



Inspiring and attracting into careers in mental health

A practical guide to supporting employability

Introduction



- Aim and purpose of the guide
 - In this guide you will be introduced to ideas about employability and examples of how you may be able to enhance the employability of your students looking to move into careers in mental health
 - It is aimed at helping students to be able to identify their skills, develop their employability and prepare for job applications and interviews
 - This guide will cover:
 - What is “employability”?
 - The breadth of careers in mental health
 - Key activities to improve employability
 - Key basic skills
 - Transferable skills: writing, research, initiative, leadership
 - Job-specific skills – the right skills, the right way
 - Identifying and addressing skill gaps
 - Building confidence and leadership ability
 - Help and advice with finding work
 - Work experience, placements and internships
- Who the guide is aimed at
 - Staff working in education settings supporting students with their future employability in mental health careers
 - Ambassadors within mental health services who are working with students to raise their awareness and understanding of careers in mental health

The guide can be used flexibly in its applications e.g. content can inform presentations/ suggested activities can be undertaken/ resource links can be shared with students

What is employability/

Employability refers to the ability of an individual to obtain and maintain employment. It encompasses the skills, knowledge, and attributes that make someone a desirable candidate in the workforce, both for initial jobs and for continued career progression.

Employability is not just about getting a job, but about having the skills, knowledge, and attributes that make individuals attractive to employers and enable them to thrive in the workplace.

Key Aspects of Employability:

Skills:

- Technical skills and qualifications relevant to specific roles, as well as core skills like communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

Knowledge:

- Understanding of industry trends, relevant regulations, and the broader context of the job market.

Personal Attributes:

- Qualities like adaptability, resilience, initiative, work ethic, and a positive attitude.

Experience:

- Practical experience gained through internships, volunteer work, or previous employment.

Why is Employability Important?

Economic Benefits:

- A highly employable workforce drives economic growth and competitiveness.

Individual Success:

- Employability helps individuals increase their confidence, secure desirable jobs, achieve career goals, fulfil potential and experience greater job satisfaction.

Societal Impact:

- A skilled and adaptable workforce contributes to the overall well-being of society.

Developing Employability:

Formal Education:

- Acquiring relevant knowledge and skills through education and training.

Work Experience:

- Gaining practical skills and experience through internships, part-time jobs, or volunteer work.

Soft Skills Development:

- Improving communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities through workshops, courses, or mentorship.

Self-Reflection and Continuous Learning:

- Identifying strengths and weaknesses, seeking feedback, and engaging in ongoing learning to stay relevant in the job market.

Key activities to improve employability

There are a number of activities that students can be supported with to increase their employability success and a helpful structure to enable this is to approach it through the pillars of: Inspire, Attract and Recruit

Think about how to embed these into module outcomes and corresponding marking criteria for existing assessments

1. Inspire

- Understand motivations for wanting to work in mental health
- Get a sense of the type of work they think they would like to get into
- Open up their eyes to understand the range of roles and careers there are in mental health
- Share resources and information about where to find out more

2. Attract

- Help identifying skills and competencies needed to work in mental health and support to identify strengths and areas for development
- Confidence building activities
- Spending time in a business or organisation on placement – volunteering/ part time employment
- Being able to shadow a professional person in their job – placement
- Help researching the jobs market
- Practising presentation skills
- Develop skills, such as effective interpersonal communication
- Identify key basic skills that all employers expect people to be able to use in context: e.g. literacy, numeracy and ICT

3. Recruit

- Help with Personal Statements/ CVs
- Help with where to look and how to apply
- Being able to have mock interviews with employers



Employability Skills

Key activities to improve employability

- Hands-on employability is a good idea to consider ways that you can build exposure to workplaces and actual work experience into your course or programme. This may include:
 - Work placements
 - Internships
 - Sandwich courses
 - Volunteering on projects with organisations
 - Site visits
 - Professional mentoring
 - Entrepreneurship initiatives in which students run real or simulated businesses
- One-to-one discussions about potential career directions and what they need to do to prepare.
- Specialised CV and personal statement writing sessions that ensures they accentuate their fitness for posts they plan to apply for, and practice in navigating the kinds of interview processes that they can expect – remembering that these differ from field to field

