

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE UK

(Frequently asked questions)

1. How do I become a Clinical Psychologist?

To become a Clinical Psychologist you need to have completed a D.Clin.Psychol (Doctorate of Clinical Psychology). This is NOT a PhD (Doctorate of Philosophy) which is commonly reported. Following successful completion of your D.Clin.Psychol it is a legal requirement for all practising Clinical Psychologists to be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

2. How do I become a Clinical Neuropsychologist?

To become a Clinical Neuropsychologist you first need to be a qualified Clinical Psychologist. Following this you would be required to complete an MSc in Clinical Neuropsychology and have two years supervised clinical practice before a VIVA. For now concentrate on getting your D.Clin.Psychol!

3. How do I apply for clinical training?

To apply for clinical training in the United Kingdom you need to apply to the Clearing House which is based at the University of Leeds (www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp/). This is where application forms are submitted not where you have to physically attend. There are currently 30 Clinical Psychology courses in the United Kingdom who run three years programmes except for the University of Edinburgh (discussed later). The number of places on these courses varies ranging from, in 2012, 9 at Bangor University to 42 at North Thames UCL. Glasgow University has 23 places and Edinburgh 27. On the application form candidates are allowed to apply for up to 4 Universities.

In 2012 the success rate for being offered a place was 15% with only 0.76% failure/dropped out rate during the course (which reflects the high standard of trainees). In 2012 3,857 individual applicants applied for clinical places translating to 14,873 individual application forms sent to universities (given that each candidate has the option of at least four Universities). In total throughout the United Kingdom there were 586 places on offer in 2012. In 2012 the University of Edinburgh had 489 applications for 27 places and Glasgow 353 for 23 places. In 2012 the mean number of years between graduating and starting the D.Clin.Psychol. at the University of Edinburgh was 5, with a range of 2 to 10 years.

4. How will my application be assessed and what is the selection process?

Applications are submitted to the Clearing House by December for admittance in October the following year. When assessing your application form there are a number of factors which will be considered;

- a) **Academic abilities** – you need to demonstrate on your application form that you have the academic abilities to successfully complete the D. Clin. Psychol. Ideally you would have a 2.1 or first class degree with further evidence of academic ability (publications, presentations etc). It is important that you demonstrate an understanding that Clinical Psychology is an academic profession therefore the assessors will look at any publications that you have or attempts to disseminate research findings for example writing an article on your research or making a presentation. You need to evidence that you understand the link between research and clinical practice and show that you have attempted to do this. For information of those accepted for clinical training at University of Edinburgh in 2012 10% had a PhD, 60% had a Masters degree, 37% had a first class (honours) undergrad degree and 62% had a 2.1.
- b) **Clinical skills/experience** – ideally you would have had experience working directly with a clinical group applying psychological principles under the supervision of a Clinical Psychologist. In most cases this is likely to be as an Assistant Psychologist however other experience is also relevant such as support worker, care assistant, nursing assistant, working with volunteer agencies. When working with client groups it is also advantageous if you have specifically worked with a mental health population and had the opportunity to apply or at least observe psychological practice. What is important is what you have learned from the experience and you are able to demonstrate that you are thinking psychologically even if you were not in the position to implement any psychological models, theories or principles.
- c) **Understanding the role of a Clinical Psychologist** – it is important when completing your application form that you demonstrate that you understand what a Clinical Psychologist does and how this differs from other professionals such as Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Nurses, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists. This is not just about understanding the therapeutic role but also other roles within the profession and nationally. You should be aware of some of the professional issues within the profession (which is probably best served by being a member of the British Psychological Society or having access to their publications).
- d) **Understanding of the NHS in the UK** – it is important that you demonstrate that you have at least a basic understanding of how the NHS is structured and works and in particular how Clinical Psychology works within the NHS. This includes understanding any current relevant issues such as policy documents and professional developments within the NHS.

5. Where can I apply for relevant work experience?

Relevant work experience is vast and varied therefore any employment where you are likely to come into contact with client groups is relevant. These employment opportunities can be sourced via local newspapers and your local employment office. In addition the British Psychological Society produces a magazine called (The Psychologist) which advertises any potential Assistant Psychologist posts. In addition Assistant Psychology posts within the NHS will be advertised on the NHS vacancies website.

6. Is volunteering worth doing?

Yes, firstly because it is a nice thing to do and secondly, providing your volunteering is relevant in some way to psychology, it will help support your application form and give you a better understanding of the needs of many of our client groups.

