

## **Voluntary Work Placement Scheme**

Professional psychology is a diverse field and psychologists are employed in various forms across the private, public and voluntary sectors. Most applied psychology careers require specialist postgraduate training, most often in the form of a professional doctorate or a Masters level qualification. The entry requirements for these courses vary between disciplines and institutions, but most will expect some form of relevant work experience before undertaking graduate training. The purpose of this is twofold, to ensure that entrants have the necessary skills to complete the course, and to ensure that applicants understand the nature of the field they are entering. For these same reasons, undertaking voluntary work during your undergraduate degree is highly recommended, to both strengthen your CV and to help you gain an understanding of what work will be like in a given field, in order to determine whether you want to pursue a particular career path.

The Department of Psychology placement scheme was set up in 2005 to assist psychology students with finding and preparing for part-time psychology related voluntary work. A number of organizations participate in this scheme, including those working with people with mental health problems, children and young people, older people, young offenders, adult prisoners, children with physical disabilities, and survivors of child sexual abuse. Settings available to work include both mainstream and special schools, youth offending teams, prisons, and day centers. It is not required to participate in the scheme but it is strongly recommended. Many graduate psychology positions in both work and training are competitive (particularly in the clinical field) and relevant work experience will help to enhance your eligibility. It is advisable to begin a voluntary placement at the earliest possible opportunity; the second semester of first year is a good time to begin making enquiries.

### **How to select a placement**

Dr Tony Moss (mossac@lsbu.ac.uk: tel 0207 815 5777) is the designated placement tutor for the department. The placement tutor can offer advice on the type of work you should seek, depending on your career aspirations and/or personal abilities. He is responsible for providing support, as well as considering the needs of your potential client group. For example, if you are hoping to work with people with serious mental health problems, it is necessary to consider carefully the degree of commitment required on your behalf, as a considerable amount of time may be required to establish trust and positive communication with this group of clients.

You can access information on the available placements by contacting the placement tutor, who will send you a list of the organizations that have already agreed to participate in the department scheme. This list is also available on Blackboard. You can then book an appointment with Tony to discuss the placement you would like and how best to approach the organization. You are at liberty to contact any organization without any assistance from the placement tutor but it is advisable to seek help prior to making a phone call or sending an email.

### **Responsibilities**

If you do decide to apply for a voluntary placement, you are responsible for:

- Contacting your chosen organization;
- Attending any interviews or training schemes run by that organization;
- Preparing a suitable curriculum vitae;
- Carrying out the duties agreed by yourself and your manager at the organization;
- If possible, making sure that you are fully supervised by a trained professional at the organization. Supervision by a psychology relevant professional is held in high esteem by employers and postgraduate trainers.

The Department of Psychology is responsible for:

- Providing a comprehensive list of organizations who have agreed to participate in the departmental placement scheme;
- Supplying a letter confirming your status as a student;
- Adequately preparing you for interview and training;
- Discussing the type of work required of you at the placement;
- Supplying a reference, if needed.

## Psychology Career Paths

To help you decide which placements will be most appropriate, here follows a breakdown of the kind of experience expected for each of the major applied Psychology career paths.

### Clinical Psychology

Clinical Psychologists work predominantly in the NHS with both adults and children providing psychological interventions mainly, but not exclusively, for people experiencing mental health problems. Training is by a three year doctorate for which students are paid by the NHS. Clinical courses are intensely competitive and only about 1 in 4 applicants are successful. The level of required experience is consequently high. Crucially, clinical courses ask for a balance between **research** and **clinical** experience.

Traditionally this has meant work as an Assistant Psychologist and/or Research Assistant although other forms of experience are gaining credence. These include any caring or service roles **working with people experiencing mental health problems** in the **public, private or voluntary sector**.

It is particularly advantageous for any experience to include working alongside clinical psychologists, especially if they can then give you a reference. In addition, research experience is most useful if it directly involves mental health service users or is clinically applicable. It is extremely rare for undergraduates to be accepted directly onto clinical courses, but any experience gained now will help in gaining appropriate postgraduate work.

