

Becoming a Psychologist

A psychology degree is attractive to employers because it combines a scientific approach (analytical thinking, objectivity, research skills) and humanities (understanding human behaviour, relationship building) giving you a broad choice about where you go on to work. Although the majority of psychology graduates do not become chartered psychologists, many go on to work in related fields such as health, education, the criminal justice system or commercial roles.

Career options as a Chartered Psychologist

There are 8 chartered specialisms (Clinical, Counselling, Neuro, Health, Forensic, Occupational, Educational, Sports & Exercise) which are detailed under [BPS careers](#) and also in the [BPS's journey into Psychology guide](#). There are also specific descriptions of many of the specialisms within the [Prospects job profiles](#).

In this guide we will cover the main 4 specialisms: Clinical, Counselling, Educational and Forensic Psychology. Clinical Psychology is the specialism that we receive the most enquiries about, so whilst this information covers all of the main psychology professions, we have given clinical psychology greater coverage.

What is the Route to Chartered Status?

Gaining a [BPS-accredited psychology degree](#) that confers the Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) of the [British Psychological Society \(BPS\)](#) is the first step towards becoming a chartered psychologist. However, even without an undergraduate psychology degree it is still possible to obtain the GBC through completing a [BPS-accredited conversion course](#).

The next step to becoming a chartered psychologist, in most cases, then requires relevant work experience after your degree followed by post graduate professional and academic training. This can either be via a Masters or a Doctorate depending on the specialism. On average it takes around seven years to gain chartered status, but sometimes longer. It might seem daunting, however, for any profession that involves challenging and difficult work it is essential individuals are fully prepared through training, supervision and by gradually increasing their levels of responsibility over an extended period.

Finally, all practising psychologists have to then register with their regulatory body: which is the [Health and Care Profession Council \(HCPC\)](#). The [British Psychology Society \(BPS\)](#) accredits

undergraduate courses and other Stage 1 qualifying courses for the Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC); however, the HCPC are responsible for approving Stage 2 qualifications and the three doctorates (Clinical, Counselling and Educational).

Top Tip - If you are considering becoming a chartered psychologist in the future, look into [student membership of the BPS](#). The BPS advertise conferences, events and workshops to student members at reduced rates. These are great opportunities to connect with psychologists in your area of interest and to keep up to date with research and the latest insights.

Clinical Psychology

The majority of clinical psychologists work in hospitals and community settings within a healthcare team. Whilst most work in the NHS, some work in private practices. They see clients individually or in groups, helping with a variety of psychological difficulties including addiction, anxiety, depression, learning difficulties and relationship issues. Most work with a particular client group, such as adult mental health, children or learning difficulties.

What does a Clinical Psychologist do?

Direct Clinical Work

- **Assessment of individuals and families** (direct observation, interviews, questioning, psychometric tests)
- **Formulation** (explanatory integration of assessment material and psychological theory)
- **Treatment** (advice, counselling or therapy, such as CBT).



The role also covers a range of other tasks and responsibilities outside of helping individuals and groups directly. These can cover:

- **Clinical Liaison** (with GP's, consultants, other members of the Multi-Disciplinary Team)
- **Evaluation & Audit**
- **Research**
- **Consultation**
- **Supervision**
- **Service Development**

Due to their role in research and evaluation they are seen as scientist-practitioners. This also explains why research experience prior to applying for the Clinical Doctorate can be highly advantageous.

After obtaining the GBC from the BPS you then need to obtain relevant work experience before embarking on a three-year doctorate in Clinical Psychology. These training places are NHS-funded, and there is considerable competition for places.

Applications for most clinical psychology doctorate courses are made through the [Clearing House for Postgraduate Training Courses in Clinical Psychology](#). Each course has a slightly different structure and ethos, so when the time comes, spend time thinking about your interests and research courses to find one that reflects these. You'll find more information about courses in [The Alternative Handbook For Postgraduate Training Courses in Clinical Psychology](#) and from the [Clearing House website](#).

