



---

# Improving Professional Practice in Clinical Psychology

**Corresponding Author:**

Dr. Simon B Thompson,  
Associate Professor, Psychology Research Centre , Bournemouth University, BH12 5BB - United Kingdom

**Submitting Author:**

Dr. Simon B Thompson,  
Associate Professor, Psychology Research Centre , Bournemouth University, BH12 5BB - United Kingdom

**Article ID:** WMC002923

**Article Type:** Original Articles

**Submitted on:**24-Jan-2012, 07:02:50 PM GMT **Published on:** 25-Jan-2012, 07:56:02 PM GMT

**Article URL:** [http://www.webmedcentral.com/article\\_view/2923](http://www.webmedcentral.com/article_view/2923)

**Subject Categories:**PSYCHOLOGY

**Keywords:**Clinical Placements; Clinical Psychology; Neuropsychology; New Courses; Patients; Professional Practice

**How to cite the article:**Thompson S B, Baker R . Improving Professional Practice in Clinical Psychology . WebmedCentral PSYCHOLOGY 2012;3(1):WMC002923

**Copyright:** This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

# Improving Professional Practice in Clinical Psychology

**Author(s):** Thompson S B, Baker R

## Abstract

Places on clinical psychology training courses are increasingly over-subscribed. Enhancing applicant's profiles have traditionally focused on gaining clinically relevant experience such as working as an assistant psychologist in a variety of clinical settings. However, even this type of experience may not be enough to secure a place. Therefore, the Masters level foundations programme was developed at Bournemouth University that offers both in-depth taught knowledge covering similar areas to the first year of a doctoral clinical psychology training programme but combined with a placement experience. The journey from development to delivery is outlined together with destinations of graduates from early years of the programme.

## Introduction

Applying for places to train as a clinical psychologist in the United Kingdom (UK) has become very competitive with many training programmes requiring not only a good first honours degree in psychology but also substantial and relevant clinical experience. It would seem that the academic "bar" has been raised yet again in terms of the requirement to gain a place on a training programme.

With this in mind, the authors sought the opinion of colleagues in the clinical and academic field concerning the viability and usefulness of developing a taught foundation programme in clinical psychology. The objective of the programme would be to enhance applicants' portfolios of experience with a thorough and broad programme comprising both theory and practice of clinical psychological disorders and approaches to treatment.

The Dorset geographical area is well served by an established health care system comprising of three general hospital National Health Service (NHS) Trusts and Ambulance Service Trusts, including one of the largest mental health trusts in the UK (Dorset Healthcare NHS University Foundation Trust). Over 50 qualified and experienced clinical psychologists, therapists, nurses, counsellors, and medical personnel, as well as commissioners of health care services and

users of these services, offered to contribute to the new clinical programme based at Bournemouth University.

Following extensive consultation and in-house and external development and evaluation, a new programme was developed that offered a comprehensive taught programme in addition to a placement experience. The opportunity to work with those qualified in a variety of clinical settings enabled students to gain more than an insight into the presentation of symptoms and treatment of clinical psychological disorders.

In response to the disillusionment of undergraduate psychology students with over-theoretical and the non-humanistic style of teaching psychology in the United States in the 1920s, Gordon Allport devised a different approach, 'The Intuitive Method' (Allport, 1929). This was based on the contention that sustained attention to the single case or single episode seems, as Bergen asserts, to allow preferential value for the human mind (Allport, 1942). The intuitive method placed a single case (a celebrated English professor who suffered from agoraphobia) at the centre of teaching, from which psychological theory naturally spun off (Baker, 1989; Banyard, 2000; Norcross, Sommer, & Clifford, 2001; Thompson, 2012).

In the design of our programme, we planned to place, case histories, autobiographies, and first-hand accounts of patients together with role play of therapy as central. We encourage those teaching on the programme to use a variety of experiential, practical or didactic teaching methods in addition to traditional lectures. Most of the staff are very willing to use practical, patient-centred teaching and enjoyed "bringing alive" real case histories in this way.

### The programme

The taught programme, entitled "MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology", is a Masters level programme and comprises six assessed units: (1) Roots of psychological disorders; (2) Range of psychological disorders; (3) Psychological therapies; (4) Jurisprudence and organisations; (5) Advanced research methods and statistics; and (6) Placement experience and dissertation.

In the first unit, lectures and workshops are delivered by health care personnel across a wide range of disorders with an emphasis on how disorders develop,

how adults develop disorders from childhood, and the variation in the origin of disorders. In the second unit, the range of clinical psychological disorders is presented such as depression and anxiety; obsessions; panic attacks; phobias; psychoses. Disorders with physical origins, such as stroke and dementia, are also included, and specific illnesses such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and head injury are also included. The aim of the programme was deviate from the traditional medical model of training where theory is taught separately from practice and instead, to deliver teaching where the patient remains the central focus and is seen as a person who has developed signs and symptoms of a disorder and receives treatment in terms of a variety of therapeutic approaches. The third unit, psychological therapies, aims to demonstrate the range of therapies available such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT); behaviour therapy; emotional processing therapy; counselling; analytical psychotherapy; acceptance and commitment therapy; dialectical behaviour therapy; cognitive analytical therapy. Although specific training in each therapy is not given and is not within the scope of the programme, it is presented and discussed by experts in the field.

