



Careers in Applied Psychology

a guide to the options

Introduction

Applied psychology is a great career choice and there are lots of options in terms of the types of training and roles available and in terms of who you work with and the sorts of issues you may choose to specialise in. This booklet provides an insight into some of the more common roles in applied psychology and what it takes to do them.

Counselling Psychologist

Counselling psychologists use psychological therapies to explore a client's experiences and distress and to offer counselling/psychotherapeutic treatments for those things that may be difficult. Much of what they do overlaps with that of a clinical psychologist but counselling psychologists use a broader range of therapies and often take a less diagnostic approach that involves less emphasis on mental 'illness' and more on the ways in which a client can change and adapt to their experiences. They often work side by side with clinical psychologists, CBT therapists and counsellors in hospitals and clinics or in private organisations. Counselling psychologists work with adults, children, young people, couples and families.

Counselling psychologists assess a client's mental health and wellbeing using methods such as discussion/interviews, psychodynamic testing and observations. They then develop a treatment plan and formulate a psychological explanation about



the problem, which would normally be discussed and agreed with the client. This then allows the counselling psychologist to implement the agreed psychological therapy with the aim of reducing the client's psychological distress and providing them with the skills to cope with challenges and make positive changes in their lives.

How do I become a counselling psychologist?

As with other branches of psychology you must first complete a psychology degree or conversion course. If you fail to obtain a 2:1 or above you may have to undertake a masters in counselling psychology in order to go further in a career in counselling psychology. To call yourself a counselling psychologist you must complete a doctorate level, HCPC approved programme in counselling psychology. Unfortunately, there is no NHS funding for these courses but most courses only require you to be at university for one or two full days a week so you can work while studying. Counselling psychology is just as competitive as other branches of psychology, so be prepared to work hard and gain as much experience as you can before applying.

Is counselling psychology for me?

Counselling psychologists have a genuine interest in helping others, showing empathy and compassion towards their clients. They need to enjoy working with people and building effective relationships with clients. It is vital they have a positive, empowering approach and are committed to enabling clients understand themselves better to find ways of overcoming particular difficulties or areas of distress that might be associated with mental difficulties. Counselling psychologists have a keen interest in different forms of therapy and interventions to help people, and they enjoy working with a range of client populations and in different settings. This requires an awareness of cultural differences and a preparedness to undertake personal development work to understand their own personality too. Counselling psychology is an evidence-based profession and practitioners need to be able to undertake or understand research to provide the best therapies for their clients.

Educational Psychologist

Educational psychologists support children or young people who are experiencing problems within the education system. They mainly deal with children with learning disabilities or social, emotional or behavioural problems either by directly working with them or indirectly through their parents or teachers. They aim to enhance a child's education by assessing their learning and emotional needs and implementing therapeutic and behavioural management programmes. Educational psychologists are normally employed by the Local Education Authority (LEA).



How do I become an educational psychologist?

The first step is to complete an undergraduate psychology degree or an accredited conversion course. Most doctorate programmes do not accept undergraduates with a 2:2 unless they have a higher qualification (e.g. masters). To be able to call yourself an educational psychologist you must have completed an HCPC approved, Educational Psychology doctorate level programme. Places in these programmes are becoming increasingly competitive so work experience with children in educational, childcare, or community settings is often essential.

Is educational psychology for me?

If you enjoy working with children and care about their education then you might enjoy a career in educational psychology. You must have strong people skills as you would be dealing with parents, teachers and local authorities, often in challenging circumstances. You should also be assertive and persuasive as you often will be the child's advocate trying to gain the needed resources for them. Additionally, there are great opportunities for you to be creative in finding ways to help the child grasp concepts and ideas. There are approximately four times as many applicants as there are postgraduate places in educational psychology but funding is available if you plan to become a full-time educational psychologist. If you succeed and are able to qualify, you will have a career that provides enormous satisfaction as you make a real difference to a child's education and potential. Each day will be both challenging and rewarding while you help children, teachers and parents cope with a range of social factors affecting the learning process.

Clinical Psychologist

Clinical psychologists assess and treat people in psychological distress. They mainly deal with those suffering from mental illnesses of various kinds, but can also help people with learning difficulties, relationship troubles or family issues. Most of the jobs for clinical psychologists are in health and social care settings such as hospitals, health centres and mental health centres. However there are also jobs in the private sector working for hospitals, clinics or private offices. A clinical psychologist tends to work with a particular type of client group, such as children or people with learning disabilities.



How do I become a clinical psychologist?

The first step in becoming a Clinical Psychologist is to complete an undergraduate psychology degree.

In order to qualify for a doctorate level programme you need to achieve a 1st or high 2:1 class honours, or failing this, complete a masters in psychology. After you have accomplished your degree you also have to complete an HCPC approved, doctorate level programme in Clinical Psychology. This course is normally three years and may be funded by the NHS so successful candidates become NHS employed trainee clinical psychologists. These courses however, are very competitive and you will need experience that demonstrates your abilities and knowledge in psychology such as an assistant psychologist or assistant researcher post. To get such posts it is recommended that you work in social care, nursing, as a care assistant or as a charity volunteer.