Counselling Psychology

Counselling psychology is a relatively new specialism concerned with the integration of psychological theory and therapeutic processes. Practitioners need to have a high level of self-awareness, and relationship building with the client is very important. Counselling psychologists will be supporting clients who are facing difficulties or life issues and they will aim to help people improve their sense of well-being and ability to problem-solve. They work with individuals, couples, families and groups in the NHS, private practice or other organisations. Listen to an [excellent panel of experienced Counselling Psychologists](#) discuss their role and route into the profession.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a Clinical Psychologist and a Counselling Psychologist?

The day-to-day job can be quite similar once qualified. However, there are key differences in 3 areas:

- **Training Route** – Similar to Clinical Psychology, after obtaining your GBC through an accredited psychology degree or conversion course, you will need to obtain relevant work experience before either embarking on an HCPC approved Doctorate in Counselling Psychology or gaining the [BPS's Qualification in Counselling Psychology](#). However, it is more common for people to enter this specialism as mature applicants and there is less emphasis on research experience and more on counselling experience.
- **Funding of the training**– the 3-year Doctorate in Counselling Psychology is self-funded, whereas the trainees of the Clinical Doctorate Programme are paid a salary as they are employees of the NHS as well as students.
- **Requirement for Personal Therapy during Training** – for the Counselling Doctorate, trainees are required to undertake regular personal therapy (which will be an additional cost to the trainee). This is distinct from supervision where you would discuss your case load with an experienced and qualified clinical supervisor. Personal therapy allows the trainee to explore their own psychological issues to develop in-depth self-awareness and understanding of their own triggers. This in turn allows them in sessions with clients to distinguish between their own issues and those of the client.

What is the difference between psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy?

A good place to start is the NHS website to explore the [differences between psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy](#). A key difference is the training route – a psychiatrist completes a medical degree before specialising in psychiatry, a psychologist completes a psychology degree before specialising in clinical/forensic/counselling and a psychotherapist is often trained mid-career following a previous career in another helping profession and will have completed

a counselling/psychotherapy course and then a Masters degree. Therapists are often very specialised developing depth of expertise in a particular modality such as cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy or family systems. Finally, to really get to grips with the nuances of different roles, you can always talk to psychologists themselves – either through connections on LinkedIn or through being a member of the BPS. Other professionals are usually very willing to help as they were in the same position once!

Educational Psychology

The training route in England and Wales requires an HCPC approved Doctorate in Educational Psychology. Entry requirements for the Doctorate include eligibility for the GBC and at least one year's relevant experience of working with children within educational, childcare or community settings. This could be from working in a variety of roles such as a teacher, a graduate assistant in an Educational Psychology Service, a Learning Support Assistant or a Care Worker. Information about the Doctorate course and the application process can be found from the [Department for Education](#) and also from the [Association of Educational Psychologists](#) who manage the applications. In your application you will be expected to demonstrate how you have applied the knowledge of psychology in your work experience.

Forensic Psychology

Forensic psychologists apply psychology to criminal and legal issues, working mainly in the prison and probation service to develop intervention techniques and treatment programmes for use with both offenders and those under supervision. They also liaise with other professionals and agencies. They work directly with prisoners and also support prison officers. The largest single employer of forensic psychologists is HM Prison Service; however, opportunities also exist within the health service and the social services. To become a forensic psychologist you need to obtain the GBC through an accredited psychology degree or conversion course, and then complete the BPS's accredited Masters in Forensic Psychology followed by Stage 2 of the BPS's Qualification in Forensic Psychology (QFS) which is two years of supervised practice that has been approved by the HCPC. A small number of universities offer a Doctorate programme in Forensic Psychology,

which is the equivalent of both an accredited Masters in Forensic Psychology and the QFP (Stage 2).

Occupational Psychology

Occupational psychologists are involved in assessing the performance of people at work, the psychology behind good leadership at work, how organisations function and how individuals and small groups behave at work. The aim is to increase the effectiveness of the organisation and to improve the job satisfaction of the individual. Opportunities exist to work within private and public organisations and also in consultancies. To become an Occupational Psychologist you will need to obtain the GBC through an accredited psychology degree or conversion course, and then complete the BPS's accredited Masters in Occupational Psychology followed by Stage 2 of the BPS's Qualification in Occupational Psychology (two years of supervised work, or a Doctorate in Occupational Psychology).