Key activities to improve employability

- Enquiry or problem-based learning, either individually or in groups, can also address key areas of employability.
 - This can be structured to include experienced of teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving and project management – precisely the skills that employers say they wish to see in graduates.
 - In some cases the output from these learning experiences can be the prize exhibit in a student portfolio: evidence of what students can do as well as what they know.
 - Lecturers/ teachers can also take other steps to increase the amount of exposure students have to professionals in their field, such as: •
 - Endeavouring to regularly use speakers and Visiting Lecturers from industry/ the sector
 - Contact with professionals through attendance at conferences or talks on campus
 - Membership in relevant professional organisations and attending their events
 - Ensuring that courses and programmes are, when appropriate, accredited by external professional bodies

Inspire

Inspiring students to be interested in finding out more about careers in mental health

The aim here is to work with students at the earliest point (e.g. in thinking about GCSE options/ year 1 of an undergraduate degree) to help them to:

- Understand their motivations for wanting to work in mental health
- Get a sense of the type of work they think they would like to get into
- Open up their eyes to understand the range of roles and careers there are in mental health
- Learn about useful resources and information and where to find out more

Activity:

The value of working in mental health..... the inspiration!



What, or who, is it that
that makes you want to
work in mental health?

What type of role/ job
would you like to go into?

Would you like to work
with e.g. adults or
children?

Activity: Quiz question.....

What are the different
jobs in mental health
you can go into?



Psychological professions

These are career options if you have a psychology degree and have Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC) with the British Psychological Society (BPS) to pursue postgraduate training in psychology.

Some of these posts are also possible via an apprenticeship route.

Paid to train and have a job!!!

Some posts are funded in terms of training and working at the same time

Psychological practitioners

Psychological wellbeing practitioner (PWP)

Education mental health practitioner (EMHP)

Children's Wellbeing Practitioner (CWP)

Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner (MHWP)

Youth Intensive Psychological Practitioner (YIPP)

Psychological therapists

Counsellor

Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist (CAPT)

Adult Psychotherapist

Family and Systemic Psychotherapist

Art, Drama and Music Therapist

Psychological Therapist (other)

Psychologists

Health Psychologist

Counselling Psychologist

Forensic Psychologist

Clinical Psychologist

Clinical Associate in Psychology

Assistant Psychologist

Psychological Professions

CAREER MAP

PSYCHOLOGISTS



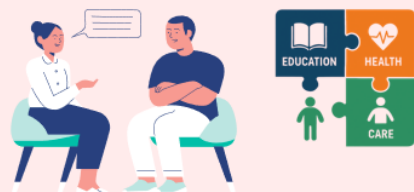
Role: Psychologists	Description	Training required
Assistant Psychologist	Supports qualified psychologists in assessments and interventions	BSc Psychology + Experience
Clinical psychologist	Works with individuals of all ages to assess and treat a wide range of mental health conditions. Uses evidence-based therapies and contributes to research, service development, and supervision.	BSc Psychology → HCPC-accredited Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (3 years, salaried NHS training)
Health Psychologist	Helps people manage the psychological and emotional aspects of health, illness, and healthcare. They work to promote healthy behaviours and support people in managing chronic conditions.	BSc Psychology → Accredited MSc in Health Psychology → Stage 2 Doctoral-level training (supervised practice)
Counselling Psychologist	Helps people manage a wide range of emotional, psychological, and mental health issues, often using integrative approaches. Works with individuals across the lifespan to improve wellbeing and coping.	BSc Psychology → Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (HCPC-accredited)
Forensic Psychologist	Applies psychological theory and practice to criminal and legal settings. Works with offenders, victims, and professionals to assess, treat, and manage risk and behaviour.	BSc Psychology → MSc in Forensic Psychology + 2 years supervised practice (Stage 2) or HCPC-accredited Doctorate

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPISTS



Role: Psychological Therapists	Description:	Training required:
Counsellor	Provides talking therapies to help people manage emotional difficulties	Counselling qualifications (Diploma / PGDip / MSc)
Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist (CAPT)	Provides in-depth psychotherapy for children and adolescents with emotional and psychological challenges	Postgraduate training in child and adolescent psychotherapy
Cognitive Behavioural Therapist (CBT Therapist)	Specialises in helping individuals manage mental health difficulties by changing negative thought patterns and behaviours	Postgraduate diploma or MSc in CBT
Clinical Associate in Psychology (CAP)	Delivers psychologically-informed care under supervision. Works in specific service areas such as adult mental health or learning disabilities.	BSc Psychology + Specialist MSc (2 years)
Family and Systemic Psychotherapist	Works with individuals, families, and groups to address and improve family dynamics, relationships, and mental health	Postgraduate training in family and systemic psychotherapy (4-6 years)
Art, Drama and Music Therapist	Uses creative processes to help clients express emotions and support mental wellbeing	Degree in relevant art/drama/music subject + HCPC-approved MA in therapy
Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist (CAPT)	Provides in-depth psychotherapy for children and adolescents with emotional and psychological challenges	Postgraduate training in child and adolescent psychotherapy
Psychologist Therapists (Other)	Qualified professionals trained in a specific therapy model to support people with particular mental health needs. Examples include: DBT; EMDR; DIT; IPT; CAT	Requires an existing core mental health or therapy qualification. Further specialist training in chosen therapy model (some may require prior psychological therapy training/accreditation)