Suitable placements would include:

Alone in London  
Childline  
CMHA  
First Steps to Freedom  
Holy Cross Centre Trust  
Lambeth Mind  
National Association for People Abused in Childhood  
OCD Action  
Samaritans  
Sane

**Example:**

**Chad Shepherd, BSc (hons) Psychology: First Class**  
*Currently applying for the Clinical Psychology Doctorate.*



I realised that to have any kind of start in a career in Psychology work experience is regarded as equally important as a good degree mark. When a placement was offered through the LSBU Psychology faculty for an honorary assistant psychologist to work at the National Psychosis Unit, attached to Kings College and the prestigious Institute of Psychiatry, I took a running jump at the chance.

The placement involved working with adults experiencing psychosis who have been, so far, treatment resistant. Many of these service-users had other diagnoses such as bi polar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and schizo-affective disorders. It was a fantastic experience, meeting and becoming friendly with people who were essentially, typical people but with mental health difficulties. The relationship that developed was exceedingly rewarding and clear-cut evidence of the importance of rapport and empathy, which is difficult to teach. Receiving supervision from a clinical psychologist who gave lots of useful advice and support guided me in the placement and gave me a more thorough understanding of how clinical psychology is implemented within the NHS. I learnt a lot from working with other volunteers from different institutions who were at different stages of their psychology career e.g. Masters and PhD students. I also had rich experience sitting in ward rounds and multi-disciplinary client review meetings with Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Nurses, Social Workers, and even being asked to contribute to discussion about service-users' recent progress. My main duties involved running activity groups that allowed the service-users to try new things, confront fears, and stimulate social interaction. This often helped them, at these times, to become less distracted by their intrusive thoughts and other worries. My duties also included one-to-one time with clients, administering psychological self-report scales, encouraging them to set goals, and even supporting them with their therapy homework. The whole experience was rich and rewarding and has been pivotal for me in getting other psychology related work and research since graduating.

## **Educational Psychology**

Educational Psychologists work within the educational system and the community with children, parents, teachers and other professionals. Much of their work focuses on dealing with problems in learning or social adjustment. Training is through a three year professional doctorate.

After recent changes, teaching experience is no longer required for entrance but it will still be expected to have relevant experience of **working with children or young people in** education, childcare or community settings. Generally, this will be expected to include some sustained, full time work after graduation, but voluntary work during your degree will still bolster any application.

It is particularly beneficial to gain experience of working with the children or young people with **special educational needs**. This can include children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, children with autism, children with physical disabilities or other conditions.

Suitable placements would include:

Childline  
Children's Society  
City of London Academy  
Islington Young Offenders Service (Peer Mentor)  
National Centre for Young People with Epilepsy  
Sense  
Spa School (Autism)  
St Vincent's Family Project  
Toynbee Hall (Young People)  
Westminster Young Offenders Service

**Example:**

**Gemma Ellis, Graduate Diploma in Psychology.**

*Now enrolled on the Educational Psychology Doctorate at the Tavistock Centre.*



I left Sussex University in 2001 with a 2:1 in English Literature. I moved to London and worked in the charity sector. In 2004 I started working with children with physical disabilities, learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural problems. I wanted to gain a better understanding of what was happening for these children and particularly how early childhood trauma was affecting their learning. I decided to study psychology.

I started on the graduate diploma at London Southbank University in September 2004. The psychology course gave me different ways to work with children and allowed me to bring in my interests in feminism and social constructionist theory as well as my background in English Literature. I continued to work with children throughout the course. Since graduating, I continued to work with children and am currently working in a mainstream school in Camden. I applied for the educational psychology doctorate because I want to be able to develop my psychology knowledge whilst working with children, families and the community. I

will be starting at the Tavistock Centre London in September and am looking forward to the challenges that it will bring and am grateful for the solid grounding the South Bank University course has given me.

## **Counselling Psychology**

Counselling psychologists work with clients to examine emotional difficulties often aiming to explore the underlying issues that may have caused them from a range of theoretical perspectives. They mainly work independently, outside of the NHS.

There are various routes to accreditation, including courses at Diploma, Masters and Professional Doctorate level. These courses correspondingly require different levels of work experience and educational attainment for entrance so it is important to check the particular requirements of the course for which you wish to apply.

For a doctorate course, for instance, you will need to demonstrate both academic ability (particularly **research skills**) as well as have work experience that includes a **helping relationship**. Specific counselling experience is not always expected, but similar roles such as befriending, working on telephone helplines, teaching and nursing will often be seen as relevant. In general, face-to-face experience is valued more than work over the telephone.

Suitable placements would include:

- Childline
- First Steps to Freedom
- Holy Cross Centre Trust
- Headway
- Islington Young Offenders Service (Peer Mentor)
- Lambeth Mind
- New Bridge Foundation
- OCD Action
- Samaritans
- Toynbee Hall (Young People's Coach)

### ***Example:***

***Jo Silver, Graduate Diploma in Psychology.***  
*Now enrolled on the Counselling Doctorate at City University.*



On starting my Graduate Diploma in Psychology I was well aware of the need to gain work experience, but was not quite sure where to start. I was therefore very grateful to find out about the placement scheme at South Bank. Through the scheme I got in touch with OCD Action, a charity that helps people suffering from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). As part of my volunteer work I help to facilitate a self-help group for people affected by BDD. In my role I listen and support people as well as using specific cognitive-behavioural strategies for addressing various BDD symptoms. This work has given me a great insight into the illness and has allowed me to put my learning of Psychology into practice. It is very rewarding to feel that I am able to make a difference to people in some way.

I have enjoyed this work so much that I am doing my Final Year Project on BDD. I feel really inspired by this placement and it has helped me to decide that I would like to work with people with anxiety disorders in the future.

## Forensic Psychology

The work of forensic psychologists is focussed on the criminal justice system and involves the application of psychological theories to legal processes, such as criminal investigations, as well as working with people who have been convicted of crimes. Most forensic psychologists work within the Prison Service, although others work in the NHS and Social Services.

The route to chartered status generally involves a one year MSc plus two years supervised practice. There is however one doctorate programme in Forensic Psychology run by the University of Birmingham. For admission to these courses, it is useful to have experience of working within a forensic setting (such as a prison) or in other settings with people who are a part of the **criminal justice system**. This might include projects that work with ex-offenders, current inmates, young offenders, or victims of crime.

Possible placements include:

- Islington Young Offenders Service
- New Bridge Foundation
- Prison Advice
- Westminster Young Offenders Service

## Neuropsychology

Clinical Neuropsychologists work with people with brain injury or other neurological problems including stroke, tumours and neuro-degenerative diseases. Their work includes both assessment and rehabilitation.

To become chartered as a Clinical Neuropsychologist it is necessary to also be qualified as either a Clinical or Educational Psychologist. Alternatively, a qualification in Neuropsychology can in itself be helpful as a route into either Clinical training or research positions.

Suitable placements include:

- Headway
- National Centre for Young People with Epilepsy

### **Health, Occupational and Sports Psychology**

For these areas of applied Psychology, work experience is perhaps less crucial for gaining access to postgraduate training than for the above fields. Still, any experience gained of **working with people**, especially **alongside psychologists**, would still be useful. The route to chartered status for all of these fields consists of a Masters level qualification plus two years supervised practice.

#### **Health Psychology**

Health psychologists are concerned with applying psychological knowledge to the area of health and illness, including designing interventions to promote changes in people's attitudes and behaviour. Any experience gained within a **health setting** or that develops your **research skills** would help to enhance an application.

#### **Occupational Psychology**

Occupational psychologists are concerned with the behaviour of both individuals and groups in the work environment as well as the operation of organisations. They work within a large variety of organisations, often on a consultancy basis. **Experience of full time work** is generally required (at least one year) but the particular nature of the work is not as important for this field as for other psychology routes. However, experience of working in an HR setting would be especially relevant.

#### **Sport and Exercise Psychology**

Sport psychologists aim to understand the psychological factors that affect performance of **individuals, teams or organisations** in sport. Practitioners often work with individuals or teams to help maximise their performance. Closely related, but different, exercise psychologists are more interested in the role of exercise in wellbeing and often work with organisations to promote exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle.

A suitable placement would be:

Sports Project Volunteer (NACRO).

### **Other routes to work experience**

The university also run a central placement scheme that offers **paid** as well as **voluntary** work. To join the central placement scheme list, which provides information on all the latest employment, please contact:

#### **Amanda Monteiro**

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And for further information about job and volunteering opportunities:

**LSBU Job Shop and Careers Advice:** [www.lsbu.ac.uk/clsd/jobshopandcareers](http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/clsd/jobshopandcareers)

**General volunteering website:** [doit.org.uk](http://doit.org.uk)