

Counselling psychologists in Scotland

Statement from the Division of Counselling Psychology – Scotland

This statement has been prepared in response to requests for information from employers, commissioners of services, and the media. It is intended to be an overview, rather than a comprehensive or definitive statement.

The profession of counselling psychology

Counselling psychology is a branch of applied professional psychology concerned with the integration of psychological theory and research with psychotherapeutic practice. Being firmly rooted in the discipline of psychology it emphasises the phenomenology of the client and of the therapeutic relationship and process. The practice of counselling psychology requires a high level of self-awareness and competence in relating the skills and knowledge of personal and interpersonal dynamics to the therapeutic context.

Broadly speaking, counselling psychologists are therefore specialist psychologists in the psychological therapies.

Counselling psychology competences are grounded in person-centred values that aim to empower those who use their services. It aims to prioritise wellbeing, anti-discriminatory practice, social and cultural context and ethical decision-making.



Counselling psychology training

Professional training to doctoral level in Scotland can be undertaken either at the Counselling Psychology Programme at Glasgow Caledonian University or, by gaining the BPS Qualification in Counselling Psychology, via the 'Independent Route'. Both routes are accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), and lead to the acquisition of equivalent competences.

There are two stages in training a counselling psychologist:

1. Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership, usually gained by having a BPS-accredited degree in psychology. This provides knowledge of the scientific discipline of psychology including human development, biological aspects of behaviour, cognitive and social psychology.
2. Three years full-time, or equivalent, post-graduate training and study at doctoral level. This involves training in two or more models of psychological therapy, which emphasise the therapeutic relationship plus ethical and professional considerations. It also covers training in research methods and skills; supervised placements and personal therapy.

Counselling psychology practice

Counselling psychologists are competent deliverers of evidence-based psychological therapy. Their training requires them to be competent to practice in at least two distinct psychological therapies, and to have an understanding of the application of the three major theories of therapy:

- cognitive-behavioural
- humanistic
- psychodynamic

They are accordingly in a strong position to respond appropriately and flexibly to the therapeutic needs of specific clients and/or contexts.

Counselling psychology competences include:

- Assessment, including assessment of mental health needs and risk assessment.
- Formulation; i.e. a psychological explanation of the genesis and maintenance of psychological problems
- Planning and implementation of therapy
- Report writing and record keeping
- Evaluation of the outcome of therapy
- Supervision and training of other applied psychologists and related professionals

- Multidisciplinary teamwork and team facilitation
- Service and organisational development
- Audit and evaluation
- Research and development
- Management of services

All practicing counselling psychologists must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and abide by the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists. Counselling psychologists, who are chartered through the BPS, are also bound by the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Counselling psychologists' competences are defined by the HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists. These overlap to a significant degree with those of other practitioner psychologists.

Counselling psychology competences are maintained by supervision of therapeutic practice and continuing professional development.

Because of their philosophy and approach to practice, individual counselling psychologists may differ in terms of their specialist interests and knowledge, and in their experience in working in particular therapeutic contexts and with specific client groups.

Clients with whom counselling psychologists work

Counselling psychologists work therapeutically with clients who may experience a variety of problems and life issues, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, post-traumatic stress, psychosis, the effects of childhood sexual abuse, relationship problems, self-esteem problems, complex grief, etc. Direct client work may be provided to individuals, couples, families or groups according to the particular training and experience of the counselling psychologist.

Settings in which counselling psychologists work

Counselling psychologists work in a variety of settings that include:

- NHS services, such as Primary Care and Community Mental Health Teams, as well as specialist services where psychological services are offered. These include services for eating disorders; drug misuse services; services for child and family, older adults, palliative care and those with learning disabilities. In the NHS in Scotland, and the rest of the UK, counselling psychologists are employed at all levels of seniority, from band 7 through to consultant grade and heads of psychology. Most health boards employ counselling psychologists.
- Other settings include independent practice; employee assistance programmes; social work services; forensic services; voluntary organisations; occupational health services; student counselling services, and cancer care organisations.

Since the advent of the Glasgow Caledonian University course in 2007 the numbers of counselling psychologists in Scotland have increased significantly. Many graduates have chosen to work in the NHS but others are now employed in charities, universities, independent practice, and other organisations.

The BPS Division of Counselling Psychology – Scotland

In Scotland, the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology represents a Scottish perspective on the interests of counselling psychology in its widest sense. It is active in a variety of areas, notably in supporting members professionally, which includes the training of counselling psychologists and the provision of high quality CPD events, to which other professionals are warmly welcomed.

Further details are available at the BPS website, including contact details for members of the Division of Counselling Psychology committee:

www.bps.org.uk

The chair of the Division of Counselling Psychology – Scotland can be contacted at:

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For further information about the Counselling Psychology programme at Glasgow Caledonian University, please see: **www.gcu.ac.uk/study/courses/details/index.php/P00682**

For further information about the BPS Qualification in Counselling Psychology, please see **www.bps.org.uk/qcop** or email **counselling.qualification@bps.org.uk**

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