Finding Work Experience in Psychology

Gaining relevant work experience is crucial to develop transferable skills which many employers seek in today’s competitive job market. Also it can help put academic study into a work environment and bring a work context to your academic studies. Many postgraduate training programmes will require you to demonstrate significant relevant work experience in order to gain a place on their course. This is especially true of highly competitive areas such as clinical or educational psychology.

Work experience can be paid or unpaid, undertaken during holidays, through a placement year or degree module, or as temporary employment undertaken alongside studies. You may find it difficult to unearth placements working directly with psychologists until you have a completed your degree, however, you can try contacting those working in your area by searching the Society’s Directory of Chartered Psychologists www.bps.org.uk.

How to get work experience

The best time for students to contact employers about work experience is during the first or second year of their degree. Some volunteering and paid opportunities may be applied for in more traditional ways, for example completing an application form; however, creative networking and making speculative applications and approaches should also be considered. If you are interested in working with a particular organisation / within a particular area, then approaching them direct is probably the best tactic.

There are numerous things you can do with a few spare hours a week to gain some work experience and among them:

- work shadowing experience
- contact experienced professionals to find out about their job and how they got into it
- www.bps.org.uk/careers-in-psychology – information on careers in psychology, how to progress and information on postgraduate research degrees
- professional networking – many posts such as assistant psychologists are not always advertised, therefore developing external relevant contacts can increase the chances of gaining such roles
- degree course – check with your department for potential opportunities to develop relevant experience through projects/dissertation
- University lecturers are always conducting their own research, and maybe happy to have students assisting them. Contact the lecturers whose subject topic interests you and ask them if they want any kind of help
- contact the Psychology Department Placement office located in Room 3.05a, King Henry Building, email: psychology-placements@port.ac.uk. Telephone: 023 9284 6640
If you are looking to gain work experience in a specific area the following sections are useful:

**Clinical Psychology**

Try to look for work experience that gives you an idea of what clinical psychologists actually do, gaining some direct clinical contact with the sort of clients psychologists work with. Also try to gain an idea of what working with clients actually entails, together with a sense of the organisational context in which a clinical psychologist usual operates.

Roles which can give you relevant clinical experience could be: assistant psychologist; care worker / assistant; support worker in various settings (e.g. community mental health, learning disability service); teaching assistant in special school (working with children with learning disabilities); volunteer in a variety of roles such as helpline, befriending, project worker with clients with disabilities / mental health issues: (e.g. MIND, Relate, SANE, Drug helpline); research assistant in a clinically relevant area. Some of these roles are in the “Volunteering Bank” in Purple Door. Please come into Purple Door to have a look at our volunteering opportunities or log into Purple Door Jobs board at [www.port.ac.uk/purpledoo](http://www.port.ac.uk/purpledoo).

Useful resources for more career advice information:

- [www.bps.org.uk/jobs/jobs](http://www.bps.org.uk/jobs/jobs) useful advice on job searching tip and vacancies
- [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) – information service for careers in the NHS in England

**Forensic Psychology**

Examples of roles to get relevant forensic experience could be: volunteering / working with a variety of organisations (e.g. NACRO, Victim Support, Youth Offending Team); involvement with prison visitor schemes; assistant psychologist in a forensic setting; working in secure units; roles in the Probation Service; research assistant in a relevant area; support / project worker; youth worker; working with people with substance misuse problems (as crime and these issues can be interlinked); befriender / helpline volunteer – e.g. with organisations such as Drug helpline. Some of these roles are available in the Volunteering Bank in Purple Door. Please come in to have a look of our volunteering opportunities or alternatively log into Purple Door Jobs board at [www.port.ac.uk/purpledoo](http://www.port.ac.uk/purpledoo).

