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promoting excellence in psychology

Best practice in psychology recruitment

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Best practice in psychology recruitment

The BPS has a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion within all its activities and scope. This is a principle that is not confined to definitions under the equality act but at all levels including fair advertisement of and recruitment for psychology posts.

WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT WRITTEN FOR?

This document is for anyone who is involved in the recruitment of applied psychology posts primarily within health and social care including:

Heads of service and lead psychologists,

Human Resources staff,

Those involved in placing adverts in, for example, NHS Jobs and BPS Jobs.

Although some of the examples and policies mentioned within this guidance refer to England only, we expect that the general principles and recommendations will apply across the devolved nations. The BPS implementation group can be contacted for help where there are differences in implementation.

KEY MESSAGES

In recent years there has been a significant expansion of psychology posts but difficulty in recruiting with one in seven posts unfilled. The best recruitment decisions will be made from having access to the widest pool of the best qualified candidates. The Society recommends that:

1. Advertisements for psychologists use the appropriate title(s), based on the competences required to deliver the duties of the post. This will normally be an inclusive title such as applied psychologist/practitioner psychologist/registered psychologist¹.
2. The advertised job specifies the context of the role (e.g. Child Mental Health, Diabetes Service, etc.).
3. The recruitment process includes a review of the essential and desirable criteria in Person Specifications to ensure they do not inadvertently exclude HCPC registered practitioner psychologists whose skills, knowledge and training would be appropriate for the advertised job role/s.

¹ Although applied psychologist is not a protected title, it is the title used within NHS England coding and reporting.

WHY IS THIS GUIDANCE NEEDED?

In recent years there has been a welcome expansion of posts for psychologists, reflecting the wider range of areas where specialist psychological skills are valued and posts funded. These new roles may not fit the limited range of post titles used historically and this therefore requires a more careful consideration of the necessary skills to open up the pool of candidates who could best meet the requirements of the post.

An audit of psychology job adverts² conducted for the British Psychological Society (BPS) showed that 66 per cent of jobs in the NHS were advertised for clinical psychologists. Clinical psychologists make up 57 per cent of HCPC regulated psychologists. Only 13 per cent of jobs were advertised so that psychologists of any domain could apply.

Further to this, in almost a third of advertisements, the job title did not match the essential criteria on the person specification. For example, the title and job description indicated that an applied psychologist was needed, but only those with a DClinPsych qualification were eligible to apply or the title was clinical psychologist but in the essential criteria the role was actually open to other HCPC-registered practitioner psychologists. It was also noted that job titles did not include contexts of practice or an indication of the role other than psychologist in the vast majority of cases (over 90 per cent). This means that posts are not being advertised to attract the widest range of potential applicants and that competent and able candidates may be being excluded from the field, limiting the capacity of recruiters to attract the best possible skills mix within psychological teams.

This is particularly relevant given that currently there is a 14 per cent vacancy rate for psychology posts in the NHS, i.e. one in seven posts are not filled. Because of this,

psychologists were recently added to the shortage occupation list by the Migration Advisory Committee indicating that there is a national shortage of psychologists, despite being one of the most popular subjects at undergraduate level. It should be noted that while the shortage applies in most areas of the UK, in some areas of the four nations it is particularly difficult (for instance in North Wales), and there are large regional variations within England.

As well as reducing the access for service users to qualified practitioners, unfilled vacancies can also lead to posts being de-established or downgraded and the money taken out of psychology and used elsewhere.

The Society's member survey³ highlighted that 10.7 per cent of psychologists cite inappropriate recruitment practices as a barrier to entering the profession and it should be noted that the Society has received numerous complaints regarding issues where psychologists are unable to apply for jobs due to the advertised title of the role.

This document is therefore to assist managers of psychological services and HR departments in optimising their chances of filling posts with skilled and experienced psychologists.

² British Psychological Society (2018) Audit of Advertisement of Psychologist Posts in the NHS. Unpublished.

³ British Psychological Society (2019) Membership survey

WHY IS RECRUITMENT OF PSYCHOLOGISTS COMPLEX?

It is generally recommended that recruitment should be based on a competency framework reflected in the person specification and job description and that this should be followed through within the whole recruitment process – advertising, shortlisting, interviewing and selection.