The jurisprudence and organisations unit enables students to grasp the concept of working in organisations, private and public, voluntary, and paid, and also the complex nature of litigation and medico-legal working, particularly as an expert witness in the court system. These aspects, together with the placement experience, make this programme unique in the UK. Many programmes at Masters level do not include a placement where the student can work with an expert in the field and gain essential information and knowledge of the capabilities within a clinical or clinical research setting. The production of a dissertation from within the area of the placement experience enables the student to gain important skills in searching the clinical research literature, becoming critical of methodology and of results, and of acquiring a balanced view about clinical trials and about the merits of different therapeutic approaches.

The 10-month programme entitled "MSc Foundations of Clinical Psychology" has now been delivered for two years at Bournemouth University and is about to enjoy its third intake this forthcoming academic year. The success is largely due to the contribution of a range of highly qualified external staff from within the Dorset area as well as a dedicated core team comprising two qualified Consultants in Clinical Psychology (and Clinical Neuropsychology), and in Research methods and Statistics. The programme is intensive but rewarding for students and has received favourable

feedback from the students and supervisors on the placements.

### **Assessments**

Conventionally, such masters level programmes are assessed through coursework or examinations at the end of the programme. This programme is assessed by using presentations, role plays, examinations (essay type and multiple choice), and by a long (12,500 word) dissertation and an oral examination (viva voce). This enables students to study a particular area of interest in depth (such as psychological approaches in depression; cognitive retraining methods in head injury rehabilitation; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in cancer; etc.) and to critically evaluate the research literature. This benefits the student and also the Field Supervisor who will supervise the student during their Placement Experience in the third term. Different methods of assessment allow students to excel in their particular skill (for example, some students prefer examinations to coursework or to multiple choice examinations).

Students who do not wish to proceed to the placement may graduate with a postgraduate certificate or PG Cert rather than the MSc. Indeed, some students may have already sufficient clinically relevant experience (for example, for their applications to proceed to train as a clinical psychologist) and so do not wish to gain further experience. This may also be because of funding issues; indeed, consideration was given to students gaining experience and working at the same time as studying. Therefore, the programme is run over two days (typically, Wednesday and Thursdays) to enable students to gain paid employment during the remainder of the week

### **Destination of graduates**

The main aim of the programme is to provide students with a thorough understanding and skills set to enable them to enhance their applications for clinical psychology doctoral training programmes in the UK. However, it is recognised that not all graduates will gain places on subsequent training programmes. Some of these will also wish to pursue different and related experience or employment elsewhere. For example, some graduates have pursued careers as counsellors or in management roles within the NHS. Others will be employed as support workers or assistants to gain further clinical experience, and some will gain places in universities to study at doctorate level in clinically related areas. The following list shows examples of the destinations of recent graduates:

1. 1-year appointment as researcher in perinatal adult health
2. Voluntary work in health psychology

3. Continuing part-time employment Brain Injury Trust
4. Support worker in private Mental Health services
5. Applied for training in low intensity CBT training at Immediate Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services
7. Voluntary work at local community hospital in dementia care
8. Paid work as an assistant in Brain Injury Unit and in dementia care and acute mental health setting
9. Applying for work as a psychology assistant
10. Working in Crisis Intervention
11. Volunteer in a stroke ward
12. Family Support Worker
13. Administrative work in university assessing grant applications

## References

---

1. Allport, G.W., 1929. The study of personality by the intuitive method. An experiment in teaching from the Locomotive God. *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology*, 24, 14-27.
2. Allport, G.W., 1942. The use of personal documents in psychological science. *Bulletin 49*. New York: Social Science Research Council.
3. Baker, R., 1989. Panic disorder: theory, research and therapy. (Chapter on personal accounts of panic). Chichester: John Wiley.
4. Banyard, V.L., 2000. Using first-person accounts to teach students about psychological disorders. *Teaching of Psychology*, 27(1), 40-43.
5. Norcross, J.C., Sommer, R., & Clifford, J.S., 2001. Incorporating published autobiographies into the abnormal psychology course. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28(2), 125-128.
6. Thompson, S.B.N., 2012. *Psychology of trauma: clinical reviews, case histories, research*. Portsmouth: Blackwell-Harvard-Academic.

## Disclaimer

This article has been downloaded from WebmedCentral. With our unique author driven post publication peer review, contents posted on this web portal do not undergo any prepublication peer or editorial review. It is completely the responsibility of the authors to ensure not only scientific and ethical standards of the manuscript but also its grammatical accuracy. Authors must ensure that they obtain all the necessary permissions before submitting any information that requires obtaining a consent or approval from a third party. Authors should also ensure not to submit any information which they do not have the copyright of or of which they have transferred the copyrights to a third party.

Contents on WebmedCentral are purely for biomedical researchers and scientists. They are not meant to cater to the needs of an individual patient. The web portal or any content(s) therein is neither designed to support, nor replace, the relationship that exists between a patient/site visitor and his/her physician. Your use of the WebmedCentral site and its contents is entirely at your own risk. We do not take any responsibility for any harm that you may suffer or inflict on a third person by following the contents of this website.