Useful resource to help you with finding work experience

- [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk) - BPS Division of Forensic Psychology search for vacancies
- [www.forenspsych.co.uk](http://www.forenspsych.co.uk) - Investigative Psychology
- [www.nacro.org.uk](http://www.nacro.org.uk) - National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
- [www.justice.gov.uk](http://www.justice.gov.uk) - Current vacancies, volunteering opportunities and information about careers within the justice system
- [www.victimsupport.org.uk](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk) - Charity giving free and confidential help to victims of crime, witnesses, their family, friends
- [www.probationbulletin.co.uk](http://www.probationbulletin.co.uk) - Vacancies in the probation service and related fields
- [www.policecouldyou.co.uk](http://www.policecouldyou.co.uk) - Information about PCSO’s and Special Constables
- [www.naopv.com](http://www.naopv.com) - National Association of Official Prison Visitors
- [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk) - Information service for careers in the NHS in England
Education and Child Psychology

Relevant experience involves working with children and young people within an education, social care, childcare or health and community setting. Examples of relevant Education Psychology experience could be: volunteering in a variety of areas / organisations such as Barnado’s; SureStart; homework / holiday club; teacher; learning support assistant; student associate schemes; assistant educational psychologist; learning mentor; child-minder or other worker in early years setting; camp counsellor (e.g. BUNAC); personal adviser, care worker; early; social work assistant; befriender. Some of these roles are available in the Volunteering Bank in Purple Door or log into Purple Door Jobs board at www.port.ac.uk/purpledoor.

- www.aep.org.uk - Association of Educational Psychologists
- www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/resources/service-area - useful resources to work in clinical service area and the skills required.

Occupational Psychology

Examples of relevant roles in Occupational Psychology experience could be: temping in an administrative role; work with an HR / Personal department. Some administrative and HR role are available in the Volunteering Bank in Purple Door or log into Purple Door Jobs board at www.port.ac.uk/purpledoor

Useful career resource information:

- www.psychapp.co.uk - Psychologist Appointments
- Occupational Psychologist profile- Prospects - useful information about entry requirements and career training information

Counselling Psychology

Examples of relevant Counselling Psychology experience could be: voluntary counselling services for organisations such as Relate; Childline; Release, MIND; Off the Record; Samaritans. Some of these roles are available in the Volunteering Bank in Purple Door or log into Purple Door Jobs board at www.port.ac.uk/purpledoor.

Useful resources:

- www.bacp.co.uk - British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- www.nhscareers.nhs.uk - Information service for careers in the NHS in England

Health Psychology

Examples of relevant Health Psychology experience could be: working in a variety of health care settings such as hospitals, hospices and care homes. Some care home roles and positions are available on Purple Door Jobs board at www.port.ac.uk/purpledoor

Useful resources:

- www.bps.org.uk - BPS Division of Health Psychology
- www.nhscareers.nhs.uk - Information service for careers in the NHS in England
Sports and Exercise Psychology

Examples of relevant Sports and Exercise Psychology experience could be: coaching experience (team and/or individual); PE teaching; volunteering experience on fitness and exercise programmes.

Useful resources

- www.bases.org.uk - British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences the professional body for sport and exercise sciences in the UK
- www.activatesport.co.uk - Organisation offering sport and activity instruction that is age-appropriate

Neuropsychology

Neuropsychologists require not only general clinical skills and knowledge of the broad range of mental health problems, but also a substantial degree of specialist knowledge in the neurosciences. Neuropsychology is a post qualification discipline, in which you first need to be a Chartered Psychologist within the field of clinical or educational psychology.

Only qualified education or clinical psychologists can enter this profession. Find out more information on www.bps.org.uk - BPS Division of Neuropsychology

Further information

Many of the opportunities mentioned above are on a voluntary basis, useful websites to access the voluntary sector are:

- www.do-it.org - National volunteering website; use the searchable database to find current opportunities in your area.
- www.port.ac.uk/purpledoor - Purple Door (University of Portsmouth) search on the link to access current voluntary opportunities or visit Purple Door and take a look at ‘The Volunteering Bank’ which lists all the ongoing roles available with local charities.
- www_mentalhealthjobs.co.uk - Specialised psychology jobs directory
- healthcare jobs uk - Useful website for job search, latest news and updates
- www.psychmininded.co.uk/jobs.htm - Search for relevant vacancies in psychology jobs
- www.communitycare.co.uk - Community Care news, updates and developments
- www.portsmouth.gov.uk - Search for relevant vacancies in areas of education and sport
- www.yell.com - Online directory, which is a good starting place for employer’s information
- www.careersinpsychology.co.uk - Visit the ‘Specific Career Options’ category

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