For psychologists there are a number of reasons why this is more complex:

Historical issues. Practitioner Psychology is a relatively new profession (compared to medicine, teaching, or the law). Professionals working in health and social care were initially almost always clinical psychologists and the majority of registered psychologists are clinical. However, as the profession has evolved, its base has expanded leading to a broader range of professional training and areas of focus. The wider range of titles have been established for over 25 years and this was consolidated when the HCPC took over regulation in 2009.

Protected titles. Psychologists in the UK who wish to use one of the legally protected titles (clinical psychologist, counselling psychologist, educational psychologist, forensic psychologist, health psychologist, occupational psychologist, sport and exercise psychologist, or one of the generic titles of registered psychologist or practitioner psychologist) must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as the statutory regulator for practitioner psychologists in the UK. The HCPC approves postgraduate training programmes, completion of which confers eligibility to register with the HCPC and use one of [the protected titles](#).

NHS Coding (Appendix 1). NHS England historically recorded all psychologists as clinical psychologists however recent

changes mean that, from 2020, this is corrected to record all practitioner psychologists under the Occupational Code 'Applied Psychologist' and under Job Role as one of the particular types of practitioner psychologists (e.g. health, counselling, clinical etc.).

Competency development. Psychologists' professional paths may differ significantly from their initial area of training, based on professional experience and continuing professional development. This is recognised by HCPC in that registrants are not expected to maintain competence across all areas of initial training, but as required by their role – whether they may have developed significant further competencies. As such using one protected title in an advertisement may directly limit the range of competent professionals able to apply for the post. Similarly, psychologists' career pathways prior to qualification can be varied and may include experience relevant to particular roles.

Skill mix and widening career options. While this is not the main focus of this document, it should be noted that another option frequently used within adult mental health is to recruit from the wide range of jobs for psychological therapists that fulfil the competency requirements – associate psychologists, CBT therapists, arts therapists, etc. The work within the Psychology Professions Networks illustrates this development.

Diversity. Psychologists working in health and social care show limited diversity in areas that have been reliably measured – and specifically in ethnicity. This is particularly important in that the UK is increasingly a diverse nation. Research is clear that a mis-match between staff and

users of the service reduces the efficacy of the interventions. Those more recent areas of registered psychology do show a wider range of ethnic diversity and would be able to contribute to a more diverse

workforce. This premise applies equally to other differences such as gender, sexuality or any other protected characteristic and beyond to any group who may be socially excluded.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

In summary the current situation is that:

There is an increase in the number of posts established for qualified practitioner psychologists across a range of new areas of delivery.

There is a current vacancy rate such that one in seven posts are not filled.

There are a range of psychologists with different protected titles (i.e. outside those that have been recruited to historically) who, due to current recruitment practises, are excluded in applying for posts they would be suitable for.

On their career pathways and in the years post qualification many psychologists develop skills beyond their core training which fit them for a wider range of posts than may be assumed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A general recommendation is that the BPS and those in recruitment within its subsystems should work towards a long-term systemic solution to enable access to as wide a range of potential candidates as possible.

This includes recommendations for advertising posts in three areas: appropriate title; specification of context and review of person specification.

ADVERTISEMENTS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS USE THE APPROPRIATE TITLE.

Three options for the wording of advertisements are recommended:

If in doubt about the typical skills of different psychology professions, then an inclusive title should be used and/or the advice of the BPS implementation group sought.

A. POST ADVERTISED WITH AN INCLUSIVE TITLE – APPLIED PSYCHOLOGIST, REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGIST, PRACTITIONER PSYCHOLOGIST⁴.

This should be the default option and would be appropriate in most cases, particularly:

- Where there is a department based service employing a range of psychologists and able to accommodate a diversity of additional staff.
- In an innovative service where the post might be shaped around the skills and expertise of a range of psychologists – an example might

be a post improving the mental health of children and young people in schools.

- In geographical areas and certain specialities where recruitment has been difficult, and it is determined that additional training and support would be built in to support applicants from a range of backgrounds.

B. POST ADVERTISED USING MULTIPLE TITLES.

This would not be best practice but may be considered where there are obvious registered professions likely to be appointable – for example:

- In mental health where posts are normally advertised as for clinical/counselling psychologists.
- In areas of physical health – clinical/health/sport and exercise.
- In specialist services such as Children and Young People's Development Disorders Assessment services where clinical or

educational psychologists might be thought to be relevant professional groups.

