Essential Career Skills

Graduate Career Opportunities in Mental Health
Careers & Employability Centre
(Opposite The Binks Building)
Chester Campus

Opening Hours:

Monday-Thursday: 9:00am - 5:00pm
Friday: 9:00am - 4:30pm
Tuesday evening: 5:30pm - 7:30pm term time

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Graduate Career Opportunities in Mental Health
This document has been designed to help you generate ideas about careers in the field of mental health. A career in mental health entails working with, and supporting people suffering from psychological distress or disorders. For example, it may include working with people experiencing anxiety, depression, dementia, addiction, schizophrenia etc. When looking at careers in mental health you will need to consider what area you would like to be involved in, what age group you would like to work with and whether you feel your own skills and abilities suit this area of challenging, but rewarding, work.

**Counsellor**

Counsellors encourage clients to talk through and reflect on emotions which relate to their psychological issues or personal experiences. The purpose is to reduce any confusion or anxiety and to empower the client to cope with their mental health issues. Advice is not given by the counsellor; instead clients are helped to make their own choices within the framework of an agreed counselling contract.

**Career path:** Masters or postgraduate qualification in counselling. To study this course, universities ask for a first degree, usually at 2:2 or above, preferably in a related subject, as well as a Certificate in Counselling and relevant experience.

**Website**
The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy; www.bacp.co.uk
Creative Art Therapist

Creative art therapists (drama therapist, dance and movement therapist, art therapist and music therapist) aim to help their clients express and understand complex and confusing emotions and experiences which they may not be able to communicate verbally. The arts are used as a medium for healing, awareness and self-development. Each discipline of the creative art therapies uses its own techniques to engage clients with their own creative development.

Career Path: Each area of the creative arts therapies will have its own entry route and criteria. For a masters, universities normally ask for a first degree in a relevant subject and evidence of ability in your chosen area. Universities may also ask for relevant volunteering or work experience.

Websites
Association of Dance and Movement Therapy; www.admt.org.uk
British Association of Music Therapists; www.bamt.org.uk
British Association of Drama Therapists; www.badt.org.uk
British Association of Art Therapists; www.baat.org.uk

Mental health nurse

Mental health nursing is one of the most complex and challenging areas of nursing. It focuses on helping people learn to cope with, or recover from, a mental health related illness. Key roles include being involved in the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of care for patients and providing outpatient follow-up services.

Career pathway: There is a postgraduate diploma in mental health nursing. Qualifications required for this course are a minimum of a 2:2 in a health related subject and five GCSEs at grade C or above (including maths, English and science). Universities may also ask for some evidence of experience in delivering care.

Website
Mental Nurse; www.mentalnurse.org.uk
Occupational therapist

Occupational therapy refers to the use of effective and creative strategies in the treatment, or rehabilitation of, clients suffering from psychological or physical disorders. The aim of these strategies is to help people gain their maximum level of independence, helping people engage in, and cope with, everyday life; for example helping people find, or return to, work, managing self-care or teaching anxiety coping skills.

**Career pathway:** A postgraduate qualification in occupational therapy which is approved by the Health Professionals Council. To do this course universities normally ask for a first degree in a health related subject, usually at 2:2 or higher as well as some experience in working in health and social care.

**Website**
British Association of Occupational Therapists; www.baot.co.uk
College of Occupational Therapists; www.cot.co.uk

Play Therapist

Play therapists help children and adolescents suffering from psychological difficulties make sense of their mental health issues and complex life experiences through the activity of play. Play therapists use a varied range of play and creative art techniques to decrease any internal conflict the client may be experiencing and to increase insight into their psychological status.

**Career pathway**
A masters in play therapy is required. Requirements for this course are usually an honours degree in a related subject. Universities may also ask for at least two years’ worth of experience working with children or that applicants must be already working with children. Some universities will not accept applicants who are under 23 years of age.

**Website**
British Association of Play Therapists; www.bapt.info
Play Therapy Careers; www.playtherapycareers.org.uk
Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists use their expertise to understand the working of a person’s mind and are dedicated to the prevention and treatment of mental health disorders. They are uniquely qualified to assess both mental and physical aspects of psychological disorders. Psychiatrists are medically qualified professionals and therefore can prescribe medication to patients.

**Career path:** To become a psychiatrist it is first necessary to have a medical degree, which usually takes five years, before going on to specialise in psychiatry. However, some universities will offer an accelerated four year medical degree course if you have a first degree in a related subject. Applicants for this course who have not achieved a first in their first degree but do have a 2:1 will normally be expected to have 3 Bs, or above, at A-level. After successfully completing the medical degree you will spend two years working in a hospital as a foundation programme trainee before opting to specialise in psychiatry, which can then take a further six years of study whilst working.