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTITIONERS



Role: Psychological Practitioners	Description:	Training required:
Children's Wellbeing Practitioner (CWP)	Works with children aged 5–18, providing low-intensity psychological interventions for mild to moderate mental health difficulties	Graduate + 1-year CWP training programme
Education Mental Health Practitioner (EMHP)	Supports children and young people with mild to moderate mental health difficulties in schools and colleges	Graduate + 1-year EMHP training programme
Youth Intensive Psychological Practitioner (YIPP)	Provides intensive therapeutic interventions for young people with mental health difficulties	Graduate + Specialist training in working with young people and complex needs
Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP)	Delivers low-intensity mental health support, often in NHS Talking Therapies	Graduate + 1-year PWP training
Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner (MHWP)	Provides mental health support and wellbeing interventions across various community settings	Graduate + MHWP training

Introducing the roles in practice

- The video resources that follow have been developed in Cheshire and Merseyside to inspire and inform interested individuals – primarily psychology graduates or those with some prior mental health work experience – regarding the large spectrum of role opportunities in the mental health system which they may not have previously known about or considered.
- The resources include short vlog / video content profiling the different role opportunities, delivered by current trainees or employees working in these roles.
- The vlogs incorporate information regarding the individual's backgrounds, what they contribute to the system, and how future candidates can apply.
- The videos are supported by written job descriptions and vacancy links where applicable, but the vlogs are the focal point for driving maximum engagement.

Introducing the roles in practice – longer videos



Jemma (Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner) -
[Download here](#)



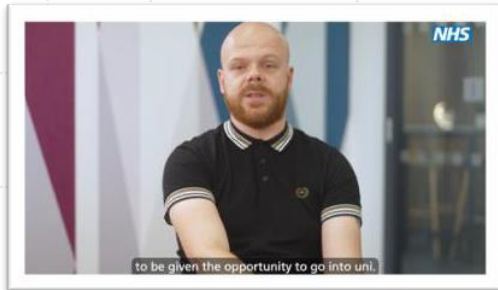
Jenny (Trainee Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner) -
[Download here](#)



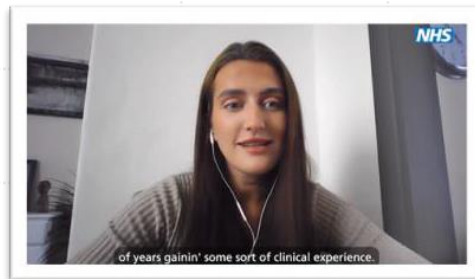
Dr Steve Jones (National Psychological Advisor) -
[Download here](#)



Natalia (Associate Psychological Practitioner) -
[Download here](#)



Sam (Nursing Associate) -
[Download here](#)



Phoebe (Assistant Psychologist) -
[Download here](#)



Rebecca (Educational Mental Health Practitioner) -
[Download here](#)



Shannen (Educational Mental Health Practitioner) -
[Download here](#)

Introducing the roles in practice – Shorter videos



Jemma (Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner) - [Download here](#)



Jenny (Trainee Mental Health and Wellbeing Practitioner) - [Download here](#)



Sam (Nursing Associate) - [Download here](#)



Natalia (Associate Psychological Practitioner) - [Download here](#)




Phoebe (Assistant Psychologist) - [Download here](#)



Shannen (Educational Mental Health Practitioner) - [Download here](#)



Rebecca (Education Mental Health Practitioner) - [Download here](#)



Other mental health careers

Mental health nursing

Mental health pharmacy

Creative therapy support roles

Occupational therapy

Support time and recovery worker

Pharmacists

Pharmacy technicians

Social worker

Speech and language therapy assistant

Occupational therapy support worker

Assistant practitioners

Prison nurse

Dietetic assistant

Nursing associate

Physician associate

Peer support worker

Education and training required

Depending on which career route you take you may need:

- Master's level psychology conversion course (for psychologist posts)
- Clinical training and qualification
- Post Graduate Certificate/ diploma
- Training spent gaining practice skills under supervision in both in-patient and intensive community treatment settings.

