Counselling and Psychotherapy Careers

What do Counsellors and Psychotherapists do?

Counsellors and Psychotherapists are trained professionals who offer “talking” therapies aimed at helping individuals to better understand their feelings, thoughts and behaviours so that they have the choice to change the way they feel, think and/or behave, and develop the coping mechanisms to deal with issues arising in the future. Counsellors and Psychotherapists are primarily facilitators of this process, they do not give advice or tell their clients what to do, and they do not use drugs or make physical interventions. The therapies they offer may be used to address a wide range of difficulties or situations, encountered by children, adolescents and adults, e.g. anxiety, addiction, anger, depression, guilt, low self-esteem, obsessive compulsive disorder, and traumatic life events like a death, divorce, abuse, violent assault or redundancy. They may work with clients on a one to one basis, or in a group setting, e.g. addiction recovery group. They may be self-employed, employed, or a mixture of the two, employment can be in a range of organisations, including the NHS, universities, colleges and schools, prisons, the military, and charities.

There is no clear distinction between the role of a Counsellor and the role of a Psychotherapist, the main differences are in: the specifics of the training undertaken and the method of working on completion of this; and the theoretical model(s) an individual practitioner chooses to adopt and the therapy or therapies they decide to practice. There is a tendency for psychotherapy to be associated with the more intense ‘talking therapies’ whether from the perspective of: the frequency and duration of the therapy; the severity of the issues addressed; and the identification of the underlying causes of problems and addressing them. A particular example of this is

For more information on different types of “talking therapies” see www.mind.org.uk; www.bacp.co.uk/student/modalities.php; and for Psychoanalysis in particular see www.bpc.org.uk/psychoanalysis-and-psychotherapy, this link also provides access to a downloadable pdf that compares other counselling and other psychotherapy therapies with psychoanalysis.
Psychoanalysis, a school of therapy opposed to a “quick fix” especially for intransigent problems. Counselling may be: briefer; less concerned with the distant past; narrower in terms of the issues being considered; and focused on a particular difficulty, e.g. anxiety, with the aim of achieving a more immediate level of resolution for that problem, and the development of the client’s problem-solving skills. However, these distinctions between Counselling and Psychotherapy should not be generalised – you will need to look beneath the top level labels.

The Social Care section of the Prospects (graduate careers) website www.prospects.ac.uk has good occupational profiles for Counsellor and Psychotherapist, which include entry requirements, training and qualifications, typical work activities, job descriptions, types of employers and where to look for vacancies. The profiles on NHS Health Careers www.healthcareers.nhs.uk under Psychological Therapies for Counsellor and Psychotherapist are also informative.

Training & Qualifying

There is currently no legal or regulatory requirement for practicing psychotherapists or counsellors to be registered or licensed and anyone can set themselves up in private practice without training, qualifications or supervision. However, to work within the NHS or for a charity, education institution or other reputable employer, training and qualifications (including practical experience and professional supervision) as well as accreditation by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) or other recognised professional

2 You will see from the Health & Care Professionals website that neither counselling nor psychotherapy are professions that are required to be registered www.hpc-uk.org/aboutregistration/. The option of Accredited Voluntary Registers (AVR) is available to all who work in health and social care roles, where compulsory registration does not exist. AVRIs are administered by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) www.professionalstandards.org.uk/. Counselling and Psychotherapy organisations that have an AVR will sport the PSA quality mark on their website, including BACP, UKCP and BPC: the “I want a…..” search facility on the PSA website will help you find these.
organisation is likely to be a requirement. Training can be full-time or part-time and will involve a mix of theoretical study, supervised work with clients to support the development of practical skills, and personal therapy.

However, an understanding of the theory and proficiency in counselling skills are not sufficient, the nature of their work means that Counsellors and Psychotherapists also need some specific competencies, including empathy, sensitivity, resilience, patience, self-awareness, listening and observational skills and a non-judgemental attitude. Life experience and a level of maturity are also assets, and these plus the need for “caring” and “helping” experience can mean that, although entry to the postgraduate training is open to any degree discipline, it is unusual for those wishing to train as a Psychotherapist or Counsellor to do so immediately after their undergraduate degree.

