduate training is likely to be self-financed and total costs (including fees) could reach approximately £6,900 per year (data collected May 08). It is usual for students to pay for their own personal therapy and, in certain cases, also to pay for their required supervision. Some trainees secure posts as assistant psychologists first and negotiate part or total funding towards their training, or approach psychology departments for sponsorship. Students can find out more about funding from RDInfo (www.rdinfo.org.uk). Applications are made directly to each course provider.

The BPS states that the division of counselling psychology is growing: since 2006 membership has increased from 676 to 2334 members, of whom 883 are chartered counselling psychologists.

Training

In addition to the clinical placements provided and the clinical and professional experience gained en-route to chartered status, training, once in post, is an integral part of a counselling psychologist's career.

The opportunity to attend short courses or study for further qualifications is usually available. As psychologists tend to use a range of techniques which are common to all specialisms, particular methods and skills can be enhanced and developed.

Upon qualification, and as soon as their services are offered to the public, chartered counselling psychologists are obliged by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (www.bps.org.uk) to take part in continuing professional development (CPD) (as of January 2009 this regulatory role will pass from the BPS to the Health Professions Council (HPC) (www.hpc-uk.org)). Examples of relevant professional development include the following:

- post qualification courses which help to develop a knowledge of different theoretical approaches;
- received or conferred professional supervision;
- presentations;
- attendance at conferences;
- undertaking topical research;
- developing expertise with a particular client group.

This is a career in which further study and developing specialisms are usually encouraged and supported. Most counselling psychologists continue to have a supervisor or mentor to whom they can turn on an ongoing basis for advice, guidance and inspiration in dealing with challenging situations, clients or groups.

Career Development

The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk), HM Prison Service (www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk), probation services, the civil service and local education authorities (LEAs) all provide clearly defined career paths for suitably qualified psychologists.

Due to a national shortage of chartered counselling psychologists, job opportunities are good, although the situation varies according to geographical region, the overall number of jobs in each specialism, and the popularity of that field. However, due to the higher cost, authorities may be forced to replace psychological therapy with drug therapy, in times of economical constraint, which would have a negative impact on the number of vacancies.

Counselling psychologists tend to work fairly autonomously, which gives them a certain amount of choice in organising their time and workload. After qualification, there is the opportunity to move into various specialisms and to choose to work with specific client groups. For all specialisms, there is a relatively short promotion ladder in the NHS and other areas, but individuals can move up the salary scale by gaining qualifications and experience.

There is also the opportunity to move into self-employment as you gain knowledge and experience, or to combine self-employment with part-time work for an employer such as the NHS.

With experience, counselling psychologists will also have the opportunity to become involved in the teaching, supervision and training of other counselling psychologists, applied psychologists, assistant psychologists and related professionals.

Typical Employers

Counselling psychologists work primarily in The National Health Service (NHS) (www.nhs.uk) in all settings. These include:

- departments of psychotherapy, clinical psychology or psychological therapies;
- community mental health teams;
- primary care;
- specialisms, such as child and family services, older adults, and learning difficulties.

See NHS Careers (www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) for more information.

Counselling psychologists are also employed in general and psychiatric hospitals, general practitioners' surgeries, private hospitals and independent practice, schools, colleges and universities, and a wide range of voluntary organisations.

You could also be employed by the civil service (see Civil Service Recruitment Gateway (www.careers.civil-service.gov.uk)), the prison service (see Prison Service Careers (www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/careersandjobs/)) or in occupational health departments and social services. The National Probation Service (www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk) is another potential employer and there may also be vacancies within the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (www.pbni.org.uk). In Scotland, criminal justice teams in local authority social work departments carry out probation activities.

Although fewer in number, opportunities also exist in the private sector, including providing psychological therapy services to industry, in employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and in independent practice. Within these settings, counselling psychologists may work directly with individuals, couples, families, and groups, or act as consultants to other professionals.

Sources of Vacancies

- The Guardian (www.guardian.co.uk) (Tuesdays and Wednesdays);
- Psychologist Appointments (www.psychapp.co.uk/);
- NHS Jobs (www.jobs.nhs.uk);
- NHS Scotland: Scotland's Health on the Web (SHOW) (www.show.scot.nhs.uk);
- The Health and Social Care Yearbook;
- Health Service Journal (www.hsj.co.uk);
- Community Care (www.communitycare.co.uk);
- The Voice (www.voice-online.co.uk);
- Jobs.ac.uk (www.jobs.ac.uk).

Local press and hospital internal vacancy bulletins also advertise vacancies.

Related Occupations

- Clinical psychologist
- Community development worker
- Counsellor
- Forensic psychologist (prison and probation services)
- Health psychologist
- Mental health nurse
- Occupational psychologist
- Psychotherapist
- Social worker

Information Sources

Bibliography

AGCAS and Graduate Prospects products are available from higher education careers services.

AGCAS Publications

[Health Sector](#), AGCAS Sector Briefing

[Options with Psychology](#), AGCAS Options Series

[Social Care Sector](#), AGCAS Sector Briefing

Other Publications

[Community Care](#), Reed Business Information, Weekly

[British Psychological Society \(BPS\) Conversion Course List](#), British Psychological Society (BPS)

[The Counselling Psychology Review \(CPR\)](#), [Division of Counselling Psychology \(DCoP\)](#), Quarterly

[The Guardian](#), Guardian Newspapers Ltd, Daily

[Health Service Journal](#), EMAP, Weekly

[The Health and Social Care Yearbook](#), [Beechwood House Publishing](#), Annual

[The Psychologist](#), British Psychological Society (BPS), Monthly

[So you want to be a Psychologist?](#), British Psychological Society (BPS), 2007

[Working In: Advice and Counselling](#), [Connexions \(Publications\)](#), 2003

Websites

[Civil Service Recruitment Gateway](#), www.careers.civil-service.gov.uk

[HM Prison Service](#), www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk

[Jobs.ac.uk](#), www.jobs.ac.uk

[The National Health Service \(NHS\)](#), www.nhs.uk

[NHS Careers](#), www.nhscareers.nhs.uk

[NHS Jobs](#), www.jobs.nhs.uk

[NHS Scotland: Scotland's Health on the Web \(SHOW\)](#), www.show.scot.nhs.uk

[Prison Service Careers](#), www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/careersandjobs/

[Psychologist Appointments](#), www.psychapp.co.uk/

[RDInfo](#), www.rdinfo.org.uk/

[The Voice](#), www.voice-online.co.uk

Addresses

[British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#), BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth LE17 4HB Tel: 01455 883300 URL: www.bacp.co.uk

[British Psychological Society \(BPS\)](#), St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR Tel: 0116 254 9568 URL: www.bps.org.uk

[Division of Counselling Psychology \(DCoP\)](#), c/o British Psychological Society (BPS), St Andrews House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR URL: www.counsellingpsychology.org.uk/

[Health Professions Council \(HPC\)](#), Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BU Tel: 020 7582 0866 URL: www.hpc-uk.org

[National Probation Service](#), NOMS Probation, 1st Floor Abell House, John Islip Street, London SW1P 4LH URL: www.probation.homeoffice.gov.uk

[Probation Board for Northern Ireland](#), 80-90 North Street, Belfast BT1 1LD Tel: 028 9026 2400 URL: www.pbni.org.uk