Attract

Starting to encourage students to think about the career path/ areas of interest they wish to pursue within mental health

The aim here is to work with students at the earliest point (e.g. in thinking about A level options/ year 2 of an undergraduate degree) to help them to:

- Identify the skills and competencies needed to work in mental health and support to identify strengths and areas for development
- Build their confidence
- Spend time in a business or organisation – placement/ volunteering/ part time employment
- Be able to shadow a professional person in their job – placement
- Research the jobs market
- Practise presentation skills
- Develop skills, such as effective interpersonal communication

Activity: Quiz question.....

In addition to your
education/ qualification
what else will you need?





Knowledge, skills, abilities and experience (KSAEs)

- It is helpful to start by thinking about the general knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences that are frequently required within roles in mental health – these are set out in the job description and person specification for the role
 - From here consideration needs to be given to the additional knowledge, skills, abilities and experiences that may be required for specific roles

Activity: Assessing personal KSAEs

1. The starting point to support students is to help them think about the following:

- **Knowledge:** What you know (e.g., theories, concepts, procedures).
- **Skills:** What you can do (e.g., writing, coding, project management).
- **Abilities:** Your capacity to apply knowledge and skills in various situations (e.g., critical thinking, leadership).
- **Experience:** What you've done and how you've applied your knowledge/skills.
- Encouraging students to understand the difference and how each applies in job settings is a helpful activity

2. Help students identify their KSAEs:

- Use worksheets or digital tools (e.g., skills inventories, career assessments).
- Ask reflective questions such as:
 - What projects have you completed?
 - What roles have you taken in group work?
 - What knowledge, skills and abilities have you had to use?
 - What do others say you're good at?
 - What areas do you think you could develop more?
- Encourage them to pull from all areas: academics, extracurriculars, volunteering, part-time jobs, and personal projects

Knowledge, skills, abilities and experience

(the technical terminology often seen in person specifications)

Skills

- Excellent communication (verbal and written) and interpersonal skills
- Demonstrable motivation, commitment and ability to study at degree level or above
- Basic counselling skills

Abilities

- Recognise the expression of emotion in others and how it manifests in their behaviour
- Build trusting and productive relationships with a wide range of people in a variety of situations
- Work well within a multidisciplinary team
- Work independently where appropriate
- Use initiative to think quickly on the spot, often in challenging situations and with competing priorities
- Ability to work non-judgementally with difference and diversity.

Knowledge

- Values consistent with providing hopeful, person-centred care
- Understanding of, and commitment to working with, people with mental health needs
- Knowledge and skills in looking after your own mental wellbeing at the same time as supporting others with theirs

Experience

- Working in mental health, education, special needs or social services
- Working in settings where they have engaged with people experiencing mental health difficulties (children and/or adults).

Knowledge, skills, abilities and experience

(the plain English version of what is seen in person specifications)

Skills

- Can communicate clearly and well, both speaking and writing, and get along well with others
- Motivated, dedicated, and can handle studying at a college or university level
- Have some basic skills in counseling or helping people talk through issues

Abilities

- Notice how people show their feelings through their behaviour
- Build trust and good relationships with lots of different people in different situations
- Work well as part of a team with people from different backgrounds
- Be able to work on your own when needed
- Think quickly and use your own judgment, especially in tough or busy situations
- Treat everyone fairly and without bias, respecting differences and diversity


Knowledge

- Believe in giving care that focuses on the person and helps them feel hopeful
- Understand and want to support people who have mental health challenges
- Know how to take care of your own mental health while helping others with theirs

Experience

- Experience working in mental health, education, special needs, or social services
- Have worked with children or adults who have mental health challenges

Activity: Skills audit



A skills audit for students is a process where they assess their existing skills and identify areas for improvement.



It helps students understand their strengths, pinpoint skill gaps, and plan for future development, particularly in the context of career preparation and academic projects.

What it involves:

Self-assessment:

A skills audit involves students reflecting on their abilities and evaluating their proficiency in various skills.

Identifying strengths and weaknesses:

It helps students recognise what they are good at and where they need to develop further.

Gap analysis:

It identifies gaps between current skill levels and the skills required for future goals, such as academic projects or career paths.

