

## **Hints and Tips for Applying**

### **STRENGTHENING YOUR APPLICATION FOR CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

The pointers listed below represent the views of the Glasgow/West of Scotland Programme and reflect the issues we considered in short listing this year. Other programmes may have different views and the emphasis on this programme may change over time. Obviously, few applicants fit the bill one hundred per cent. Most are stronger in some areas than others. There are more candidates with appropriate qualifications than there are places, so being rejected this time does not necessarily make yours a bad application.

#### **WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?**

##### **Academic and Research Ability**

A strong degree is essential (2.i or better). We have to be sure that you will be capable of undertaking a doctorate level of study. Other evidence of your academic and research ability comes from research/academic activity undertaken since qualifying (research assistant posts, appropriate postgraduate qualification, in-service research work), publications and your academic reference. The style of your application form also reflects how far your work is grounded in psychological theory. Research work in a clinical relevant area is preferred.

##### **Clinical Ability**

Some clinical experience is essential. This can take the form of voluntary or paid work in a "caring" setting (e.g. social services supported living accommodation, mental health services nursing assistant). The best clinical experience involves working contact with clinical psychologists in a clinical or relevant research setting and, in practice, most (but not all) successful applicants have experience of this kind. A reference from a clinical psychologist with whom you work is useful, particularly if they have worked with applicants to clinical psychology programmes before and have written references in the past. Quality is more important than length of experience. Your clinical ability will be judged by your experience, the way you present this on the form, and your clinical reference.

##### **Are You Personally Suited To This Career?**

Are you confident, hard working and organised? Do you work well with others?

Do you understand what the day-to-day work of a Psychologist entails? Would you engage well with patients and others in treatment? This will be judged using your application form and your references. A little information about your interests and activities outside work is helpful in presenting a well rounded picture of you as a person.

Are you committed to the profession and the health service? Are you motivated?

Your commitment and motivation will be judged by your career path to date, the way you express this in the form, and your references. Have you been involved in voluntary work? Have you taken advantage of opportunities to develop your skills/knowledge? Have you tried to get work published? Do your activities to date show that you are focused on a career in clinical psychology? Would you stay in the profession after qualifying? Would you contribute to the National Health Service in Scotland?

### **WHICH ASPECTS OF AN APPLICATION FORM MIGHT PRESENT PROBLEMS?**

## **References**

These are important. It is not only who you ask, but also what they say. Think hard about how you have worked with your referee. Do you know if your referee feels very positive about you and your work? If you do not know, try to seek some feedback from him (or her), regarding this, and areas which you need to improve. Try to elicit a frank discussion about whether your referee really thinks you will be suitable for training as a clinical psychologist. If he (or she) does not know you very well, are there opportunities for your referee to become more familiar with your work? Make sure your academic referee can comment on your academic and research abilities. Your clinical referee should be in a position to comment on your abilities in a clinical setting.

## **Presentation**

Dense tiny text, spelling mistakes, repetitive text, long complex sentences and poor grammar make the application difficult to read, and will reduce its impact. Although the Clearing House encourages you to put in only relevant experience, at Glasgow we find it helpful to have all gaps filled and consider that activities such as caring for children or travel abroad are relevant to your application. We have contacted applicants from time to time to obtain further information.

## **GBR By Unusual Means**

Often people who have obtained GBR without a first degree in psychology have an ungraded qualification. You might need to concentrate harder on presenting your academic skills and your academic referee will be particularly important.

## **Unusual Career Paths**

This applies particularly to mature applicants who have more life experiences. While the additional experience is often useful to the application, it can be a disadvantage if your career path is perceived to lack focus. We have had very positive experience of people entering the profession later on.

## **Too Much Experience?**

If you have been applying to clinical psychology for some time and have good experience, it may appear to the selection panel that your more recent experience has not strengthened your application. For example, a third year as a psychology assistant added to essentially the same application will not make you a stronger candidate than last year and, with each year, the effort you put into gaining experience will reap diminishing returns. A long gap since your first degree is a disadvantage, particularly in the absence of evidence of continued academic interests. Try to get some frank feedback from people who know your work well.

## **WHAT ABOUT MASTER'S DEGREES AND PhDs?**

Additional degrees are by no means the norm among applicants. Some obtain a masters degree to enhance their application and there is no doubt that a relevant qualification provides further evidence of your academic and research ability. Make sure that you are happy with the content of a Master's course before accepting a place. Clinical experience is still essential.

An additional degree will not compensate for a first degree which is lower than a 2.1.

Completing a PhD just to apply for clinical psychology is a long route into the profession. Consider that after three years, you could still lack sufficient clinical experience, or not be on track

to complete the PhD in time to enter clinical training (you may not complete other qualifications while on the course). If you are interested in the PhD in its own right and have a particular interest in research, this route enables you to keep doors open into an academic/research career while strengthening your clinical application.