**Websites**
British Medical Association;
www.bma.org.uk
Royal College of Psychiatrists;
www.rcpsych.ac.uk
NHS Medical Careers;
www.medicalcareers.nhs.uk
Psychological Well-Being Practitioner

Psychological well-being practitioners (PWPs) work within the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies service (IAPT). They support clients who are experiencing mild to moderate anxiety and depression, delivering high volume, low intensity interventions, seeing a large number and range of patients. PWPs are trained to assess common mental health disorders and to provide suitable psychological interventions, as well as promoting self-help and supporting patients with managing common medication.

**Career pathway:** Both graduates and non-graduates can apply for a PWP training post, consisting of one day per week academic work and four days supervised practice. To be accepted as a trainee at graduate level you may be asked to have a relevant degree and experience and, as a graduate, you will be trained to postgraduate certificate level.

**Website**
Improving Access to Psychological Therapies; www.iapt.nhs.uk

Psychologist

Psychologists study mental processes and human behaviour. Unlike psychiatrists, psychologists are not medically trained. It is a science based profession, meaning that psychologists construct and test theories using scientific methods, principals and procedures. These theories help develop the understanding to the causes, effects and treatments of mental health disorders. Alongside this, psychologists use a variety of techniques to help clients explore their thoughts and emotions related to their psychological issues or life experiences. Psychologists divide into their own specialised disciplines:

- Clinical Psychology
- Counselling Psychology
- Forensic Psychology
- Health Psychology
**Career path:** Doctorate in your chosen psychology field. For a postgraduate degree in psychology most universities ask for a 2:1 or above in a relevant field (though some universities will accept a 2:2 first degree if applicants have achieved a good grade at masters level). These opportunities are highly competitive and relevant experience is generally required.

**Website**
British Psychological Society; www.bps.org.uk

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**Psychotherapist**

Psychotherapists use ‘talking therapies’ such as psychodynamic therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, person-centred therapy and behavioural therapy. They use these techniques to help clients explore their emotions, inner conflicts and find ways to deal with and decrease distress. Psychotherapists can work in a number of settings; with individuals, couples, families and groups.

**Career Path:** Masters in psychotherapy which has been accredited by United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the Association of Child Psychotherapists or the British Psychoanalytic Council. Universities usually ask for a first degree in a related subject as well as relevant experience.

**Website**
British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy; www.bacp.co.uk
UK Council for Psychotherapy; www.psychotherapy.org.uk
Association of Child Psychotherapists; www.childpsychotherapy.org.uk
Social Worker

The role of a mental health social worker is to provide help and support to their clients, and in some cases clients’ families, by negotiating and coordinating care plans and reviewing their effectiveness. This job requires the social worker to act in a variety of roles, as a guide, advocate, critical friend and counsellor. Social workers work closely with other organisations including the police, local authorities, schools and probation services.

**Career path**
Postgraduate Qualification in Social Work accredited by the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Entry requirements for this course generally ask for a first degree at 2:2 or above in any subject but preferably in a social science or related field. Universities may also require experience in social care.

**Website**
General Social Care Council; www.gscc.org.uk
British Association of Social Workers; www.basw.co.uk/social-work-careers

**To find out more......**
For further information on careers in mental health, or to follow new ideas you may have, you can find information on the following websites:

www.nhscareers.nhs.uk
www.prospects.ac.uk
www.nextstep.direct.gov.uk

**Mental Health Organisations**
Looking at mental health organisation websites can be a great way to find work and voluntary opportunities, as well as providing information on mental health conditions.

www.mind.org.uk
www.rethink.org
www.turning-point.co.uk
Opportunities within your University

University of Chester Careers and Employability can provide impartial one to one information, advice and guidance on possible future study or employment. This could range from a 15 minute session looking at your CV, or application form, to a 45 minute guidance interview exploring your future options.

Volunteering is a great way to gain experience. Student Skills Development can help you find a voluntary placement to help you gain invaluable experience in a related area. If you want to enhance your CV; gain new skills; make a difference to the world around you; have fun and enjoy a challenge, or if you just want to do something extraordinary, then give volunteering a go. You might want to commit to an hour or two each week, or you could try a few of their one-off events. Student Skills Development offers a range of volunteering opportunities. You can record your volunteering hours in return for awards and certificates. There are opportunities to volunteer in mental health organisations such as Victim Support, MIND, Young Addiction and The Salford Foundation (working with offenders).

Work shadowing/information gathering interviews with working professionals, can be a great way to test out future career options and find out in-depth, up to date information. The careers team can help you to seek this type of opportunity.