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# Counselling Psychology

## What is Counselling Psychology?

**Counselling Psychology is an applied psychology profession meaning that scientific psychological research and theory is put into practice working directly with people and organisations. Counselling Psychology as a profession incorporates the scientist practitioner and reflective practitioner philosophies and sees the therapeutic relationship as being a powerful vehicle for change.**

Counselling Psychologists take a phenomenological approach to their work, meaning that they work with exploration and enquiry to understand the individual's unique subjective psychological experience to empower their recovery and alleviate distress.

The BPS (2020) defines Counselling Psychology as "Counselling psychologists are a relatively new breed of professional applied psychologists concerned with the integration of psychological theory and research with therapeutic practice. The practice of counselling psychology requires a high level of self-awareness and competence in relating the skills and knowledge of personal and interpersonal dynamics to the therapeutic context".

## What do Counselling Psychologists do?

Counselling Psychologists working directly with people, teams and organisations. One of the most significant roles of a Counselling Psychologist is to offer therapy to people with a range of mental health difficulties, emotional struggles and relationship difficulties. Counselling Psychologists are highly skilled in the assessment of mental distress, considering a range of factors that contribute and maintain someone's suffering, and working actively in therapy with clients to alleviate distress and change unhelpful patterns.

Counselling Psychologists also have skills in applying their understanding of behaviour and distress to teams and groups, helping to highlight where changes can be made in this context. Counselling Psychologists also engage in teaching, research and audit work, as well as offering supervision to trainee psychologists, other mental health professionals/team members and lead and manage services.

## How do I train?

In order to become a Counselling Psychologist, you will need to complete a 3 or 4 year Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology, accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS).

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[There are several courses throughout the UK and you can search for one on the British Psychological Society \(BPS\) website and filtering for “Counselling Psychology” \(https://portal.bps.org.uk/Accredited-Courses\).](https://portal.bps.org.uk/Accredited-Courses)

[The BPS also has the option to train directly through them with the Qualification in Counselling Psychology \(QCoP\) \(https://www.bps.org.uk/qualification-counselling-psychology\).](https://www.bps.org.uk/qualification-counselling-psychology)

## Entry Requirements

In order to become a counselling psychologist and progress on to the above Doctoral Programmes you will need

- A minimum of an upper second class (2:1) honours degree in Psychology
- If you have a lower second class (2:2) honours degree in Psychology then you may be considered if you have also completed an MSc in Psychology with a heavy emphasis on research methods. This is to demonstrate your ability to do this at a doctoral level, as required by the professional doctorate
- Be eligible for a Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) of the British Psychological Society
- Most Counselling Psychology Doctorates require for you to have completed a completed a basic counselling skills course.
- Have practical experience of using and applying counselling skills with people with emotional distress

## Previous Experiences Required

Most Counselling Psychology Doctorates will ask for you to have practical experience of using and applying counselling skills with people with emotional distress. Therefore, it is imperative that you gain as much experience as possible.

Some options for this include working for the Samaritans, volunteering with Heads Together or Rethink, helping to facilitate community mental health support groups, working as an Assistant Psychologist (employed or honorary), volunteering for drugs and alcohol services or considering training as a volunteer counsellor for organisations where you meet their criteria; this may option up a variety of ways to help including via telephone or online.

It is always helpful to contact your local volunteering bureau to see what opportunities they may have.

One of the main things you have to be prepared to do to gain the appropriate experience is to work in a voluntary capacity. Many do this alongside paid work and this represents the passion and dedication Counselling Psychologists have toward their profession.

## Career Prospects

Counselling Psychologists work in a range of settings; the NHS being the most prominent. Within this context, Counselling Psychologists can work in a range of services, from primary care (IAPT) to inpatient mental health hospitals, as well as in physical health settings or specialist psychological therapy services.

Counselling Psychologists also work in private settings, in voluntary settings, in schools/colleges, in prisons/forensic settings, as part of Employee Assistance Programmes, for

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corporations, with occupational health departments and in independent practice as self-employed psychologists.

Counselling Psychologists can also work in the academic sector, teaching and training on established psychology programmes.

The training for Counselling Psychology is a self-funded programme. On qualifying, Counselling Psychologists, working in the NHS, would be employed, as all applied psychologists, at a Band 7 on the Agenda for Change Pay Scale; for 2020 the starting salary would be £38,890 and would rise to £44,503.

Progression through the NHS grades is typically achieved through being appointed to new roles. As a counselling psychologist your progression would be from a Band 7 (newly qualified) up to a Band 9 for Heads of Psychology Services, with Bands 8c and 8d representing Consultant Clinical Psychologist levels.

Working in the Prison service also holds a nationally agreed pay scale and counselling psychologists “working in private practice or in commerce and industry should expect to be remunerated at a comparable level to those employed in the public sector” (BPS 2020).

## Any other relevant information

Questions often get asked about the difference between a clinical psychologist, counselling psychologist and counsellor and we have discussed these further in the leaflet titled “FAQs/Differences amongst professions”.

## Useful Organisations

[British Psychological Society \(https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/counselling\)](https://careers.bps.org.uk/area/counselling)

[Health Careers \(https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/counselling-psychologist\)](https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles/counselling-psychologist)