7. Why won't Clinical Psychologists let me shadow them?

Firstly there are clinical and ethical reasons why shadowing is difficult for example NHS policies, patient confidentiality and the patient's wishes. Clinically having another person observing a session can affect the therapeutic relationship and changes the dynamics within the therapeutic setting. In addition clinicians then have to spend some additional time with the person shadowing to allow them to ask questions, time which would have otherwise been spent dictating a clinic letter or writing up session notes.

8. Are there any age limits when applying for clinical training?

No. Age discrimination is illegal.

9. Is it worth applying if I graduated with a 2.2 degree?

Yes however not all Universities accept candidates for interview who have obtained a 2.2. Those who do would require further evidence that you are able to academically meet the standards of the D. Clin. Psychol therefore if you have obtained a 2.2 you would be expected to at least have completed a further MSc.

10. Am I at a disadvantage if I have a degree in behavioural studies followed by conversion course?

No you will not be disadvantaged providing the conversion course meets the requirements for registration with the BPS.

11. I want to train in Aberdeen and I am not interested in training elsewhere, will this disadvantage my application form?

Each applicant gets the opportunity to apply for four University places therefore it stands to reason that if you are only applying for one University (for Aberdeen this would be the University of Edinburgh) you are reducing your chances of being selected for clinical training by $\frac{3}{4}$. It will however not disadvantage you when your application is being reviewed by the University of Edinburgh.

12. How are the interviews structured?

If you have been lucky enough to be offered an interview each University has a different process for selection. All have some level of interview often at least one clinical interview and one academic interview however most have additional elements to their selection process which may include group work, role play, critique of a journal article, a presentation, a written exercise before the interview, a written exercise at the time of interview.

13. Do I get paid whilst on the course?

Whilst you are a Trainee Clinical Psychologist you will also be an employee of the NHS and as such will have an NHS employment contract. Your employment contract will stipulate that you have to be registered with your University to remain an employee of the NHS (therefore if you drop out your employment contract will be terminated). Currently Trainee Clinical Psychologists get paid between £25,000 and £29,000 and all Universities fees are paid by the NHS.

14. How are the courses structured?

Each course is structured differently however broadly speaking you would be expected to spend a period of time with each clinical population. For example at the University of Edinburgh you would spend six months in Adult Mental Health, six months in Child Psychology, six months in Learning Disabilities and six months in Older Adults. Following this there are often elective placements where you may choose to return to a previous placement to get more experience of trying something different for example Clinical Neuropsychology, Eating Disorders, Forensic etc. All courses require trainees to complete a large scale piece of research and meet the academic requirements for that particular course which can include examinations, small scale research, essays, assessed presentations.

15. How long is clinical training?

Clinical training is normally three years however the University of Edinburgh also have a specialist training programme which can last four or five years. This is not a part-time course however when completing your course you are half time on placement and half time completing a work component i.e. you will be working, under supervision, as a clinician half of the time.

16. Where will I be based for my clinical placements?

By and large you will complete your placements in the areas where your University is based for example if you go to the University of Birmingham your placements will be in Birmingham. There are some exceptions to this in areas where there is a large geographically spread population. For example the University of Edinburgh covers the East of Scotland therefore you may be geographically based in

Lothian, Fife, Tayside, Forth Valley and Grampian as well as others. Whilst you will have your placements in these geographic areas you will often return to Edinburgh for teaching blocks (accommodation and travel paid for by the NHS).

17. What are the job prospects like after successfully completing my D.Clini.Psychol?

Like any profession this depends on financial constraints, largely of the NHS, when you eventually qualify. Most trainees however once qualified do find employment although you may be required to move location.

18. Do all jobs have a research element?

Yes. Clinical Psychology is an academic profession therefore it is extremely important that Clinical Psychologists contribute to the evidence base available to inform practice.

19. How much of my time, when I am qualified, will be spent dealing directly with clients versus administration?

This depends on many factors including which area of Clinical Psychology you specialise in and your own level of experience. As you progress through the career of Clinical Psychology many Heads of Departments become more involved in managerial and policy making decisions although all will maintain a clinical caseload.

Useful References:

What is Clinical Psychology? John Hall & Susan Llewelyn.

How to become a clinical psychology. Graham Turpin & Alice Knight.

Questions answered by **Dr Fiona Summers, Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologist**. March 2013