It should be recognised, however that this may still exclude highly skilled candidates. For example, there are counselling psychologists who are trained in child and adolescent practice, and who have extensive skills and many years of experience, but who would be excluded from an advert by a Children and Young People's Development Disorders Assessment services where clinical or educational psychologists were the only titles advertised.

⁴ Although applied psychologist is not a protected title, it is the title used within NHS England coding and reporting.

C. POST ADVERTISED BY SINGLE TITLE

There are very few cases where only one title would apply. For example, both counselling psychologists and clinical psychologists who would suit 8A in Child Trauma services, 8A in Learning Disability Challenging Behaviour Services, Band 7 for Memory Service (Older Adults).

Neuropsychology is (for now) perhaps a special case as only specific titles can gain a qualification in this area, though this is expanding. This could be managed in the advert by specifying a qualification in neuropsychology. If an actual qualification is not necessary, just experience, then any HCPC

registered psychologist with the experience and competencies could apply.

It may be thought that all band 7 posts could be advertised like this, however, while band 7 roles are usually taken on graduation, increasingly people are changing posts within the band and so may have further experience. Additionally, some psychologists may have another qualification as well as their core registration qualification or other experience from previous careers. This means that posts are best advertised using an inclusive title so as not to exclude competent people or miss out on valuable skills.

THE CONTEXT IS SPECIFIED IN THE ADVERTISED JOB ROLE/S

When the recommended advertising practices above are followed then this will, in many cases, open applications from a wider pool of candidates. Including the context, appropriate knowledge, and experience, alongside the title will allow potential candidates to easily and rapidly select appropriate posts.

This could match and complement the NHS England Coding structure – applied psychology posts would be advertised firstly specified

by the Occupational Code and/or Job Role followed by the area of work.

For example:

- Applied Psychologist – weight management (Child Diabetes Service) Band 7, 4 sessions 0.4wte
- Practitioner Psychologist Inpatient Wards Adult Mental Health (part time, 0.5wte)
- Registered Psychologist – Older Adult Mental Health Band 7/8A, Full Time

THERE IS A THOROUGH REVIEW OF THE ESSENTIAL AND DESIRABLE CRITERIA IN PERSON SPECIFICATIONS FOR EACH JOB ROLE TO BE ADVERTISED

This will ensure they do not inadvertently exclude other HCPC registered practitioner psychologists whose skills, knowledge and training would be appropriate for the advertised job role/s.

This review will be based on an outline of competencies that will reflect career pathway and post qualification training and experience acquired over years in a profession as well as initial qualification.

Responding to the pressing needs of the five year forward view and NHS long term plan, new psychological roles are being developed in an exciting array of non-traditional settings for psychology. New or different

types of psychology post will require the psychology service manager to scrutinise any existing templates used and ensure that it is appropriately adapted to the requirements of the individual post. An example would be within a mental health trust where new services are commissioned within physical health – such as pain management, child and adolescent diabetes or Parkinson's disease.

Care should be taken to only specify essential criteria that is required for that specific job. For example, a post should only specify a requirement to have expertise in two psychological therapies where the evidence and guideline indicate that to be the case.

SUMMARY

People who recruit psychologists will demonstrate best practice by working to a competency framework and using inclusive job titles along with the context of the role

within job advertisements. This will enable the most effective means of filling psychology posts with the best candidates.

Appendix 1 – NHS Coding

THE NHS HAS CHANGED THE WAY IT RECORDS THE WORKFORCE DATA.

NHS England records the numbers and designations of staff in the Electronic Staff Record (ESR) and all providers (Trusts etc.) complete annual returns to government. Psychologists in Trusts and the BPS know that in the past the NHS has not been recording the psychological workforce accurately due to the way psychology related posts are recorded.

However, the way the psychological workforce has recently been changed for the better as a result of the work done by the National Workforce Information Review Group (WIRG) and the Psychological Workforce Therapies Working Group.

ROLES WILL BE RECORDED DIFFERENTLY.

Posts in the ESR are coded at three levels and the main changes include:

- The Occupational Code has changed:
 - ‘Clinical Psychology’ has become ‘Applied Psychology’
 - ‘Psychotherapy’ has become ‘Psychological Therapy’.
- The Job Role has changed to record the practitioner areas of the ‘Psychological Workforce’:
 - Clinical, Counselling, Educational, Forensic, Health, Occupational, Sport and Exercise.
 - The Area of Work has changed to accurately reflect the services where psychologists work (e.g. adult mental health, child & adolescent mental health etc).



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