Other Specialisms

There are other specialist areas within psychology, which include sport and exercise psychology, health psychology, neuropsychology, and teaching and research in psychology. For further information about these routes you can check out [BPS careers](#) and also the [BPS's journey into Psychology guide](#). The Academy HE's [Psychology Student Employability Guide](#) is also a great resource as it provides insight into the different specialisms but also covers topics such as Career Planning, Work Experience, Networking and Employability Resources.

Skills Required

There are many skills you will need to develop over time to be an effective psychologist. The skills required can also vary according to the type of role and context of the work. However, the importance of resilience, boundary management and reflection are critical. To explore the importance of these skills read [Effective Self-Care and Resilience in Clinical Practice](#), [Dealing with Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout](#).



Work Experience

If you are considering qualifying as a professional psychologist, you will need to build up a sustained body of work experience, so start early. The Psychology professions are rewarding, but can also be emotionally demanding and challenging. You will be supporting people who have complex issues. To convince both yourself and those who will be selecting you for future jobs/courses that the challenges and complexities of the profession suit your interests and capabilities, gaining relevant experience whilst completing your undergraduate degree is important.

Volunteering is an excellent way of building up relevant experience whilst at University. Look for opportunities through the [RHUL Volunteering team](#), [Do-it](#), [TimeBank](#) and [Volunteering England](#). Also explore the list of charities in the resources section of this guide and approach these organisations for volunteer opportunities. For example; supporting vulnerable groups (such as those with mental health issues, refugees, older adults, children with learning disabilities) is useful if you aspire to be a clinical/counselling psychologist. If you are interested in Educational Psychology, tutoring, working in a pre-school or helping at a summer camp would give you important experience with children and young people. For forensic psychology working with a charity that supports ex-offenders would be beneficial to develop your skills, gain a realistic insight into the work and show your commitment.

After your undergraduate degree, you will be looking for paid work before applying for post graduate training (this might be alongside some volunteering too). Employers use various publications and websites to advertise posts such as the [BPS's Psychologist Appointments](#), [Mental Health Jobs](#) and the [NHS Jobs](#) website. An example of a suitable role prior to embarking on specialist postgraduate training is a [Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner \(PWP\)](#) which is within the [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies \(IAPT\)](#) programme working as a low intensity therapy worker. So searching using keywords such as 'IAPT', 'low intensity' or 'well-being' can identify vacancies on the NHS website. Check out the [OxfordPsych Trainee PWP video](#) for insights into what the PWP role involves. Other websites and organisations to try are listed in the resources section of this guide. Be aware that some [Assistant Psychologist](#) jobs may only be advertised for a very short time so be prepared to apply quickly. This [blog](#)

will ensure you maximise your chances of success when the time comes.

The amount of relevant experience gained before embarking on an HCPC-approved doctorate in Clinical Psychology can vary from 1 year to over 6 years but averages around 2 years. The Alternative Handbook gives a further breakdown of current trainees pre application roles and how many times they applied for the Doctorate before being successful. Although an Assistant Psychologist or a Research Assistant post is often seen as ideal pre-application experience there is stiff competition for these jobs. So often, successful trainees have creatively gained their relevant experience through different roles, such as Mental Health Care Worker or a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP). What is most important is what you learn in the roles and how you reflect on your experiences and have gained some experience of delivering psychological interventions under supervision (ideally by a clinical psychologist or psychological practitioner).

Examples of roles to explore as an undergraduate/after graduation to gain relevant experience include:

- Healthcare Assistant, Residential Care Assistant, Nursing Assistant, Auxiliary Nurse
- Mental Health Support Worker
- Assistant in a special needs school
- Helpline Volunteer e.g. Nightline, Samaritans, Childline
- Mental Health Charity Volunteer
- Clinical Psychology depts – shadowing
- Undergraduate/post graduate psychology depts – Research Assistant

Building up to:

- Assistant Psychologist – NHS & private sector
- Trainee Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (IAPT), leading onto High Intensity Therapist
- Research Assistant on a health-related project

Also check out [6 graduate jobs in mental health I wish I'd known about!](#) for ideas to explore. Plus the [Oxford Psych Q & A](#) on the range of different roles you can do to build up relevant work experience.

