

Studying for the psychological professions

This page provides an overview of the things to consider if you are thinking about applying to train in the psychological professions, what you can expect during training and your next steps after training.

Not to be confused with [psychiatrists](#) ^[1] (who are doctors), people who specialise in the [psychological professions](#) ^[2] include:

- [psychologists](#) (working in [clinical](#) ^[3], [counselling](#) ^[4], [forensic](#) ^[5] and [health psychology](#) ^[6])
- [high intensity therapists](#) ^[7]
- [psychological wellbeing practitioners](#) ^[8]
- [psychotherapists](#) ^[9]
- [counsellors](#) ^[10]

Female mental health nurse and male student nurse

Entry requirements will vary depending on the university so check with the universities.

The following information focuses on training and registration for psychologists, but a relevant degree (usually in psychology) is often the starting point for training in other careers in the psychological professions. For instance, to train as a psychological wellbeing practitioner (PWP) you usually need a degree in psychology followed by further study which you'll do while you're working in a trainee PWP position.

Applying for a degree in psychology

The first step to becoming a professional psychologist is to take a degree in psychology [accredited by the British Psychological Society \(BPS\)](#) ^[11] which will give you Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) of the BPS. GBC is necessary to progress to training in the area of psychology that interests you and to practise as a professional psychologist. If your psychology degree doesn't provide GBC, conversion courses are available.

Applications for first degrees are made through [UCAS](#) ^[12].

Entry requirements

Entry requirements for psychology degree courses vary because each university sets its own entry criteria, but you are likely to need at least two (usually three) A-levels or equivalent qualifications at level 3, plus supporting GCSEs. Contact universities directly to find out whether qualifications equivalent to A-levels or GCSEs are acceptable.

Entry is competitive, so aim for as high grades as possible. For most courses you don't need specific A-levels (or equivalent), but some specify preferred or essential subjects, such as a science. Psychology A-level can give you an insight into the subject, but isn't necessary.

- **Your application**

In your application you will need to demonstrate that you understand what psychology involves. Any relevant experience ^[13] would be helpful.

The UCAS website ^[14] allows you to search for courses and view entry requirements. More detailed information about specific courses can be found in university prospectuses and on their websites.

- **Your degree in psychology**

Psychology degree courses last for three or four years. BPS-accredited courses must meet certain standards but programmes vary widely in their content, the way they are structured, and how they are taught and assessed. The facilities available and amount of support and supervision may also differ from course to course. Find out more by looking at university websites and prospectuses, attending university open days and contacting admissions staff.

Support at university

See our information about the support available ^[15] while on your course.

- **What happens after your degree?**

After you have passed a BPS-accredited degree or conversion course, you have to undertake postgraduate training to qualify in the area of psychology that interests you.

To work as a [clinical psychologist](#) [3], [counselling psychologist](#) [4], [forensic psychologist](#) [5] or [health psychologist](#) [6], you have to take a postgraduate course (usually at doctorate level) approved by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC [16]). You can search for [HCPC](#) [16]-approved courses using our [course finder](#) [17] or by visiting the [HCPC register of approved programmes](#) [18].

The NHS funds a number of places to take approved postgraduate courses in [clinical psychology](#) [19] only. Apply for these through the [Clearing House for Postgraduate Courses in Clinical Psychology](#) [20]

Entry to approved postgraduate training is very competitive and you need to have relevant experience. Some people enter training after working in a support role, for example as an [assistant psychologist](#) [21] or research assistant.

It is really important to check the entry and training requirements for your chosen career carefully. For example, the doctorate training for counselling psychology is self-funded and requires a minimum of 450 face-to-face therapeutic hours with a wide range of clients plus 40 hours of personal therapy.

When you apply for a university programme leading to a role providing NHS healthcare, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values would apply in your everyday work. [Find out more about NHS values](#) [22].

Support

See our [information about the support available](#) [15] while on your course.

• What happens after qualifying?

In order to practise as a clinical, counselling, forensic or health psychologist you must [register with the HCPC](#) [23].

Job vacancies for those who want to work in the psychological therapies are advertised on the [NHS Jobs website](#) [24], on the [BPS Psychologist Appointments website](#) [25] and elsewhere. General information on looking for work can be found in the [Career planning](#) [26] section and under [Looking for a job](#) [27].

There are opportunities to work in a range of settings such as in community mental health teams, in health centres, GP surgeries and hospitals, with social services, or for charities such as Mind. You can usually progress from one grade or band to another. You'll need some experience in a more generalist role, but in most areas of work you can specialise in an area that interests you. For example, a clinical psychologist can undertake further training to work as a high intensity therapist, or focus on helping people with certain mental health conditions.

To remain registered with the HCPC ^[16] (or other register for those who don't have to be registered by law, for example psychotherapists), you have to maintain its set standards for your role. This includes taking part in continuing professional development ^[28] (CPD).

Source URL:<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/studying-psychological-therapies>

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