Anyone considering training to be a Counsellor or Psychotherapist is well advised to get some experience of working (or volunteering) in a helping role with face to face contact with clients. This will be valuable in helping you decide if this is the right path for you and will also be looked on favourably by training providers when included in your application. If you do not have applied “counselling” type experience then trying out a part-time introductory level course (8 to 12 weeks usually in an adult education or FE college) might be a good idea before committing to the longer and more expensive Certificate (1 year part-time) course. Some course providers may require the Certificate qualification before granting entry to the Diploma (1 year full-time, 2-3 years part-time, including a 100 hour supervised placement) course, which is the minimum level required for working towards being qualified. Some training providers will have a minimum age requirement, e.g. over 25. Many people who decide to train as a counsellor or psychotherapist do so after following a previous career path, sometimes in “caring or helping” fields, e.g. social worker, teacher, nurse, but more significant career changes are not uncommon, e.g. from academia, civil service and marketing. During the course of their careers chartered psychologists and psychiatrists may decide to undertake additional training in counselling/psychotherapy modalities to augment their skill set in working with patients.

The BACP www.bacp.co.uk and UKCP http://www.ukcp.org.uk/ websites provide an overview of the training and experience required to become a counsellor or psychotherapist and also provide lists of accredited training
courses. The British Psychoanalytic Council’s (BPC) website provides information for those wishing to train as BPC accredited psychoanalysts. Each of these websites usually have some job vacancy postings too, useful to see the type of employed work (as opposed to private practice) that counsellors, psychotherapists and psychoanalysts can engage in.

BACP accredits courses run by a wide range of providers, the characteristics they have in common are: at least 1 year full-time or 2-3 years part-time; 450 contact hours; curriculum includes coverage of counselling/psychotherapy theories and skills, professional issues and personal development (including self-reflective practice); and at least one supervised placement; on completion the student should be able to function as a counsellor. Most courses start from a theoretical base - typically humanistic, psychodynamic, cognitive, behaviourial, psychoanalytic, Jungian or integrative. They may use the label of counselling or psychotherapy. They may also focus on one or more ‘delivery methods’ - one to one, couples, families, or groups. These courses can cover a wide range of psychotherapy modalities and types of therapy within these so it is important that you choose a course that trains you to be the sort of practitioner you want to be. To achieve BACP accreditation as a practicing counsellor then in addition to completing an accredited Diploma level course you will need 450 hours of supervised practice with clients (150 hours of which must have been completed after your Diploma). UKCP also accredits psychotherapy courses and these share the core characteristics outlined above.

Training as a psychoanalyst takes on average 4-5 years, the BCP provides a list of training providers. The cost of Certificate and Diploma accredited courses can vary significantly and price is not always indicative of quality so it is important to research courses thoroughly and to be sure that they meet your needs. In addition to a varying level of course fees, accredited training will require the trainee to undergo and pay for personal therapy sessions and supervision of their client work by qualified therapists. Depending on the type of therapist you want to be, personal therapy will vary in length and intensity,

3 UKCP How to become a Psychotherapist
www.psychotherapy.org.uk/16/information/what-is-psychotherapy/how-to-become-a-psychotherapist
and supervision costs will continue if self-employed for a number of years after the initial period of study.

**Working as a Counsellor or Psychotherapist**

Many practicing counsellors/psychotherapists are in private practice, either working on their own or with groups of other therapists. These will usually charge an hourly rate of £40-£100 for 50 minutes, depending on their qualifications, experience and the level of demand for their services. Successful counsellors and psychotherapists in private practice who work full-time can earn between £40k - £100k.

Some counsellors/psychotherapists will be employed by the NHS, charities, education institutions, prisons, emergency services, military or private sector employers. It is not unusual for a counsellor/ psychotherapist to have a portfolio career, e.g. part-time in an employed role, some private practice work, and maybe some volunteering as well. Pay will vary significantly depending on whether a trainee or qualified, the level of experience, and level and range of other qualifications, and type of work, e.g. pay in the NHS can range from around £20k for a trainee Psychological Wellbeingpractitioner, to £28k for a qualified practitioner, raising to £43k+ for an experienced High Intensity Therapist.