You may find it helpful to visit the discussion forum on [ClinPsy](#) which is run by qualified Chartered Clinical

Psychologists, providing insight, advice and information about entry to the profession. Also follow up on some of the insightful youtube videos listed in the resources section where current and aspiring trainees share their reflections on a range of topics including how to gain work experience and succeeding at interviews for the doctorate programme.

LinkedIn is an increasingly useful platform to explore other professionals career journey's giving ideas for your own path, plus you can connect to other psychologists and ask for advice. Join the private RHUL LinkedIn group for Psychologists and use the Alumni search function on the Royal Holloway LinkedIn employer page to find Psychologists and Psychologists in training to connect to. See the resources section for other social media groups to follow.

Resources

General Information on Career Options

[What can I do with a psychology degree? | Prospects.ac.uk](#)

[Career options in psychology | BPS](#)

[Contact a psychologist](#). Use the BPS's online directory to identify practicing psychologists that you could approach to find out more about roles, shadow or try to set up some experience

Clinical Psychology

[The Alternative Handbook](#). (free download once you have an account) Great resource covering views and experiences of current trainees.

[ClinPsy Forum](#) – excellent forum for aspiring and qualified clinical psychologists. There is a discussion thread on just about everything!

[Clearing House](#)

[Applying for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology BPS Division of Clinical Psychology Pre-Qualification Group application event 2020](#)

[Seeing is Believing: The Changing Face of Clinical Psychology](#)

[Applying for Clinical Psychology Training Part 1](#)

[Applying for Clinical Psychology Training Part 2](#)

Preparing for Success in Clinical Psychology Doctoral Course Interviews

[Part 1: Preparing for interviews](#)

[Part 2: Managing the interview day](#)

[Success in Online Interviews for Clinical Psychology training](#)

[University of Manchester Trainee Clinical Psychologist Q & A Session](#)

Counselling Psychology

[Panel Event of Counselling Psychologists](#) discussing their careers and route into the profession

[Independent Route to Qualify for a Counselling Psychologist](#)

Therapy

[IAPT Services](#) - important option for those considering a career as a therapist within the NHS (e.g. High Intensity Therapist doing CBT or EMDR or Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner)

Read - Blogs

[Blog of a Forensic Psychologist in Training](#)

[Psychponderings Blog](#)

[ThePsychAssist Blog](#) (no longer active but lots of articles)

[ClinPsyEye](#)

Follow - Instagram

[@theoxfordpsych](#)

[@psychassist](#)

[@withyouinmindpsych](#) – Assistant Psychologist setting up a mentoring scheme for aspiring psychologists

[@theartofbeingwell](#) mentoring scheme for aspiring BAME Clinical psychologists

Listen - Podcasts

[How did we get here?](#) – Prof Tanya Byron, Clinical Psychologist and author of the Skeleton Cupboard conducting 45-minute therapy sessions with a range of clients.

[Psychology: Let's Get to Clinical](#) – A podcast seeking to enrich the journey for anybody working towards a career in clinical psychology

Free Online Courses

[Psychology and Mental Health: Beyond Nature and Nurture](#) – free online course delivered by Professor Kinderman and Kate Allsopp through FutureLearn.

Widening Participation

[BPS Division of Clinical Psychology Minorities in CP Group](#) – part of the BPS that looks particularly at the experiences and needs of people going into and within the CP profession who consider themselves to be part of a minority group, they offer some support for those applying to doctorate training and have some good publications too.

[The Clearing House website International Students](#),

[Race Reflections](#) – great website written by Clinical Psychologist Guilaine Kinouani on topics related to race and culture. Some of content is members only but has some useful lists and information.

