

# "The opportunity to support positive change for each individual I work with is so rewarding."

After reading a university prospectus in her school library, Rebecca was captivated by the psychology courses. These courses ultimately led her to a fulfilling career in the NHS for 25 years.

## Dr Rebecca Morland

### Consultant counselling psychologist

#### Salary range

Over £65K



### How I got into the role

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I remember reading university prospectuses in the school careers library, and my interest being sparked by the psychology courses. I was fascinated by studying the mind and human behaviour, as it combined my love of science with working closely with people in a helping capacity. I have never looked back since.

During my undergraduate psychology degree, I volunteered in various settings and after graduating worked as a support worker for adults with a learning disability (where I knew there was a psychology department). This gave me the experience to get an assistant

psychologist post near home, as I was not in the financial position to move away for a job. I was fortunate that the Head of Service took me under her wing, and I will be forever grateful that I was funded by the NHS to complete the postgraduate training in counselling psychology and the top-up doctorate. I may have never qualified otherwise, and that financial investment paid off as I have worked in the NHS for 25 years now.

I completed placements in a range of adult mental health services, then moved to an early psychosis service. Following on, I have worked as a consultant in a youth offending team and a regional forensic CAHMS, and am currently part of a multi-agency stalking partnership. My career has gone full circle as I am now back working with adults after 14 years of working with children. I particularly enjoy building new services for those who are disadvantaged, have complex needs and are not provided for in mainstream services. Whatever area I have been employed in, I have found the core skills and values of counselling psychology have been transferable.

## **What I do**

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For me, there is no typical day, and often multiple different aspects of the role need to be juggled through the week. My diary will have appointments for professional consultations and multi-agency meetings plus assessment and intervention sessions. There will also be time allocated for competing risk assessments, writing reports, supervising colleagues, delivering training, service development and strategic planning. Managing time and expectations can be a challenge of the role, so being able to prioritise and plan, but at the same time be flexible is key.

I have always valued that counselling psychology is based on humanistic principles, so building a therapeutic relationship is a central consideration. This has helped trust and collaboration to develop with people referred even under the most difficult of circumstances. I also appreciate working in a multi-agency setting, which allows a more comprehensive response to better manage risk concerns and/or meet an individual's needs.

## **The best bits and challenges**

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Counselling psychologists are person-centred in that we consider how each individual creates meaning from their circumstances, and we use this understanding to guide research questions and theory development. I really enjoy learning from each and every person, and thinking about how their experience fits with what is already known in the field. The opportunity to support positive change for each individual I work with is so rewarding, and the role is even more fulfilling when I am able influence change at a local, regional and national level.

After so many years of working as a counselling psychologist, I still love the role especially as there is always so much more to learn. I have appreciated the opportunity to attend many additional training courses, which have further developed my knowledge and skills. I have also found presenting at conferences is a great way to connect with other professionals who are specialists in the same field, and to be inspired by new areas of research.

Personally, I have found that counselling psychologists are well-respected in the NHS due to being grounded in a reflective scientist-practitioner model, and I have been appointed to senior roles in typically clinical and forensic teams. In some areas where there is less familiarity about the profession, there may be misunderstanding so at times a reminder or explanation about our core competencies can be helpful.

In psychology and the NHS as a whole, I would like to see a greater focus on co-production with experts by experience from a diversity of backgrounds. This means that services are designed jointly with the people who use them, so that they are representative and accessible to each and every member of the community.

## **Life outside work**

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The role of a counselling psychologist is rewarding but also demanding, so having good support systems and a good work/life balance is essential. I find it is important to be in nature as often as possible as I always feel more restored afterwards. I walk my dogs, have started a vegetable patch and go to the sea when I can. I love to travel so am usually planning a holiday and will relax with a good box set or book. I must admit I still enjoy the odd crime drama or podcast, but I limit these to weekdays so the weekends can focus on the lighter side of life!

## **Top tips for others**

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The three words that summarise the main qualities of a counselling psychologist are:

1. **Compassionate Advocates.** Counselling psychologists tend to feel deep empathy for others, whilst maintaining healthy boundaries. We are a kind, inclusive and courageous professional group who are strong advocates for social justice.

2. **Reflective Practitioners.** Counselling psychologists continually reflect on how their interactions and behaviours impact on the therapeutic relationship and therapeutic process. Self-reflection, personal counselling and supervision help counselling psychologists to consider what effects their own thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and biases have on their practice (re-evaluating as needed).

3. **Multi-Layered Analysts.** Counselling psychologists are active listeners who analyse what individual and contextual factors are contributing to someone's psychological difficulties. We are also skilled in analysing information from multiple sources informed by psychological theory and research knowledge to help inform the therapy, risk management or system change. These skills are further transferable to service development/evaluation, research projects and strategic planning.

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