**Some suggestions for experience building volunteering opportunities include:**

- Relevant experience while at Cambridge may be available through joining, or volunteering with, organisations like: **Student Community Action** [www.cambridgesca.org.uk/](http://www.cambridgesca.org.uk/) ; **Cambridge Mental Wealth Group** [www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/societies/directory/mentalwealth/](http://www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/societies/directory/mentalwealth/) ; **Nightline** [http://nightline.ac.uk/volunteering/](http://nightline.ac.uk/volunteering/) ; **Samaritans** [www.samaritans.org/volunteer-us](http://www.samaritans.org/volunteer-us) ; **Citizens Advice Bureau** [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/join-us.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/join-us.htm) ; **Cambridge University Hospitals** [https://www.volunteering.cuh.org.uk/](https://www.volunteering.cuh.org.uk/) ; **JCR, or Cambridge University Student Union** (in a welfare role)

- **Childline** now part of the NSPCC [www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/volunteer-or-work-for-us/](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-you-can-do/volunteer-or-work-for-us/)
- **Jimmy's** (night shelter in Cambridge)
  http://www.jimmyscambridge.org.uk

- **Rethink** (mental illness) volunteer helpline
  [www.rethink.org/get-involved/volunteering-participating](http://www.rethink.org/get-involved/volunteering-participating)

- **Young Minds** advertises helpline volunteering opportunities from time to time
  [www.youngminds.org.uk/about/jobs](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about/jobs)

- **Cruse** [www.cruse.org.uk/](http://www.cruse.org.uk/) bereavement counselling – opportunities to volunteer, and they may also accept trainees counsellors on placement

- [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) volunteering opportunities across the country

This list is not exhaustive.

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**Career Information & Professional Bodies**

**Prospects** (Careers resources for students and graduates)
[www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs_social_care.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs_social_care.htm)

**Mind** [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) factsheets on mental health issues and careers in mental health

**Professional Standards Authority** to check if a particular counselling or psychotherapy organisation that offers registration (linked to training, qualifications and professional experience) is on the PSA register go to
[www.professionalstandards.org.uk/accredited-registers/find-a-register](http://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/accredited-registers/find-a-register)

**BACP** (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)
[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk); and to see examples of jobs for qualified Counsellors and Psychotherapists [www.bacp.co.uk/search/Jobs](http://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Jobs)

**UKCP** (UK Council for Psychotherapy) [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)

**Association of Child & Adolescent Psychotherapists**
[www.childpsychotherapy.org.uk/](http://www.childpsychotherapy.org.uk/) Information on training and practicing
British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) www.babcp.com Information on training and practicing

British Psychoanalytical Council www.bpc.org.uk/

Institute of Psychoanalysis (British Psychoanalytical Society) www.psychoanalysis.org.uk/ Information on training and practicing

British Psychoanalytic Association www.psychoanalysis-bpa.org/ Information on training and practicing

The Society of Analytical Psychology www.thesap.org.uk/ Information on training and practicing Jungian analysis

British Psychotherapy Foundation www.britishpsychotherapyfoundation.org.uk/ Information on training and practicing

Relate provides relationship support, and offers training for suitably qualified people to work for them as Counsellors www.relate.org.uk/about-us/work-us

NHS - in addition to employing psychiatrists, and various types of chartered psychologists, the NHS also employs counsellors and psychotherapists see www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies for an overview and advice on where to find opportunities and likely levels of pay and /www.jobs.nhs.uk/ for vacancy examples

Charityjob www.charityjob.co.uk/ e.g. use “counselling” as key word, or search under “practitioner” category to see they types of opportunities in the charity sector (usually require qualifications – but could also be ideas for volunteering to build experience ). Likewise Guardian Jobs http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/jobs/social-care/counselling/