Is clinical psychology for me?

To become a successful clinical psychologist you need certain personal skills. You should have a patient, sympathetic approach, a thorough knowledge of psychological theory and a genuine desire to help others. You also must be very dedicated.

Only 1 in 6 doctorate applicants are accepted onto a clinical psychology training each year and the average age is 26, so aim to get as much experience as possible during and after your degree. Unlike other psychology qualifications, you may be paid during your time studying, although this is no longer the case everywhere. A career in clinical psychology is both rewarding and stimulating. Every day is different and you have the opportunity to help others by alleviating their psychological stress. Research is constantly finding new ways to tackle psychological difficulties and mental illnesses making it a very exciting field of psychology.

Occupational Psychologist

Occupational psychologists apply their psychological knowledge into the work environment. They aim to help develop employee performance through training, implementing efficient systems and increasing morale. Occupational psychologists can have an in house role working in the company, or adopt a consultancy role moving around companies. Depending on the company's needs, they can provide anything from employee counselling to designing a work environment to implementing organisational changes.



How do I become an occupational psychologist?

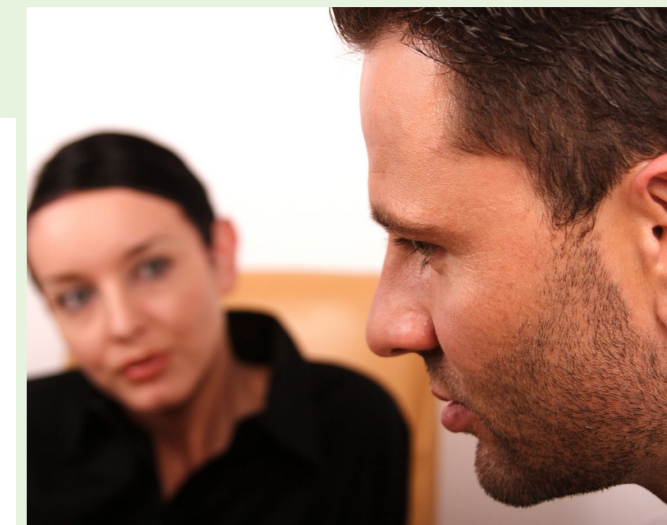
You must complete an undergraduate degree in psychology or complete an accredited conversion course. You generally have to achieve a 2:1 or above and have relevant work experience to move on to further qualifications. To become an occupational psychologist you must complete an HCPC approved Masters in occupational psychology or equivalent. Unfortunately, there is little funding available for any of these courses, however, there are part-time options so you can work simultaneously.

Is occupational psychology for me?

Occupational psychology allows you to combine psychology with business. If you are a good with people, statistics, and management, you may excel in this field. You must also be able to negotiate and solve problems under short deadlines. The job can be demanding but it gives you the opportunity to work with many kinds of people, travel and have a degree of flexibility.

Psychologists specialising in psychotherapy

Psychologists can specialise in psychotherapy by undertaking further applied training after a psychology degree in a specific psychotherapy model. These psychologists, who may or may not be qualified as counselling or clinical psychologists, work using psychotherapy to help individuals, couples, families or groups to overcome many emotional and psychological problems. They use a variety of therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy, humanistic psychotherapy and systemic therapies. They aim to understand their clients thought processes, feelings, behaviours and inner conflicts and then develop ways to alleviate psychological distress.



How do I become a psychologist specialising in psychotherapy?

To become a psychologist specialising in psychotherapy, you will need an undergraduate degree in psychology. Following this, you will need to gain some experience in a helping role or may choose instead to undertake a pre-entry postgraduate qualification, which is usually a Masters Degree in Psychotherapy. You will then be eligible for a psychotherapy course.

Courses usually run on a part-time basis over four to six years and include both theory and practical work. Training will usually include personal therapy, which along with fees makes it an expensive qualification. However, the programme is designed to give you time to work concurrently.

Is psychotherapy for me?

To become a psychologist specialising in psychotherapy you need to have a genuine interest in the emotional problems people face. You must be able to build relationships with clients and have the confidence to explore the painful aspects of their lives. If you believe you have these qualities and the patience to observe and listen, then you may succeed in this role. Prepare to gain as much work experience as possible and to dedicate vast amounts of time to research. Remember, at the end of the tunnel is a career that allows you to use your creativity and initiative to help those in distress.

Other psychology careers

Health Psychologist

Health psychologists sit at the relationship between mental and physical health. They aim to preserve health, prevent illness and examine the psychological factors that might be causing a physical illness. To qualify you need to have an undergraduate psychology degree and then undertake an HCPC accredited, masters level programme in Health Psychology followed by a period of supervised practice.

