

Relevant Clinical Experience: Your questions answered

Thanks for your interest in applying for clinical training at Plymouth University – I am delighted you want to know more from us. From the clinical perspective (I am the Clinical Director and responsible for the placement side of the programme) I am aware that it can be difficult to know how best to gain relevant clinical experience. This is especially difficult as there are no hard and fast guidelines or requirements in relation to previous applied experience. Taking a clinical placement year within your undergraduate programme, if one is available, and gaining additional relevant experience during gap years and vacations is always beneficial; but there is no guarantee that any particular means of gaining experience will stand you in greater stead than any other – what is most important is your being able to demonstrate through your application form and interview that you are **able to reflect on what you have learnt** through experience and to specify its relevance to you as a potential clinical psychology trainee, so that you can demonstrate to the selection panel 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:

1) look out for psychology assistant posts or primary mental health care worker or health and well-being practitioner posts - sometimes these are advertised in your local press, or on NHS Trust websites, and sometimes it is worth tracking down the contact details of local Heads of Psychology services in your local Trusts and forwarding to them your CV with an email asking if they have any work opportunities. But do be aware that psychology assistant posts are neither a necessary nor a certain route into clinical training so do not despair if you cannot find such a post, and do not even feel that this has to be your first choice of route;

2) consider other NHS, social care, voluntary sector, education experience; eg 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 eg in learning disability services, working with refugees, employment in clinically relevant research etc etc. Use your initiative in seeking 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. For example the Guardian jobs section often advertises interesting posts. Indeed some successful applicants come with previous training and experiences in other health professions such as nursing or midwifery or overseas development work;

3) seek out voluntary sector work in your local communities or on overseas projects if you are able to travel. Inform yourself of the impact of social and political structures on individual and community health and well-being locally, nationally and inter-nationally;

4) consider whether you have relevant personal experience of being a carer or being cared for, or of using NHS/ social care services, or do you bring personal cultural experiences which could enrich the NHS workforce (eg in clinical psychology we are relatively short of people with disabilities, of men, of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds). Could you find relevant work experiences which would help you reflect on and make the most of your own cultural and personal background?

5) with all of the above, in your application for training, try to demonstrate not only that you have had relevant experiences but also that you are able to critically 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. There are often interesting articles for example in the Wednesday Guardian; the Department of Health and BPS websites have topical papers and consultation documents and information that will alert you to current issues. Consider joining your local branch of the BPS's Division of Clinical Psychology as an affiliate or student member.

I hope you decide to apply for a training place at Plymouth. If you gain a place here you will have 3 long placements, usually of three or four days a week, each of which, with the relevant academic and research work, last a year; year 1 with people with learning disabilities and with children and families; year 2 with adults and older adults and year 3 in one of a range of varied services/ specialisms eg child, learning or physical disability, adult or older adult mental health, health psychology, eating disorders, etc etc. Year 3 will help you consolidate and fill any gaps and prepare you for your first post. You would expect all or most of your placements to be within one of four fixed geographical areas in the glorious southwest; either Cornwall, Plymouth, South Devon or Exeter/East Devon (expect a reasonable large amount of travelling in this varied area).

We are keen to encourage applications from intelligent reflective people with interest and enterprise who can demonstrate their commitment to innovative ways of applying psychology, who can show that they are humane, compassionate people who show a broad interest in society and the world around them, who are able to empower both themselves and others and who are open minded yet critical in their approach to learning and research.

I hope this is helpful. For more general queries do get in touch with the programme admissions tutor via our website.

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