

PROSPECTS

Job profile

Occupational psychologist

If you have an interest in psychology and how people behave at work, as well as excellent communication and interpersonal skills, consider a career as an occupational psychologist

As an occupational psychologist you'll apply psychological knowledge, theory and practice to organisational issues in the workplace, such as culture and change, as well as issues at an individual or team level. In doing so, you'll improve employee job satisfaction and increase the overall effectiveness of the organisation.

You can work in a consultancy role or in-house as an employee of an organisation. Collaboration is common with management, human resources officers (</job-profiles/human-resources-officer>) and training and development officers (</job-profiles/training-and-development-officer>), careers advisers (</job-profiles/careers-adviser>) and management consultants (</job-profiles/management-consultant>), business coaches, ergonomists (</job-profiles/ergonomist>) and psychologists, trade union representatives and staff in teams and individually.

Responsibilities

The work can be broad in scope and cover areas such as:

- counselling and personal development
- design of work environments
- human-machine interaction
- organisational development and change
- performance appraisal and career development
- personnel selection and assessment
- training, employee relations and motivation.

Depending on your area of work, you may need to:

- assess the usability and functionality of a system, such as a computer or workstation, and make recommendations for improvements to ensure ease of use for the operator
- investigate problems that arise and accidents that occur as a result of poorly designed human-machine interfaces
- review the ergonomic design of a workplace by assessing the suitability of elements such as lighting, noise levels and furniture and provide recommendations for changes or improvements
- work with engineers and designers to provide input into the design of equipment, like vehicles and workspaces
- develop, implement or evaluate employee selection procedures, including psychometric tests, assessment centre exercises and structured interviews
- develop talent management processes and systems so organisations can identify and develop their high-potential employees
- provide coaching, guidance and advice to employees or students in order to help them plan and manage their careers
- design performance appraisal systems that enable an organisation to measure, manage and reward the performance of its employees
- work one-to-one with individuals to support them in becoming more successful and effective in delivering their organisational objectives, while also enhancing their personal well-being
- analyse the training needs of employees, identify skills gaps and determine how to address that gap in a cost-effective manner
- design, develop and deliver training and development programmes
- mediate in situations where there is conflict between employees and management or an employment dispute
- design, develop and implement initiatives aimed at helping employees to cope successfully with changes taking place in their

workplace, such as restructuring, downsizing or new business processes.

Salary

- Starting salaries can be around £18,000 to £25,000 per annum.
- Salaries for more experienced occupational psychologists range from £35,000 to in excess of £80,000. More experienced or senior consultants may earn higher salaries.

Salaries can vary significantly depending on the setting you work in and whether you work publicly or privately. Private sector organisations, particularly management consultancies, tend to pay more than the public or third sectors and academia. Check job adverts to get a feel for current salaries.

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

Working hours

Working hours are generally 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, although you may occasionally have to work longer hours.

What to expect

- You may work on-site with a client, at a training or management development centre or at your company's offices.
- Self-employment and freelance work is common for psychologists with substantial experience in a specialist area. You'll also need to build up a good client base before becoming freelance.
- Jobs are available throughout the UK, but major consultancies tend to be based in the south east of England and in larger cities.
- Consultants must respond to client needs. This often means working to tight deadlines. Business clients usually expect you to dress professionally.
- If you're self-employed, you'll need to travel to visit clients. There may be opportunities in larger consultancies to work overseas with multinational client companies.

Qualifications

You must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to work as an occupational psychologist. This involves completing The British Psychological Society (BPS) (<http://www.bps.org.uk/>) qualification in Occupational Psychology (QOP) stage 2 (or equivalent qualification) that has been approved by the HCPC.

First, you'll need Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC), which is achieved by completing a BPS-accredited psychology degree or conversion course.

You'll then need to successfully complete a BPS-accredited Masters in occupational psychology, which usually takes one year full time or two years part time. To get a place on a Masters course, you're often expected to have at least a 2:1 plus some relevant work experience, although some course providers may accept a 2:2. Contact individual universities for details of their entry requirements. Search for a BPS-accredited course (<https://www.bps.org.uk/public/become-psychologist/accredited-courses>).

This is followed by the BPS QOP (stage 2) (<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologists/society-qualifications/qualification-occupational-psychology-stage-2>), which is a doctoral-level qualification consisting of a minimum of two years full-time (or part-time equivalent) supervised practice that builds on the knowledge gained during your Masters degree.

You'll need to be employed as a trainee occupational psychologist in a role (either paid or unpaid) related to occupational psychology for the duration of the training. You'll receive support and supervision from a coordinating supervisor who will act as your mentor as you develop your skills in at least five areas of occupational psychology and the consultancy cycle.

You'll need to complete an annual progress report and submit a portfolio of competencies to show that you're competent to practice as an occupational psychologist in a range of settings.

Once you've successfully completed the QOP (stage 2), you're eligible for registration as an occupational psychologist with HCPC (<http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/>) and accreditation as a chartered psychologist with BPS.

