Clinical Doctorate Applications and Interviews

Guidelines for Clinical Doctorate Applications

Read the General Guidelines produced by the Clinical Clearing House at www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp and the detailed guidelines provided by each institution carefully, where you’ll also find the online application form. It’s also extremely useful to read the Alternative Handbook (available from the BPS shop https://shop.bps.org.uk) to get insight into the different courses from current and recent students.

Choosing where to apply

It is essential to check you meet the eligibility criteria specified by each institution, as these can differ. Don’t waste your choices by applying to an institution for which you don’t meet the criteria – up to 20% of applications are rejected on this basis.

For some institutions eg East London you now need to complete online tests (including verbal reasoning and shape-sequencing tests) and additional questions as part of the application process, to evaluate your critical thinking skills and capacity for making judgments in complex situations. Edinburgh started using these test in 2015-16 too. You must achieve scores on these procedures that place you in the upper 75th percentile, and have to re-sit the testing procedures in person (eg on the day of interview) to confirm your scores. Some institutions also use General Mental Ability (GMA) tests eg Lancaster University.

When deciding where to apply, as well as ensuring you meet the eligibility criteria specified by each of your chosen institutions, it’s important to consider your preferred learning styles, and locations you’re prepared to work in. Different institutions have different teaching methods and different areas of interest. Check these out. Make sure you’re comfortable with those to which you apply.

If you have location and client-group choices, be honest in your selection of locations you’re prepared to work, and the client groups you prefer to work with. If you apply to Edinburgh and say you’re happy to work in the Highlands – make sure you mean it. Similarly with the client group; e.g. don’t tick specialising in working with children, unless you really would be happy to accept that specialism.

Your personal statement

In the online application your personal statement is very important. It includes reflections on your work and research experience and if applicable includes publications and disseminations resulting from your work. You need to articulate your personal suitability for the role by reflecting on your academic, research and work experience. At some institutions including Edinburgh University your application will be scored more highly if you have a Masters or Doctorate in Psychology, have worked as a Clinical Psychology Assistant or have direct, relevant experience with the client group.

The word limit is restricted to 3000 characters so you need to be concise. Remember that this is a reflective, not a descriptive, piece of writing – you need to demonstrate what you
have learned from your experiences and that you can also apply your academic learning appropriately to clinical/practical settings.

**Guidelines for Clinical Doctorate Interviews**

All courses include interviews to test clinical, academic, and research knowledge and experience and your reflection on all these aspects in relation to becoming a clinical psychologist. Interview panels always include both academic staff and NHS staff. Some institutions may also include service users and carers, and current trainees (often third years) as interview panellists.

Additional selection activities may include:
- Research related written task
- Clinical task with related written exercise
- Situational judgement tests
- Research interview panel
- Practitioner interview panel
- Group discussion/exercise
- Case scenarios – reading about clients and outlining your approach to working with them
- Client related exercise
- Numeracy and literacy skills tests
- Presentations possible on your research proposal for the D.ClinPsych
- Structured role-play scenario
- Methodological and statistical questions on provided research abstracts

Lancaster University provides examples of the sort of exercises they use in selection – including videoed examples, which you can view [here](#).

You will find examples of some questions asked of recent applicants at the end of this document. However, it’s important to stress that questions and formats change each year, so don’t just rehearse answers to specific questions. Make sure you research the themes for questions outlined below, and are comfortable discussing them. Many candidates will apply several times before they are successful. To avoid the potential for you to be asked the same questions in consecutive years (and/or passing on the questions to new applicants), questions change each year.

**Potential themes covered in the interview include the following:**

- The NHS
- Clinical interventions and experience
- Knowledge of psychology particularly related to clinical research and practice
- Reflections on your own experience and research
- Professional issues including diversity, equality, confidentiality
- The role of CPs and other health related professionals
- Cross and multi-disciplinary team working
- Supervision
- Research
- Personal issues
Advice on what to expect in an interview for a Clinical Psychology course from a clinical psychology course recruiter.

1) you are very unlikely to get an interview unless you have good, relevant experience involving contact with a Clinical Psychologist. You can then ask the clinical psychologist about the topics normally covered in the interview. If you are not working with a clinical psychologist, you should ensure you make contact with one before your interview (eg via ESPAG* meetings in the east of Scotland - they also organise Interview Preparation Groups for those applying for the Doctorate). Most clinical psychologists would be OK about giving some time to discuss interviews with candidates.

2) Try to ensure that you gain experience in the year or two prior to application which you can reflect upon and talk about in an interview. You will always be asked to discuss a case you have worked with in a clinical setting. If you have only done research posts, this work can be in a voluntary capacity.

3) You will almost always be asked to discuss some research with clinical relevance too. Your undergraduate thesis is OK but relevant research after graduating is better (again, this is OK if it is voluntary).

4) You will also always be asked about relevant NHS policies influencing clinical psychology

5) You need to demonstrate understanding of how clinical psychologists work e.g. evidence based practise, formulation, generic skills and the personal qualities required to be a clinical psychologist.

Finally, don’t be put off by the competitive process - it is this way due to the popularity of the job and it is definitely worth the hard work and patience to get there!

Information and advice from first year Clinical Psychology trainees on their experience of the interview and how to prepare.

Student 1
Questions change year to year, so be prepared to think flexibly during your interview. Use these questions as themes to focus your interview preparation.

2 questions I remember:
1) Tell me about some research you’d like to conduct.
2) Tell me about two opposing views in psychology.

Student 2
It’s important to prepare general areas rather than specific questions. A few things I focused on were current issues within clinical psychology, ethical issues, the role of clinical psychology, work in MDTs (Multi Disciplinary Teams) and my personal qualities and how they benefit or hinder my work as a clinical psychologist.
Student 3

Useful interview preparation is to think of the key themes that are relevant to the role of Trainee and Clinical Psychologist e.g. Reflection, ethics, policy, service development.

Student 4

The questions asked were always along the same themes, (see below) and it’s useful to have an understanding of those themes in preparation for interview rather than having specific questions to look at.

Typical themes include:
- either good practice or something that didn't go so well (and how did you deal with that)
- something around MDT working
- some kind of general knowledge of basic models in psychology (undergrad stuff)
- what has prepared you for working as a psychologist - being able to reflect on this
- something around service issues and current drivers in psychology
- knowledge of any research you have conducted
- + all the stuff the others have already mentioned.

Student 5

It’s helpful to think of the clinical and the academic sections of the interview as separate sections (although there was always some crossover).

In the academic interview there was a prepared review of a research paper (strengths and weaknesses) and themes of research ideas, current debates in psychology... and more

In the clinical interview I recall an ethical vignette of the ‘what would you do if?’ type, questions on MDT working, models of psychology, personal strengths and weaknesses (probably phrased differently) and policy hot topics like Local Delivery Plans etc.

And Finally ....

....the online forum ClinPsy, for people interested in Clinical Psychology, has helpful posts on many matters relating to a career in Clinical Psychology, including DClin application and interview advice eg. www.clinpsy.org.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=32&t=18313 – advice for the clinical psychology interview.

Janet Forsyth (University of Edinburgh) and Sandi Thomson (University of Aberdeen) with grateful thanks for insights and information supplied by staff and students at both universities.

*ESPAG – East of Scotland Psychology Assistant Group – a group of aspiring psychologist from a range of backgrounds who meet together monthly at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Morningside, for peer support, talks and discussion of relevant ideas in a welcoming environment. Contact ESPAG via ESPAG@hotmail.com

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