- This can help inform a student as to the type of work experience or volunteering opportunity they may wish to pursue to be able to enhance the breadth of their skills

Focus on transferable skills:

Skills audits often highlight transferable skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving) that are valuable in various contexts, including academic and professional settings

Activity: Skills audit

Skills required Students can add to the examples of skills provided below by listing skills they feel are relevant to their career interests,	Skill levels Students can rate their proficiency in each skill using a scale of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very skilled • moderately skilled • in need of training/development 	Evidence Students should provide examples or evidence to support their self-assessment.	Identified gaps By comparing their current skills with required skills, students can identify gaps and areas needing improvement.	Development plan Students can create a plan for further development, such as seeking training, taking on new challenges, or engaging in relevant activities such as volunteering or work experience.
Understanding Mental Health: Recognising signs and symptoms of various conditions.				
Active Listening and Communication: Effectively communicating with individuals experiencing mental health challenges.				
Empathy and Compassion: Showing understanding and support for others' emotional states.				
Problem-Solving and Decision-Making: Developing strategies and making appropriate decisions in mental health contexts.				
Referral and Resource Navigation: Knowing when and how to connect individuals with appropriate support services.				
Self-Care and Boundaries: Maintaining personal well-being and setting healthy boundaries in a demanding role.				



Activity: Matching KSAEs to job descriptions and person specifications

- The aim here is to teach students to analyse job descriptions and person specifications. This can be done by asking a student to pick out a job/ role of interest and:
 - Encouraging them to highlight the required qualifications, experiences and skills.
 - Using a T-chart or matrix to map their own KSAEs to those required for the post
 - Supporting them to identify gaps and consider how transferable skills or ongoing learning can address them.

How to develop the experience/ skills needed

Paid or voluntary
roles

- shadowing health psychologists working with patients with pain management issues
- helping support patients with stroke rehabilitation
- nursing
- social care work
- mental health work
- witness service or victim support
- education or youth service settings
- services for individuals with disabilities is also useful..
- bail hostels and refuges
- voluntary organisations and charities
- drug or alcohol treatment centres
- secure hospitals and rehabilitation units
- young people's services, such as a regional youth offending service

How to develop the experience/ skills needed

Lived experience of
mental health

- yourself or others around you

Experience working
under the
supervision of a
qualified
practitioner

- a chance to experience mental health in a work environment

Experience as a
research assistant

- helpful to have a good balance of experience in both academic and applied health areas

Placements

Student placements as part of a work experience scheme or as a core part of a degree curriculum offer numerous benefits, including gaining practical work experience, applying academic knowledge in real-world settings, and developing key skills for future careers.

They also enhance employability, build professional networks, and can even lead to job offers from placement providers.

The advantages for students can include:

- **Enhanced Employability:** Placements provide valuable work experience that makes students more attractive to graduate employers.
- **Career Exploration:** Placements allow students to test out different career paths and confirm their career goals.
- **Skill Development:** Students acquire practical skills, both technical and soft skills, relevant to their field.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Placements facilitate the building of professional relationships with industry professionals, mentors, and potential employers.
- **Applying Theory to Practice:** Placements bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world application of knowledge.
- **Increased Confidence:** Successfully navigating a placement environment can boost students' confidence in their abilities.
- **Potential for Job Offers:** Many employers use placements as a way to recruit graduates, with a significant percentage of placement students receiving job offers from their placement providers.
- **Financial Benefits:** Placement years can provide a source of income, allowing students to save for their final year of study.
- **Improved Academic Performance:** Studies show that students who undertake placements may perform better academically in their final year.
- **Clarified Career Goals:** Placements help students understand what they want and don't want in a future career.
- **Familiarisation with working patterns:** Placements provide students the opportunity to experience different working patterns and the benefits and limitations of these (e.g home based working; setting based working and/ or hybrid working)
- **Research and knowledge gathering:** Placements can provide students with access to professionals, people who access services, experience of processes etc that can inform assignments and dissertations

Recruit

Supporting students to feel confident in applying for opportunities to work in mental health

The aim here is to work with students at the earliest point (e.g. undertaking A levels/ year 3 of an undergraduate degree) to help them to:

- Know where to look for vacancies and opportunities and how to apply
- Prepare a Personal Statement/ CV
- Complete a job application
- Be able to undertake mock interviews (ideally with prospective employers)

Applying for jobs

Job applications can be submitted through various methods including online forms, email, or even in person. Many companies utilise online application portals on their websites, while others may prefer email exchanges or physical application forms. Networking, directly contacting employers, and even walking in to inquire about opportunities are also effective strategies.

It is important to help students to find out more about the different processes that are used by organisations and familiarise themselves with the application process (for example the websites to look onto; the pages on the websites; the categories and headings used; the application process used).

1. Online Applications:

- **Company Websites:** