

43 Training in Counselling Psychology

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

WHEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

1. Understand the various questions and practicalities one should explore prior to embarking on counselling psychology training.
2. Describe what is involved in the two different routes for qualification in counselling psychology.
3. Outline different types of work undertaken by qualified counselling psychologists.

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KEY TERMS

Assessment • Competencies • Doctorate • Learning • Qualification in Counselling Psychology (QCoP) • Reflexivity • Standards of Proficiency

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ROUTE MAP OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, we introduce the topic of counselling psychology training and take you through the process of considering applying to train, through to completing training to qualification. After first providing some context and background, we go on to explore the two training pathways in counselling psychology. We then discuss things to consider ahead of making an application and the process of application and assessment. We then outline what the training itself might look like. Finally, we consider career options and possible future developments in counselling psychology training.

43.1 CONTEXT

From 1965 to 2009, the British Psychological Society (BPS) regulated the professional practice of psychology in the United Kingdom (UK) and maintained the Register of Chartered Psychologists. In 2009, the statutory regulation of psychologists was taken over by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). BPS accreditation

learning the acquisition of knowledge, this can be through experience or study.

standards and associated **learning** outcomes for counselling psychology training programmes were established in 2017 (BPS, 2019a).

Similar to other branches of applied psychology, the use of the protected title 'Counselling Psychologist,' requires the completion of a BPS-accredited HCPC-approved doctoral-level training route. Following qualification, HCPC registration is required. There is also an HCPC registration process for applicants who complete professional training outside the UK. Psychologists are trained

standards of proficiency the thresholds for proficiency that are set out by a regulating body to determine the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies that registrants to that profession must have.

to meet a set of generic and profession-specific HCPC (2015) **Standards of Proficiency** for practitioner psychologists, which represent minimum legal, ethical, and practice standards necessary to protect the public. The BPS continues to award Chartered Member status, which is designated by the nominal suffix 'CPsychol'.

doctorate an academic award that recognises mastery of a specialism achieved through the acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge, the conceptualisation and analysis of a problem with the aim of creating new knowledge.

qualification in counselling psychology (QCoP) an independent route to qualifying as a counselling psychologist.

43.1.1 Approved UK Training Programmes in Counselling Psychology

In the UK, there are two HCPC-approved routes to training as a counselling psychologist: the University Professional **Doctorate** route and the BPS **Qualification in**

Counselling Psychology (QCoP; originally the BPS Diploma in Counselling Psychology, previously known as the 'Independent Route'). Both routes are discussed in this chapter.

At the time of writing, there are 12 UK universities offering BPS-accredited, HCPC-approved Professional Doctorates in Counselling Psychology. These include City University London, East London, Glasgow Caledonian, Manchester, Metanoia & Middlesex; New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling & Middlesex; Regent's; Roehampton; University of South Wales; West of England; Wolverhampton; and York St. John. The BPS website page on 'find an accredited source' should be checked for an up-to-date list of universities offering counselling psychology training, as this changes over time (see <https://www.bps.org.uk/public/become-psychologist/accredited-courses?type=CONV>).

The BPS QCoP was established in 1992 as a blended programme of independent study and research, plus trainee-sourced academic training. As discussed in further detail below, both the training routes aim to equip students by the end of training with all the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for a Counselling Psychologist, and associated BPS **competencies**.

competencies areas that a psychologist needs to be competent in.

43.1.2 Core Aims of Training

The overarching aims of counselling psychology training in the UK are to develop reflective scientist-practitioners who can integrate developmental theories of human growth and adjustment, with research and counselling skills to reduce psychological distress and promote mental health and well-being on individual, family, group, and community levels (Goodyear *et al.*, 2016). Counselling psychologists are trained to provide psychological therapy interventions for mild to complex mental health difficulties. They are also trained to understand the relationship between a person's psychological strengths and resources, and the stressors placed on those resources by the social and physical environment. Goals of counselling psychology interventions may include reducing social exclusion and improving engagement in interpersonal relationships, education, and work (BPS, no date).

In the UK, counselling psychology can be differentiated from other applied psychology professions by three hallmarks. The first is its interests in philosophies of experience (such as phenomenology) and the study of the nature and limits of human knowledge (known as epistemology). The second is its emphasis on reflective practitioner development, which involves critical examination of one's practice with the aim of continually improving the quality of one's work. The third is the development of capabilities for sophisticated attunement to others' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural experiences and intentions (known as the intersubjective therapeutic relationship; BPS, 2019a). In the UK, the practitioner psychology professions, including counselling psychology, have in some senses been amalgamated within the health-care industry through HCPC regulation.

43.2 JOURNEY INTO TRAINING

Embarking on training to be a counselling psychologist requires a significant commitment of time, money, studiousness, and emotional labour. You need to be open to learning about psychological theory, practice and research, and yourself. You may need to juggle home and family life. We advise that training is not taken on lightly. It is important to spend some time asking yourself *why* you want to train to be a counselling psychologist, and what you hope, fear, or expect the experience of training and subsequent work will be like. Initial expressed motivations might be along the lines of 'because I want to help people' but

exploring these to be more specific about *why* and *how* you might want to help people can be useful (Activity Box 43.1).

43.2.1 Practical Considerations Before Training

First, it is important to consider whether you want to undertake a doctoral qualification at a university or the BPS QCoP route. Your decision may be informed by your current experience and work, your other life commitments, and whether or not you would like to (or feel it might be helpful to) complete a university qualification, which confers the title 'Dr' and involves a doctoral research component. The information in the following sections might help you answer some of these questions.

43.2.1.1 Training fees and salaries for counselling psychologists

A counselling psychology professional doctorate university training route usually comprises three years' full-time or six years' part-time doctoral study including a research dissertation and 450 hours supervised practice carried out primarily (although not exclusively) with individuals. The average 2022 tuition cost for three years' university study is approximately £26,000. Costs vary by institution and often increase annually. For up-to-date information on tuition fees, please consult webpages of individual institutions. Costs of ancillary supervision and personal therapy may be in the region of £4,000 bringing the possible cost of a professional doctorate into the region of £30,000.

QCoP comprises guided independent study, assessed papers, and 450 hours supervised practice in a programme that can be undertaken full or part time. It may appeal to



ACTIVITY BOX 43.1

Think about why you want to train to become a counselling psychologist (see Reeves, 2018 for similar questions about embarking on counselling or psychotherapy training). Make notes on the following:

1. Why do you want to become a counselling psychologist?
2. What do you hope to offer people and society by working in this profession?
3. Are you confident you know what being a counselling psychologist involves? Have you investigated the career paths available?
4. How does counselling psychology fit with your skills and experiences so far?
5. Do you enjoy doing research and academic writing? Do you aspire to improve these skills, contribute to development of new knowledge, and publish your work?
6. How do you anticipate managing the emotional, academic, financial, and practical demands of training?
7. Have you ever received help from a counselling psychologist or other practitioner psychologist? If so, how did your experience of engaging with psychological services influence your aspiration to train to be a counselling psychologist? What impact do you think this will have on your work in the profession?

those who have already completed a substantial amount of relevant postgraduate training, research, and/or supervised counselling practice, for which 'accreditation of existing competence' (AEC) can be applied. The minimum length of enrolment is 18 months for candidates awarded substantial AEC. There is no time limit to complete QCoP. The cost of QCoP in 2022 is £7,340 plus likely written assignment resubmission fees. Costs of ancillary supervision and therapy are approximately £8,000. Academic training in core and secondary therapeutic approaches and research may be upwards of £19,000 bringing the possible cost of QCoP into the region of £34,000.

The costs of training on either route do not take into account living expenses, books and supplies, membership subscriptions, or lost earnings. Although loans and scholarships may be available for some elements of training at some institutions, there remain substantial financial barriers to becoming a counselling psychologist.

In 2022, the salary for an employed, newly qualified counselling psychologist may be equivalent to National Health Service (NHS) Band 7, approximately £40,000–£46,000 per year. More experienced counselling psychologists employed in clinical settings who handle management and leadership responsibilities may attract annual salaries in the region of Band 8a-b at £47,000–£63,000. Consultant counselling psychologists, who carry significant clinical and/or operational leadership responsibilities, may be paid over £65,000 for a full-time role. Pay grades for UK university lecturer roles may start anywhere from £32,000 to £44,000 per year. More experienced lecturers may be paid annually upwards to £55,000. Senior academics may be paid over £60,000 for a full-time role. In self-employed roles, pay varies considerably depending on type and amount of work taken on, and fees charged.

43.2.1.2 Choosing a programme of study

If you are leaning towards the taught doctoral route, you will need to choose course(s) to apply to. All university programmes have websites that describe the type of training involved. Some universities offer full-time and part-time training, but some only offer one of these routes. All courses must train you in a minimum of two models of psychological therapy, but which models taught and emphasised by the teaching team will vary. It is, therefore, important that you want to train in the models offered by a particular programme. It is useful to look at course staff profiles and review research they are actively undertaking and support their students to do. Training courses cohort sizes vary, and it might help to consider if you would prefer smaller or larger groups. Some training starts the first year at master's level and then progresses to doctorate level in subsequent years. Some programmes have exit awards at several stages for students who do not complete the full qualification. See below for further details of what the training courses involve.

If you are leaning towards QCoP, it will be important to first closely review the Candidate Handbook to understand its framework and assessment processes (available from <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Qualifications/Counselling/QCoP%20Candidate%20Handbook.pdf>). Consider how you will manage your time to complete the papers and placements, as unlike an academic programme, there are few deadlines. Think about how you will access suitable academic databases and libraries. Consider your self-discipline and motivation for self-directed study, and whether you learn best in more solitary environment.

assessment an information gathering process that usually happens at the beginning of clinical work.

43.2.1.3 Entry requirements, applying, and the assessment process

If you are considering applying for QCoP, eligibility for enrolment includes BPS membership with Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC). Enrolment takes place over two stages. Pre-enrolment includes candidate notification to the Qualifications Team of intent to enrol, with information about previous and planned academic courses required to meet core therapy training requirements. Once a candidate is approved to enrol, the process includes full review of existing competencies, plan of training and placements, references, and other evidentiary requirements. More information on QCoP enrolment and required paperwork can be found in the QCoP handbook and at <https://www.bps.org.uk/qualifications/counselling-psychology/enrolment>

If applying for an academic programme, each university has its own admissions process. Check first whether you meet the entry requirements. Most counselling psychology university training requires at least a 2:1 undergraduate degree in psychology, accredited by the BPS to confer GBC. Where candidates completed a non-psychology degree for their first qualification, they might follow this with a 'conversion' master's programme, which again confers BPS GBC. Typically counselling psychology programmes do not ask for a master's in their minimum entry requirements, but as courses become more competitive over time, master's qualifications do potentially provide a way of evidencing your research and practice skills.

Courses typically look for applicants to have at least introductory training in counselling skills. This can range from a one-year part time 100-hour skills certificate completed at a further education college, through to diploma and masters practitioner qualifications. Counselling training is likely to involve introduction to counselling theory, and practical training in counselling skills, such as role play or 'triad' work (where one student acts as a listener/counsellor, one as a client, and one gives feedback). These can be done online, but we encourage you to opt for a programme that includes skills practice, rather than

simply the theoretical training, as the practical element is commonly what university courses are looking for. Applicants should also have some professional experience using counselling skills. Experience can be gained in roles such as support workers, psychological therapists in NHS Increasing Access to Psychological Therapy services, working on helplines such as Samaritans and Childline, direct experience of counselling or therapeutic work (typically only when the applicant has a therapy qualification), and allied roles such as mental health nursing. Programmes are also keen to see that applicants are personally and professionally ready to embark on training and typically want to see evidence of reflexive thinking and self-awareness.

Application and assessment processes themselves vary across different universities, but may involve submitting a written personal statement, alongside evidence of previous qualifications (e.g., degree transcripts and certificates) and professional training, and references (often an academic reference and a professional reference is advised). You should ensure you understand what is required, by reading websites in full before applying. Training courses may offer open days where you can obtain more information and hear from staff working on the course. Following written applications, you may then be invited to an interview. Once again, these vary across institutions and can involve interviews with academic staff, service users, or placement representatives; practice-based assessments such as demonstrations of counselling skills; assessment of previous academic work; pre-prepared presentations; group-based activities; and/or completion of standardised tests. Following application,

you will be informed whether or not you have been awarded a place, and fingers crossed your work will have paid off! If you are not offered a place, asking for feedback from the interview panel will help you to further develop your application. If reapplying to the same programme, be sure to demonstrate how you have applied feedback provided by the interview panel from your last application.

43.3 THE TRAINING EXPERIENCE

43.3.1 Doctorate Level University Training

University training programmes in counselling psychology involve a balance of teaching, self-directed academic study, placements, research, and personal development. Courses differ as to the specific balance of these divisions. However, all are required to cover HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Counselling Psychologists, and BPS competencies for counselling psychologists outlined in their 'Standards for accreditation of Doctoral programmes of counselling psychology', as outlined in Table 43.1.

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency for counselling psychologists are a mixture of competencies which we share with other branches of applied psychology (for example, to 'understand the need to act in the best interests of service users at all times' and 'be able to apply psychology across a variety of different contexts using a range of evidence-based and theoretical models, frameworks, and psychological paradigms'), and those which are unique to counselling psychology (for example, to 'be able to critically reflect on the use of self in the therapeutic process' and to 'understand the spiritual and cultural traditions relevant to counselling psychology'). There are also some which we share with one or two other applied psychologies but not all.

Teaching itself varies across institutions and staff, but importantly, students are required to engage critically with the material, which is likely to involve participation in group discussions, activities, and critical thinking (rather than just attending lectures). Training is based on scientist-practitioner and reflexive-practitioner models, and universities ask students to integrate their learning on theoretical models of counselling psychology, with their learning on research, and professional practice and personal development. **Reflexivity** and the

reflexivity the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments, and practices during the research process, including the phases before, during and after formal research activity. Reflexivity helps the researcher understand how their positioning may have affected the research process. Counselling psychology researchers tend to formally practice reflexivity in research, irrespective of methodological approach.



PHOTO 43.1 Your personal statement for D. Couns. Psych. programme application should follow the guidance provided by the university admissions team.
Source: Soundtrap/Unsplash.com

TABLE 43.1 BPS competencies (accessed here: <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Accreditation/Counselling%20Accreditation%20Handbook%202019.pdf>).

1. Counselling psychology philosophy	By the end of the programme, you will understand the wide range of philosophical traditions that underpin counselling psychology. You will be able to critically evaluate paradigms underpinning core theoretical models. You will understand relevant spiritual and cultural traditions. You will use personal experience and insight to inform your practice. You will embody a reflective practitioner stance and embrace humanistic and relational values.
2. Psychological knowledge and application	By the end of the programme, you will be able to demonstrate knowledge of, and critically evaluate, theories of mind and personality, lifespan developmental theory, and a range of explanatory frameworks to understand distress. You will understand the importance of social and political contexts. You will have a critical understanding and knowledge of psychometric tests, psychopharmacology, and diagnostic frameworks.
3. Psychological assessment and formulation	By the end of the programme, you will be able to initiate, develop, maintain, and end therapeutic relationships. You will have experience using different models of psychological therapy and will be able to conduct psychological assessment, formulation, and treatment in those models. Your assessments and formulations will be collaborative, open to change, and culturally relevant.
4. Counselling psychology practice and psychological intervention	By the end of the programme, you will have in-depth critical knowledge and supervised practice in one specific model of practice, and working knowledge and supervised practice in a second model. You will be able to provide short- and long-term psychological interventions to individuals in different contexts. You will have completed minimum of 450 supervised hours of clinical practice. You will be able to reflect on this practice critically, understand social approaches to intervention, and know how to apply principles of clinical supervision.
5. Evaluation of practice	By the end of the programme, you will understand and be able to critically evaluate your practice in different ways. You will understand processes of evaluation and outcomes at organisational and systemic levels.
6. Research and inquiry	By the end of the programme, you will be able to demonstrate and apply knowledge of a range of research methodologies using appropriate software and tools, design and implement research, reflect on the experience of being a researcher, critically evaluate published research, and understand the principles of service audit.
7. Working with diversity and cultural competence	By the end of the programme, you will have knowledge and understanding of equality, diversity, social inclusion and power, discrimination, and oppression. You will demonstrate a commitment to equality in your practice. You will have a critical understanding of different social identities and intersectionality (e.g., the importance of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs and practices, disability and ableism, socio-economic status, sexuality, and gender).
8. Personal and professional skills and values	By the end of the programme, you will understand ethical, legal, and professional frameworks. You will be able to apply this understanding in complex practice situations. You will understand the experience of therapy through undertaking your own personal therapy. You will strive to do no harm. You will demonstrate creativity in the therapeutic process. You will recognise when your fitness to practice is impaired. You will commit to ongoing learning and development.
9. Communication, influencing, teaching and leadership skills	By the end of the programme, you will be able to communicate clinical and non-clinical information to different audiences. You will keep appropriate records and write reports to enhance communication with other practitioners. You will understand how to communicate through interpreters. You will foster collaboration and psychological mindedness within teams and organisations. You will recognise malpractice and uses and misuses of power. You will contribute to development and leadership of the counselling psychology profession.



FOCUS POINT 43.1 REFLEXIVITY IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING

Reflexivity is an extremely important aspect of counselling psychology practice, and therefore of our training. It has been described as a 'way of being' underpinning all elements of counselling psychology's professional identity (Donati, 2016). Finlay (2008, p. 6) suggests that reflexivity involves '*critical self-reflection*: reflecting critically on the impact of their [practitioners'] own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, behaviour, while also attending to the impact of the wider organisational, discursive, ideological, and political context'.

Training programmes and routes aim to facilitate this reflexivity and reflective practice in several ways, including mandatory personal therapy, personal development or reflexive practice groups, reflexive activities, and assessments. Students need, therefore, to be open to engaging with these elements of their studies, through a process of self-reflection, which might not always be comfortable.

use of self is important in all counselling psychology training and practice. Unique to counselling psychology within the world of applied psychology is the requirement to engage in personal therapy during your training. This helps students develop an understanding of what it is like to receive counselling, but also importantly allows for significant learning about the self, which is vital in any therapeutic relationship (Focus Point 43.1).

43.3.1.1 Placements

As well as the university-based study and reflexive work, students are required to complete 450-hours of supervised placement work as a trainee counselling psychologist across several settings to evidence the required competencies. Some universities will assign you to work at placements within the university or local services, whilst others will expect you to apply for placements with services with which the programme has good relationships. It is important to plan at the outset of training what types of experience you wish to gain, and what you want to include on your CV by the end of training. On placement, you will be involved in direct therapeutic work and clinical supervision. You may also have opportunities for service development or audit, or participation in multidisciplinary teams. Placement experiences will vary significantly depending on setting, for example this could be in an NHS primary care setting working with a general population; a forensic setting; a third sector organisation; an educational institution; or otherwise. You are likely to get experience with people from different groups (e.g., children and young people, older adults, and working age adults), in different modalities (group work, family work, individual therapy, couple work, or community work), and with different presenting issues in terms of focus and severity (for example, working in complex secondary care or inpatient settings, and working with mild to moderate mental health difficulties). You will also be required to utilise different models of training taught on the course

(for example cognitive-behaviour therapy, psychodynamic therapy, existential therapy, or person-centred therapy). Work in placements integrates learning on theory, research, and practice. Clinical supervision offers an important safeguard and learning tool to scaffold and support this process of development.

Finally, there is a research component to the training. All university courses involve completing a research thesis assessed at doctoral level. The requirements of this vary, for example, whether you pick your own topic or work with a topic identified by a supervisor; the length of the final thesis (anywhere from 25,000 to 50,000 words commonly); and the format of writing it up. Nevertheless, all programmes require this to be an independently conducted, unique contribution to the academic literature on a particular topic. It is, therefore, a significant undertaking and one which will take up much of your time, thinking and writing whilst doing the course. Typically, instruction in research methods takes place in the early stages of the programme in order to lay the groundwork for this project.

43.3.1.2 Assessment

All areas discussed above will be linked to an assessment, for you to demonstrate what you have learnt and achieved. Assessments can take different forms, for example, practice-based work might be assessed through clinical supervisor reports, or recordings, transcripts, and process reflections on therapeutic work (with appropriate informed consent), or university-based practice assessments against standardised protocols for therapeutic approaches. Academic work might be assessed through theoretical or research papers, or group tasks and presentations. The final assessment is typically the viva voce (oral examination), where you defend your final portfolio of work, which at some institutions is solely the research thesis, whereas at others it involves the research thesis combined with evidence of practice competencies. Viva voce is typically conducted by an

CASE HISTORY 43.1

DOCTORATE TRAINING CASE EXAMPLE

'I chose to focus on counselling psychology because of the strong emphasis on the ethical underpinning.... There are different areas that you are involved in as a trainee on a full-time course: theory, research, practice, and personal development.... My practice is based in two placements. I am on one placement working with individuals for two days a week in primary care in the NHS. Here, I see clients in a hospital setting and a medical centre, which is very different to my second placement in a local charity. There I see individual clients in an office used specifically for counselling one evening a week... As well as my practice, I attend three days a week at university where I take part in seminars on theory and research as well as practice-based work with the other trainees.... Doing the doctorate is definitely challenging... but fantastically rewarding, and hopefully at the end of it I'll get to be a counselling psychologist!' (Lennie, 2013).

internal examiner (an academic from the university where you are studying) and an external examiner (an academic from a different university who does not know you, but knows your research area well) (Case History 43.1).

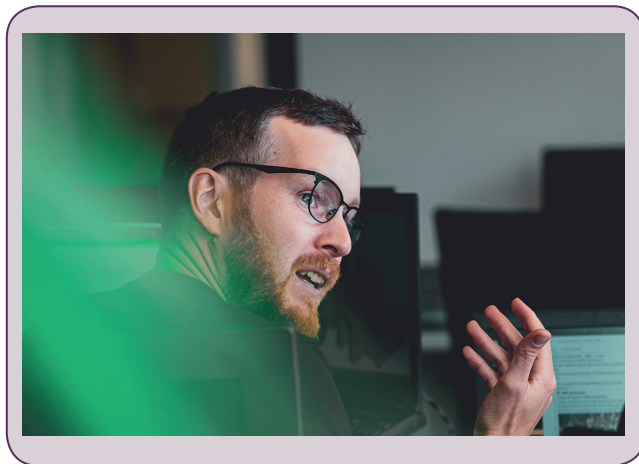


PHOTO 43.2 Reflexivity involves examining how one's beliefs, assumptions and context influence one's research processes and findings.

Source: Sigmund / Unsplash

43.3.2 British Psychological Society Qualification in Counselling Psychology

QCoP requires candidates to evidence BPS's 82 competencies for counselling psychologists, which are set out over nine domains of learning and experience (see Table 43.1). QCoP does not confer an academic doctorate. QCoP is led by a Qualifications Board and administered by a Qualifications Team, which includes the Assessment Team that assesses and responds to candidate portfolios.

43.3.2.1 QCoP mentors: Registrar, Co-ordinating Supervisor, Practice Supervisors, and Research Supervisor

The Registrar is a member of the Qualifications Board who reviews and approves enrolment applications. They also approve Co-ordinating Supervisors, Practice Supervisors,

and Research Supervisors and monitor the supervisory process. The Registrar holds regular telephone clinics for candidates to discuss queries about QCoP processes.

QCoP candidates are responsible for finding and paying the following mentors to support their study:

1. The Co-ordinating Supervisor is secured prior to enrolment. They endorse enrolment paperwork. They are responsible for providing candidate guidance on QCoP training requirements. Candidates must meet monthly with their Co-ordinating Supervisor and undertake quarterly review meetings. The Co-ordinating supervisor interfaces with the Qualifications Team by verifying candidate competencies and the Practice Supervisors' reports.
2. QCoP candidates must have at least two different Practice Supervisors for the required 450 hours' practice. Most of the supervision should be with a counselling psychologist, although accredited professionals from other disciplines may be approved for the remaining time. One hour of supervision is required for every eight hours of practice. All Practice Supervisors must complete BPS training every two years.

Co-ordinating Supervisors and Practice Supervisors can be found on the Register of Applied Psychology Practice Supervisors at <https://portal.bps.org.uk/Psychologist-search/Register-of-Applied-Psychology-Practice-Supervisors>.

A Research Supervisor may be required where the candidate must complete a research study because they did not receive the relevant AEC for any previous research completed, or does not undertake a dissertation as part of their required postgraduate training during QCoP. The Research Supervisor is preferably a counselling psychologist with relevant research supervision experience. They are responsible for guiding the candidate through the research process; and for providing an annual report to the Qualification Board.

QCoP CASE EXAMPLE

Dr Marina Skourteli, a counselling psychologist who completed the QCoP in 2011, published her reflections on her experience in *Counselling Psychology Review* (Skourteli, 2010). Marina found studying for the Qualification independently to be a deeply fulfilling experience, although one that required self-discipline, determination, and initiative. 'I felt challenged to dissect my own philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality and notions of psychological health and illness and reflect on how these inform my choice of theory and clinical work' (p.66).

43.3.2.2 QCoP portfolios: Contents and assessment

Competencies are presented for assessment over two portfolios of documentary evidence units (DEUs) and assessed units (AUs), a research portfolio, a competencies logbook, and a one-hour oral examination or 'viva' (similar to that described above for academic doctorates).

DEUs are developmental activities including postgraduate training in two therapeutic models, supervised clinical practice in QCoP-approved placements, personal therapy, and a reflective journal. AUs consist of seven essays and a **competence** logbook.

The first portfolio is assessed at master's level. It comprises evidence of 200 hours' supervised clinical practice and 20 hours of personal therapy; and three 3,000 word essays. These essays focus on a critical incident or point of change, a case study, and anti-discriminatory practice.

The research portfolio is also assessed at master's level and comprises a 12,000–15,000-word original research dissertation relevant to counselling psychology.

Descriptors for master's-level **competence** include *a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of . . . academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice; a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship; originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline* (BPS, no date, p.48). Further descriptors for master's-level assessment criteria can be found in the QCoP handbook.

The second portfolio is assessed at doctoral level. It comprises evidence of 350 hours' postgraduate academic training in a core therapy model and 150 hours postgraduate training in a secondary model. It also includes evidence of a further 250 hours supervised clinical practice and a further 20 hours of personal therapy, the **competence** logbook, and four 5,000-word essays. The essays include a process report embedded in a case study; an issue related to organisational, structural, or situational context; philosophy of counselling psychology; and a reflective essay.

The viva is conducted at doctoral level and includes review of the candidate's overall competencies, reflections on their research, their perceived strengths and weaknesses, and their professional identity.

The significant step up from masters to doctoral-level scholarship for QCoP and university taught doctorates, is the skill and ability to generate new knowledge. Descriptors for doctoral-level **competence** include *the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication; a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice; the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems; and a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry*. (BPS, no date, p.49). Further descriptors for doctoral-level assessment criteria can be found in the QCoP handbook. The publication of research and theoretical work carried out at doctoral level is an essential step to making a contribution to knowledge. 'It's partly an issue of ethics. People expect research to lead to an improvement in something, and participants make the effort because they think it will do someone good in the end. It isn't enough that it does the *student* good in the end, in terms of getting their degree'. Professor of Counselling Psychology Martin Milton (quoted in Kasket, 2016, p.643).

Throughout training QCoP candidates must act in accordance with BPS (2021) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*; and HCPC (2016) *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (Case History 43.2).

43.4 COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY CAREERS

The QCoP opens doors to diverse career opportunities within the NHS; schools, and further education and higher education counselling services; private healthcare

and hospitals; prisons and probationary services; the police; and independent practice. Counselling psychologists also work in academic roles as lecturers and researchers. They may carry out scholarship including development of new or updated theories, methods and practices to evolve the field. They may also work as consultants providing specialist advice to teams or organisations on patient care, management processes, or programme design and evaluation.

Counselling psychologists can derive tremendous personal and professional satisfaction from helping individuals, families, communities, and organisations to learn, grow, and flourish. Counselling psychology as a profession offers endless positive challenges for ongoing learning and personal and professional growth across all areas of specialism. Counselling psychology work is, however, not without hazards including stress, overwork, and emotional exhaustion. At a bare minimum, ethical practice guidelines require psychologists to proactively maintain their fitness to practice, but beyond this, it is incumbent on counselling psychologists to look after themselves psychologically and physically in order to provide the best possible care to others.

43.4.1 Where Do Counselling Psychologists Work and What Do They Do?

There is little detailed research about precisely what sorts of work, or for which types of employers the UK's counselling psychologist workforce is deployed. Evidence suggests that perhaps a third to a half of qualified counselling psychologists work at least part-time for the NHS (Goodyear *et al.*, 2016; BPS, 2019b). It has also been suggested that up to a half of qualified counselling psychologists may work in private practice and independent group practices (BPS, 2019b). It is possible that fewer than 20% work in academia as lecturers or researchers, and fewer than 20% work for private healthcare facilities (BPS, 2019b). Overall, it can be surmised that many counselling psychologists work in more than one job, the majority provide some amount of direct therapeutic practice, and a subset also provide supervision to other practitioners or trainees. However, regardless of work setting or role, the key activity engaged in by 98 UK counselling psychologists who responded to a survey by Goodyear *et al.* (2016) was administration and management. All psychologist work requires administrative functions such as recordkeeping, audit, reporting, and planning. Management roles may include multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary team leadership, care pathway development, recruitment, clinical governance and policymaking, service quality assurance, and providing supervision and training (Gale, 2016). A study of UK counselling

psychologists conducted by Jones Nielsen and Nicholas (2015) found around 10% of 148 respondents worked in leadership positions including directors and heads of service and clinical leads. In independent and charitable organisations, leadership may extend to programme design, evaluation, and research; business planning; securing contracts, grants, and other funding sources; and forming delivery partnerships (Vermes, 2016). Leadership in academic settings might involve directing programmes of study, leading on units of teaching, or areas of work across departments or schools, for example, leading on research training, mentoring, or equality, diversity, and inclusion.

43.5 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING

Whilst difficult to predict, within this section, we suggest two areas that appear to be fruitful areas of development for counselling psychology training.

43.5.1 Neuropsychology and Epigenetics

A recent BPS Division of Counselling Psychology member survey (BPS 2019b) indicated that over half the 129 respondents would be interested in undertaking clinical neuropsychology training. This interest in neuroscience (knowledge of brain function and its links to mental health), and, more specifically, neuropsychology (specialist psychologist work with neurologically impacted people) may be because a proportion of counselling psychologists work in services for people with neurological conditions including brain injury or stroke; in dementia and memory clinics for older adults; and in educational or support settings with people with learning disabilities or autism (Goss, 2016).

Neuropsychologically informed training could also cover the mechanisms and impact of focal neuromodulation therapies such as repetitive transcranial magnetic brain stimulation and transcranial direct current stimulation, which are increasingly available for 'treatment resistant' depression (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2016; Čukić, 2020).

Advances in knowledge and theory of epigenetics (activation of heritable phenotypes based on social environment and experiences; Szyf *et al.*, 2008) inform counselling psychologists' understanding of the negative health sequelae of trauma (Ramo-Fernández *et al.*, 2015) and racial discrimination (Brody *et al.*, 2016).

43.5.2 Socially Informed Counselling Psychology and Integrated Employment and Mental Health Support

The global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021 heightened risk factors associated with poor mental health, especially social inequalities. Protective factors including social and family connections, and access to physical exercise, employment, education, and health services were curtailed. Consequently, population mental health suffered to an unprecedented extent. The mental health of young people, older people, and the unemployed fared even worse than that of the general population (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022). The pandemic highlighted how some statutory mental health services are positioned to intervene too late and inadequately, only when people have reached crisis point (UK Department of Health and Social Care, 2022). In the coming decade, with some adjustment to curricula and training competencies, counselling psychology could play a vital role in mental health rehabilitation and prevention of mental ill health by helping people access education,

employment, and other socially meaningful activities that provide structure and purpose in everyday life. Moreover, counselling psychologists could be further trained to provide culturally sensitive family and community-oriented support. In England specifically, working in post-pandemic mental health systems may require training focus on understanding how NHS Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) work. ICSs create localised partnerships between NHS services, local government-commissioned care, and the charitable and private sectors. Cross-sector collaborations are intended to join up physical health, mental health, and social care (NHS England, 2022). Relevant skills for psychologists include managing socially focused, multi-agency, integrated mental health support and early intervention services through co-design with service users, families, and carers (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (NCCMH & NHS, 2019).

To help the field of counselling psychology evolve, counselling psychology trainers must work with BPS and HCPC to keep training **competency** frameworks up-to-date with national mental health priorities and counselling psychology's articulated social justice agenda (Cutts, 2013; Winter, 2019).

SELF-TEST QUESTIONS

- What are the two routes to training in counselling psychology in the UK?
- How many universities are currently accredited to provide BPS and HCPC approved counselling psychology training? Which of these are not in England?
- What are the overall aims of counselling psychology training?
- What are relevant first steps to consider whether or not to apply for counselling psychology training?
- What are some considerations to take into account when choosing between QCoP and a university-based training programme?
- What do application and selection processes entail for University and BPS QCoP training routes?
- Locate the webpage for a UK university professional doctorate programme in counselling psychology. Find the course curriculum and review the research requirements. What topic ideas do you have for a study that might meet these requirements?
- What are the main elements of the training at universities and how might you be assessed?
- What are the main elements of the training on QCoP and how are competencies assessed?

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- The aim of counselling psychology theory, research, and practice is to 'reduce psychological distress and to promote the well-being of individuals' (BPS, no date, p.5). The method to promote this aim comprises training focused primarily on skills development in therapeutic work with individuals. On the other hand, counselling psychology has an aspirational goal to 'develop knowledge and understanding of equality of opportunity and diversities. . .' (Learning outcome 7.1, BPS, no date, p.37). It could be argued that therapy at the individual level is not a particularly effective method for bringing about social

changes and more equal opportunities. What recommendations would you make for curriculum adjustments to bring counselling psychology method (individual psychological therapy) and goal (social justice) into better alignment, and why?

- 'Providers of accredited [counselling psychology training] programmes should take steps to identify under-represented groups (e.g., men, black, and minority ethnic students) and encourage their participation in psychology education and training and in the wider psychological workforce. . . . Providers should consider the steps they are able to take to promote and improve the career prospects of other underrepresented groups and to encourage greater representation' (BPS 2019a, pp.25, 33). What ideas do you have about how counselling psychology training providers can enable more people from under-represented groups to undertake training and develop careers in counselling psychology?
- Did you see the pandemic effect your own mental health or those of people you care about? Based on these experiences, if you could advise the government as a counselling psychologist on the top three improvements that could be made to address mental health at a population level within the next five years, what would you suggest and why?

TEXTS FOR FURTHER READING

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RELEVANT WEBLINKS

- BPS Standards for Accreditation of Doctoral programmes in Counselling Psychology: <https://cms.bps.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/Counselling%20Accreditation%20Handbook%202019.pdf>
- HCPC Standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-proficiency/practitioner-psychologists/>

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