Skills

You'll need to show:

- excellent communication and interpersonal skills in order to convince clients of your abilities, inspire their trust and gain information
- adaptability and flexibility
- problem-solving ability
- self-confidence, with the ability to deal with a variety of people
- the ability to influence other professions, managers and staff, who may be sceptical or resistant about what you're offering
- resilience and a positive attitude
- the ability to work under pressure - you will need to achieve results within fixed deadlines while working on a number of projects
- pragmatism
- commercial awareness
- the ability to show that your work has practical and worthwhile benefits over a relatively short timescale.

For some posts, you'll also need show competence in psychometrics or statistical analysis.

Work experience

To get a place on a BPS-accredited Masters course, you'll often need relevant work experience. Try and get some administration experience with an occupational psychology consultancy or a human resources (HR) department and volunteer, if possible, to take on more people-focused activities.

You can also contact a local occupational psychologist to see if you can work shadow them. For a complete list, see the BPS Directory of Chartered Psychologists (<http://www.bps.org.uk/bpslegacy/dcp>).

Other relevant activities include:

- getting involved with selection processes, for example on a student committee, school governing body or fundraising group
- mentoring A-level or university students
- helping supervise a community project
- working for a psychometric test publisher
- getting involved in coaching psychology and attending local coaching network meetings.

Check with course providers what kind of experience they're looking for and how much.

Employers

Opportunities are available with organisations and businesses of all sizes in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Typical employers include government and public services, leadership development centres and consultancies. The Civil Service is one of the largest employers of occupational psychologists and competition for posts is keen. Jobs are available with departments such as:

- Civil Service Commission
- Civil Service Resourcing
- Department for Work and Pensions
- HM Prison Service
- Home Office
- Ministry of Defence.

Many occupational psychologists are employed in private consultancies, some of which specialise in occupational psychology-related services. Many of these consultancies are small, employing no more than a handful of psychologists, although some occupational psychologists work within the human capital service lines of larger, full-service consultancy firms.

Occupational psychologists also work in universities in teaching or research roles and some are self-employed. Some have portfolio careers combining several aspects of teaching, research and consultancy.

Psychometric test publishers also employ occupational psychologists.

Look for job vacancies at:

- Civil Service Job Search (<https://www.civilservicejobs.service.gov.uk/csr/index.cgi>)
- Jobs in Psychology (<https://www.jobsinpsychology.co.uk/>)
- Personnel Today (<https://jobs.personneltoday.com/>)

Professional development

Once qualified, you must keep your skills up to date and follow the ongoing developments in research. Continuing professional development (CPD) is an essential part of continuing registration with the HCPC and chartered membership of the BPS and should include a mixture of directed and self-directed activities.

Directed activities can include:

- taking core skills workshops and e-learning courses
- attending conferences and events
- taking post-qualification training courses
- writing for journals
- undertaking and presenting research and papers at conferences.

Training and development opportunities are available through the BPS Professional Development Centre (<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologists/professional-development>). Workshops can be in areas such as supervision skills, working in private practice, acting as an expert witness, aviation psychology and working with the media.

You could also undertake further research at PhD level.

Career prospects

In general, occupational psychology doesn't have a clear-cut career path and it's often down to you to determine how your career progresses. There are opportunities to progress to senior posts, leading teams or projects, although if you're working for a small unit, you may need to change job to progress your career.

If you're working for the Civil Service as part of the Government Occupational Psychology Profession (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/civil-service-government-occupational-psychology-profession/about>) you'll have access to a range of learning, qualifications and opportunities to help develop your skills and career. You'll be able to progress through the grades as you gain experience and knowledge.

With experience you can move into self-employment and set up your own consultancy business.

While occupational psychology provides a breadth of experience in several areas, many related professions, such as occupational health and safety, ergonomics and human resources (HR), have their own qualification structures and training programmes. Taking further related qualifications, such as professional diplomas and short courses, may open more doors to you.

It's also possible to pursue an academic career either after a period as a practitioner or by doing research for a Doctoral degree after a Masters and gaining a post as a university lecturer or researcher.



(<http://agcas.org.uk/>)

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Written by AGCAS editors

December 2017

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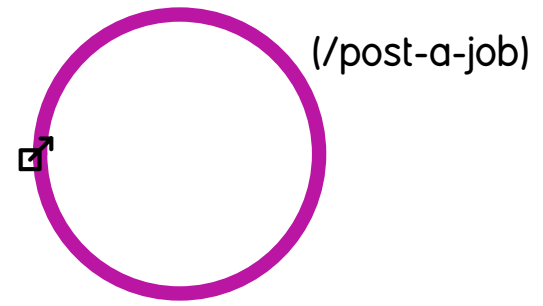
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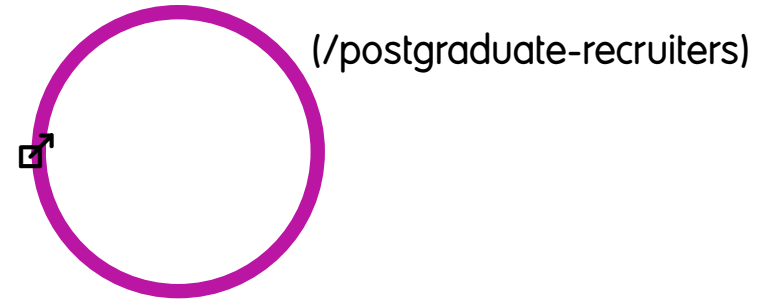
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