Sport and Exercise Psychologist

Both sport and exercise psychologists study behaviours, mental processes and wellbeing of individuals, teams and organisations involved in sport and exercise. Psychologists rarely work in both sport and exercise psychology. Sport psychologists specialise in using psychological techniques to prepare athletes for training and competition. Exercise psychologists use psychological theory and exercises to increase motivation and participation in exercise in the general public. To qualify you must complete an undergraduate psychology degree and then undertake an HCPC accredited, masters level programme in Sport and Exercise Psychology followed by a period of supervised practice.

Forensic Psychologist

Forensic psychologists connect psychology and law. They may investigate criminological psychology or be involved in therapeutic and training processes for rehabilitation purposes. Forensic psychologists mostly work in the prison service. To qualify you must first complete an undergraduate psychology degree and then undertake an HCPC accredited, masters level programme in Forensic Psychology followed by a period of supervised practice.

Neuropsychologist

Neuropsychologists examine the relationship between the structure and function of the brain and how they relate to specific psychological processes and behaviours. This understanding helps them assess and rehabilitate people with brain injuries or other neurological disease. Becoming a neuropsychologist is tough and normally involves completing an undergraduate degree in psychology followed by a further post-graduate qualification in an applied psychology field such as clinical, educational or counselling psychology. Further specialist training in neuropsychology is then required.

Academic Psychologist

Academic psychologists teach at universities and conduct research. To become one you must firstly complete an accredited undergraduate psychology degree. Most academic lecturers have then gone on to specialise through postgraduate training or a PhD.

Hints and tips - getting into applied psychology

1 Get to know yourself better

Ask yourself who you are and what you believe. Are you artistic, funny, dramatic, peaceful and grounded, or scientific? What is your background and life experience? What qualifications do you already hold? What are your hobbies and interests?

2 Do some research

There are many different ways of working with people therapeutically. Do some reading about the different therapeutic approaches to get a good indepth feel for what's involved for each one before you decide what will suit you and your personality.

3 Volunteer

The best way to get a feel for the work and to develop skills that will stand you in good stead for getting a paid role is to volunteer. There are numerous voluntary organisations so do some research into the different options and select opportunities that work for you and your personality while also being relevant for your chosen career path.

4 Make good contacts

Make contact with people who are working in your chosen area and ask them about their experiences and how they got into their field.

5 Be persistent

You may find it takes longer than you thought to be accepted onto your chosen course or to complete it. Don't give up! Use the time to acquire new skills and get more experience that will eventually help you progress. For example, if you want to work with children, you could get a role in a nursery or school. Also consider alternative types of therapy work that may help you acquire further skills and experience of working with people and demonstrate your commitment to this type of career. You may find the alternative is actually something you love, or you may decide to move on to your original path, but the experience will stand you in good stead either way.

6 Get a good supervisor

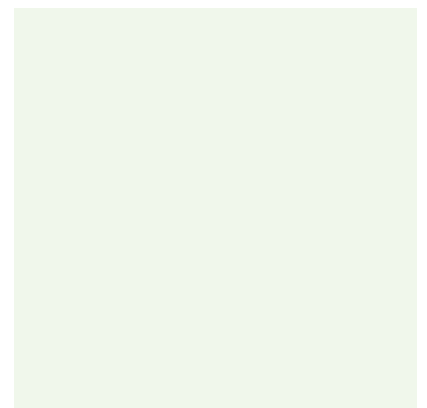
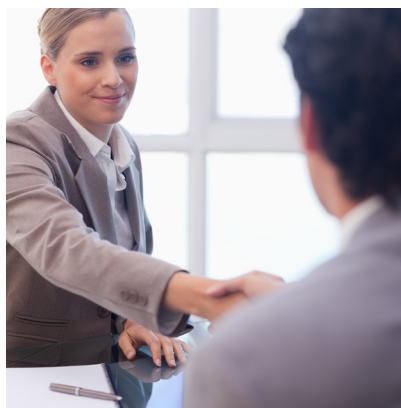
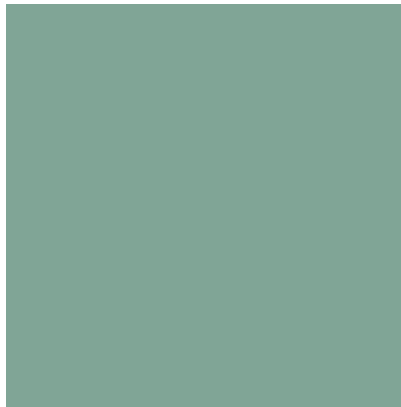
Once you start seeing clients, a good supervisor is vital to support you on your journey.

7 Be true to yourself

Always be true to yourself and your beliefs and personality. Choosing to train in a therapeutic approach that is close to your personality and beliefs will make you a more natural and relaxed practitioner and this will help put people at ease and ensure they get the most from their therapy sessions with you.

Good luck!





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