



The British
Psychological Society

Guidance on the use of the Title 'Consultant Psychologist'



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1 Introduction

- 1.1. This guidance is produced by the BPS in relation to the adoption and use of the title ‘Consultant’ by any Psychologist to describe themselves and to promote themselves to colleagues and the general public. The purpose is to provide guidance and advice to individual psychologists, and to those involved in the recruitment and employment of psychologists about the appropriate use of the title. It is also intended to function as a reference document in relation to complaints or concerns raised within the BPS or HCPC.
- 1.2. The BPS does not have any direct control over the adoption or use of the title by its members. It is issuing this guidance in its role as the professional body for psychologists to provide clear information on expected standards for psychologists’ presentation to the general public, protection of the public and also in relation to the reputational integrity of the profession.
- 1.3 This guidance will be of value to:
 - Employers who are considering whether a post should be described as a consultant level position.
 - Those considering employing or commissioning services from someone who describes themselves as a consultant.
 - Individual psychologists who are considering applying for consultant posts.
 - Individual psychologists who might wish to use the title to describe themselves to others, either colleagues, other organisations or the public.
- 1.4. This document updates and replaces earlier guidance from the BPS.

2. Use of the Consultant Title

- 2.1. The use of the term ‘consultant’ generally does not have a formal definition.
- 2.2 Within the medical field it is used by doctors who have considerable experience and proven expertise demonstrated through examination within their respective Royal Colleges. The use of this title would therefore be seen to reflect both seniority and specialist expertise.
- 2.3 Within the NHS it is used for applied psychologists who are employed in Band 9, 8C and 8D positions.

3. General Professional Guidance

- 3.1. All psychologists who are members of the BPS are expected to work to the standards set out in the British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and Conduct. The code is based on four ethical principles which constitute the main domains of responsibility within which Psychologists may encounter ethical issues. The principles are: Respect, Competence, Responsibility and Integrity. The Code can be found on the BPS website.
- 3.2 The HCPC provides standards for practitioner psychologists who are registered within them. Standard 9 of the Standards for Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2016) includes two relevant statements:
 - 9.2 You must be honest about your experience, qualifications and skills.*
 - 9.3 You must make sure that any promotional activities you are involved in are accurate and are not likely to mislead.*
- 3.3. Any complaint against a practitioner psychologist’s use of the title ‘consultant’ through the HCPC would utilise this guidance as one aspect of the evidence base. Complaints can be made via the Fitness to Practice Department at ftp@hcpc-uk.org.

3.4. The National Assessor provision sits within the BPS and is recognised by the Department of Health as the source of expertise and quality assurance in relation to the use of the consultant title. National Assessors provide guidance on the Appointment of Consultant Psychologists that outlines the knowledge, competencies and experience required for a post to be designated as consultant level stated as those associated with an NHS 8c or higher position. This includes completion of an accredited postgraduate doctoral level training, substantial experience in a wide variety of settings and substantial high level knowledge and skills. Information on all these areas can be found on the BPS website. The National Assessors can be contacted via national-assessors@bps.org.uk. Whilst the National Assessors work primarily in health and social care the system is applicable across all areas of psychology and National Assessors are willing to advise and provide guidance in relation to job descriptions and titles.

4. BPS Guidance for members

- 4.1 The BPS recommends that any member considering their eligibility and the appropriateness of adopting the consultant title should make use of the National Assessor framework, standards and methods.
- 4.2 Psychologists considering using the title ‘consultant’ outside of the NHS should consider whether their own training, experience, skills and competencies are reflective of those of an NHS consultant in order to ensure they do not mislead the public. The BPS does not consider that it is acceptable practice for an individual to decide that they may adopt this title without some external review and validation that can be authenticated against the National Assessor standards; the National Assessors are available for advice and guidance in this matter.
- 4.3 The BPS would advise that all psychologists who are eligible to do so should use their protected title. The term consultant should be used only ahead of a full protected title, e.g. ‘consultant counselling psychologist’. Any exception to this would require advice from the National Assessor.
- 4.4 People who have held the title consultant and then leave, or retire from, an NHS or other post, are advised that they may continue using the title where it is appropriate to their current work and against some external review.
- 4.5 There is a difference, by implication, between a ‘consultant’ psychologist and a psychologist who provides consultations. Where the latter is meant this should be made clear by a description of services rather than by title.

5. References

British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and Conduct. Leicester, BPS.

<http://www.bps.org.uk/what-we-do/bps/ethics-standards/ethics-standards> (accessed 16/01/2017)

Health and Care Professions Council (2016) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. London HCPC.

<http://www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/standards/standardsofconductperformanceandethics/> (accessed 16/01/2017)

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