**Relevant Clinical Experience: Your questions answered**

Thank you for your interest in applying for clinical training at Plymouth University – I am delighted you want to know more from us. It it can be difficult to know how best to gain relevant clinical experience since there are no hard and fast guidelines or entrance requirements in relation to previous applied psychology experience.

Taking a clinical placement year within your undergraduate programme and gaining additional relevant experience during gap years and vacations is always beneficial; but there is no guarantee that any particular type of experience is better will give you an edge when it comes to selection. To be successful candidates must have at least 12 months of further relevant experience after graduation, even if they have taken a placement year. We ask for some evidence of continuity of experience over several months at least, rather than many brief periods.

It will help if you application form demonstrates what you have learned from your work and how this has prepared you for clinical training. The selection panel wants to be able to determine that you will be able to both positively contribute to, and benefit from, the training we offer and to the NHS/health and social care workforce.

Here are some suggestions for gaining experience after your first degree:

1. Look out for psychology assistant posts, primary mental health care worker or health and well-being practitioner posts. NHS Jobs is a good source of advertisements or NHS Trust websites. It’s worth tracking down the contact details of local Heads of Psychology services in your local Trusts or Health Boards and forwarding to them your CV with an email asking if they have any work opportunities. Psychology assistant posts are neither a necessary nor a certain route into clinical training and there are alternatives, so don’t despair if you cannot find such a post.
2. Consider working as a research assistant on a research project relevant to clinical psychology. Ideally, one were you work with clinical psychologists in recruiting or supporting participants. Look at university websites where there is significant clinical psychology research activity and at national academic/research websites to find advertisements.
3. Consider broader NHS, social care, voluntary sector, education experience. For example, working as a care or nursing assistant; working for charities/ organisations such as Headway, Sure Start, Age Concern or Mind; being a classroom or nursery assistant; working on play/ holiday schemes for children and adults with disabilities; working as an advocate in intellectual disability services or with refugees. Ideally try to get a post where there is some clinical psychologist input and where you might get some supervision for them. Seek out opportunities that would give you a broad perspective on what applied psychology in general and clinical psychology in particular could contribute to "the helping professions'' and to self/ mutual help processes.
4. Seek out voluntary sector experience in local communities or on overseas projects. Inform yourself of the impact of social and political structures on individual and community health and well-being locally, nationally and inter-nationally. Again, contact with clinical psychologists within this work could help to increase your knowledge and understanding of the role.
5. Consider whether you have relevant personal experience of being a carer or being cared for, or of using NHS/ social care services. Alternatively, do you bring personal cultural experiences which could enrich the NHS clinical psychology workforce (e.g. we are relatively short of people with disabilities, of men, of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds)? Could you find relevant work experience linked to your own experience or characteristics that would help you to draw on and expand your own cultural and personal experiences in a way that could benefit the NHS?

In your application for training, try to demonstrate that you are able critically to reflect on what you have made of your varied experiences - and on their relevance to you in your possible future role as a clinical psychologist within the rapidly changing NHS and social care workforce.

To be generally well informed, keep your eye open for public debates about changes in the NHS and in psychotherapy, psychology and public health and social care. You can visit the BPS and ACP websites, follow leading clinical psychologists on Twitter, join relevant Facebook groups such as those for pre-qualification psychologists, and join the ACP and the BPS Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP) as an affiliate member to get regular updates on events and news. You can also join local DCP branches or groups such as Psychologists for Social Change.

Very best wishes for you application to our programme. If you gain a place here, you will have placements each year in a range of specialties where you can gain clinical competencies. The placements will be supported by teaching and coursework assignments; service evaluation and research projects will run alongside them. You can expect all or most of your placements to be within one of three geographical areas in the southwest; Cornwall, Plymouth or South Devon (expect a reasonably large amount of travelling in this varied area and the need to own and drive a car).

We are keen to encourage applications from people with interest and enterprise who can demonstrate their commitment to innovative ways of applying psychology. We seeking compassionate people who share the values of our NHS and a broad interest in society and the world around them, who are able to empower both themselves and others, and are open-minded yet critical in their approach to learning and research.

If you have more general queries do get in touch with the programme admissions tutor via our website.

Reg Morris, Clinical Director,

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, University of Plymouth