[Support network for Aspiring Clinical Psychologists of Black, Asian and Mixed Heritage](#)

[Collective of Asian Psychological Therapists](#) (have regular reflective groups)

[DClinPsy International Trainee Support](#) (have monthly meetups)

Key Books

Clinical Psychology

The Skeleton Cupboard: The Making of a Clinical Psychologist, Tanya Byron

Love's Executioner, Irvin D Yalom

Surviving Clinical Psychology: Navigating Personal, Professional and Political Selves on the Journey to Qualification, James Randell

How to Become a Clinical Psychologist, Laura Golding & Judith Moss

Becoming a Clinical Psychologist: Everything you Need to Know, Steven Mayers & Amanda Mwale

The Clinical Psychologist Collective: Advice & Guidance for Aspiring Clinical Psychologists, Marianne Trent

Trauma

The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma, Bessel van der Kolk

Health Psychology

Living with the Enemy: Coping with the stress of chronic illness using CBT, mindfulness and acceptance, Ray Owen

The Reality Slap: How to Survive and Thrive when Life Hits You Hard, Russ Harris

With the End in Mind: How to Live and Die Well, Kathryn Mannix

Forensic Psychology

So, You Want to be a Forensic Psychologist? Brendan O'Mahony

The Dark Side of the Mind: True Stories from My Life as a Forensic Psychologist, Kerry Daynes

Further Reading

Formulation in Psychology and Psychotherapy: Making Sense of Peoples Problems, Lucy Johnstone & Rudi Dallos

Effective Self-Care and Resilience in Clinical Practice, Dealing with Stress, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout, Sarah Parry

Organisations, Job websites and Charities

Job websites

Mental Health & Healthcare Related

- [NHS](#)
- [Healthjobs UK](#)
- [Creative Support](#)
- [Turning Point](#)
- [The Big Life Group](#)
- [The Priory Group](#)

Govt, Social Care, Community and Charity

- [Civil Service jobs](#)
- [Looking Ahead](#)
- [Charityjobs](#)
- [Jobsgopublic](#)
- [Community Care](#)

Charities/Other Organisations



Mental Health

- [Samaritans](#)
- [Nightline](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Mind](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness](#)
- [SANE](#)
- [Together](#)
- [Anxiety UK](#)
- [Welldoing](#)

Adolescent Mental Health

- [Get Connected](#)
- [Mindful](#)
- [STEM4](#)
- [YoungMinds](#)

Bereavement

- [Child Bereavement UK](#)
- [Cruse Bereavement Care](#)
- [Grief Encounter](#)

Child Abuse

- [ChildLine](#)
- [NAPAC](#)

Dementia

- [Alzheimers Society](#)
- [DementiaUK](#)

Domestic Violence

- [National Centre for Domestic Violence](#)
- [National Domestic Violence Helpline](#)
- [Refuge](#)
- [Women's Aid](#)
- [Rape Crisis](#)

Drug Addiction

- [WithYou](#)
- [FRANK](#)

Eating Disorders

- [Anorexia and Bulimia Care](#)
- [Beat](#)

HIV and Sexual Health

- [Terrence Higgins Trust](#)

Refugees

- [The Association of Jewish Refugees](#)

Learning Disability

- [Mencap](#)

Older People

- [Age UK](#)

Relationships

- [Relate](#)

Post-Traumatic Stress

- [PTSD UK](#)
- [PTSD Resolution](#)
- [Combat Stress](#)

Forensic - Crime/Offenders/Ex-offenders

- [HM Prison and Probation Service](#) (see Forensic Psychologist) – the biggest single employer of psychologists in the country.
- [Circles](#)
- [Prisoner Reform Trust](#)
- [NACRO](#) – May provide an opportunity for voluntary work with offenders or victims of crime.
- [Witness Service](#)
- [Victim Support](#) - independent charity which helps people cope with the effects of crime.
- [Change, Grow, Live-](#) Charity that works with people to change their lives for the better. Voluntary and paid positions available.
- [Work with Offenders](#) – Leading news, information and job site for the offender supervision and offender rehabilitation community.
- [Youth Justice Board](#) – Youth Offender Panels are a ground-breaking new way of dealing with young people who commit crime. Their website deals with how to apply to sit on a Youth Offending Panel.
- [National Association of Official Prison Visitors](#) – Independent volunteers, recruited on behalf of the Prison Service, who visit and befriend prisoners.