

Building work experience for professional psychology doctorates

1. Entry requirements for professional practitioner psychology doctorates

Whether you want to progress into Clinical, Counselling, Educational, Forensic, Health, Neuro, Occupational or Sports Psychology, you will find that there will be intense competition for professional doctorate courses.

For example, in 2025 **20% of applicants succeeded** in gaining one of the 1,179 places on NHS clinical psychology training (source: www.clearing-house.org.uk/). With such competition, those who are successful often have substantial experience and are persistent in making applications for several years.

Applicants for professional doctorate study will need to show evidence of a strong understanding of the profession, the role of a psychologist, and an awareness of broader issues affecting your specialist discipline of psychology.

You will normally need at least a 2:1 in a [BPS accredited](#) psychology degree and to have undertaken 'relevant work experience' in your chosen field of psychology (see section 2 below).

You will also need to show evidence of the skills and experience required specifically for that specialist area. The following links provide a general overview but check each university's entry requirements for specific details:

- Clinical Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/clinical-psychologist
- Counselling Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/counselling-psychologist
- Educational Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/educational-psychologist
- Forensic Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/forensic-psychologist
- Health Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/health-psychologist
- Neuropsychology www.bps.org.uk/neuropsychologist-job-profile
- Occupational Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/occupational-psychologist
- Sport & Exercise Psychology www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles/sport-and-exercise-psychologist
- Academia, Teaching & Research Psychology www.bps.org.uk/academia-teaching-and-research-psychologist-job-profile

2. What is 'relevant experience' and how much do you need?

All courses will expect you to have some relevant experience before starting training to help you understand the role of a psychologist, the setting they work in and the people they work with.

Relevant experience includes voluntary/paid, full/part time experience involving service or care roles with clients, in the public, private or voluntary sectors.

Successful applicants will commonly have gained experience in mental health, charities, nursing, social services or criminal justice.

Some courses will require experience that has been supervised by a psychologist who can supply a reference for your application. This often means working as an Assistant Psychologist and competition for these roles is high, so it is advisable to build up work experience with the client groups you are interested in working with during and after your degree. Try to gain experience in a range of settings and with a variety of client groups to broaden your experience.

Some doctorate courses will also have specific requirements for the length of time & type of experience required. For example, for entry onto a Clinical Psychology training course, 6-12 months of the following clinical work experience is typically required:

- Experience of paid or voluntary work in a clinical, community or clinical-academic setting exposing the person to client groups and service settings directly relevant to clinical psychology.
- This experience can be gained in a range of contexts including NHS or University settings, the voluntary sector, or organisations affiliated to the NHS. It follows that a variety of pre-training roles would be relevant, including (but not restricted to) Assistant Psychologist, Research Assistant, Graduate Primary Care Worker, Nursing Assistant, and Healthcare Assistant.

You will need to demonstrate what you have learnt from your experiences both personally and professionally. Your ability to relate what you have learnt from work experience to underpinning psychological theories will be essential both at application and interview stages.

Find out more at www.clearing-house.org.uk/applications/entry-requirements/relevant-experience

3. Finding relevant work experience

To search for voluntary opportunities:

- www.doit.life/
- www.worcsu.com/volunteer/

Below are a sample of the types of organisations who may provide voluntary or paid opportunities to develop your experience whilst at university:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Care Homes | • Mentoring Services |
| • Charities | • Online counselling services |
| • Children's' Centres | • Probation Service |
| • Community Rehabilitation Centres | • Schools and Colleges |
| • Drug Action teams | • Welfare agencies |
| • Homeless Centres | • Youth Clubs |
| • Housing agencies | • Youth Offending Teams |
| • Local authorities | • Youth Services |

(Go to www.yell.com to search for any of the above in your local area).

4. Local organisations to contact to see if they can offer work experience

ASPIE Worcester	www.aspie.org.uk
BEAM Project Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Birmingham	www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-you-can-do/volunteer
Birmingham LGBT Birmingham	https://blgbt.org/support-us/volunteer/
Birmingham BVSC Birmingham	www.bvsc.org/become-a-volunteer
Carrs Lane Counselling Centre Birmingham	www.carrslanecounselling.co.uk/vacancies/
Change, Grow, Live	www.changegrowlive.org/careers-volunteering/volunteering
Citizens Advice Bureau Worcester	https://citizensadviceworcester.org.uk/index.php/volunteer/
Cranstoun	https://cranstoun.org/support-our-work/volunteer-with-us/
Headway Worcester	www.headway.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-with-us/
Give us a Shout Home based/online	https://giveusashout.org/get-involved/volunteer-shout/
Maggs Day Centre Worcester	www.maggsdaycentre.co.uk/support-us/volunteer/
Mind Herefordshire	https://herefordshire-mind.org.uk/volunteering/
Onside Advocacy Worcester	www.onside-advocacy.org.uk/volunteer
Rethink Mental Illness	www.rethink.org/get-involved/use-your-experience/volunteer-with-us/
RSVP (Rape and Sexual Violence Project)	https://rsvporg.co.uk/get-involved/volunteer/
St Paul's Hostel Worcester	https://stpaulshostel.co.uk/work-with-us/
The Basement Project Bromsgrove	www.bromsgrovebasementproject.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/
West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre	www.wmrsasc.org.uk/volunteering
West Mercia Women's Aid	www.westmerciawomensaid.org/support-our-work/volunteering/
Worcestershire Association of Carers	https://www.carersandcommunities.org.uk/volunteering
YMCA Worcestershire	https://ymca.org.uk/y-mentoring/
YSS	www.yss.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/

Also, see list of local providers of volunteering placements at www.worcsu.com/volunteer/providers/

5. Finding job vacancies

For Assistant Psychologist and Psychologist roles in (Clinical, Counselling, Education, Forensic, Health and Occupational) and finding other support roles in mental health and community work:

- www.bps.org.uk (members only)
- www.healthjobsuk.com/
- www.jobsinpsychology.co.uk/

Clinical and Health Psychology:

- www.jobs.nhs.uk
- www.healthjobsuk.com/

Counselling Psychology:

- www.jobsinpsychology.co.uk/

Educational Psychology:

- www.aep.org.uk (members only)
- <http://jobs.theguardian.com/>

Forensic and Occupational Psychology:

- www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/index.cgi
- <https://jobs.justice.gov.uk/>

Research Assistant positions in universities and colleges:

- www.jobs.ac.uk

Sport and Exercise Psychology:

- www.jobs.ac.uk
- www.uksport.gov.uk/

6. Further information

See our '[Careers with a Psychology degree](#)' and '[Careers in Mental Health](#)' leaflets plus the following links;

- www.bps.org.uk/find-your-career-psychology
- www.clearing-house.org.uk/
- www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles

If you would like to book a careers appointment to discuss your options, please visit: <https://worcester.targetconnect.net>

myCareer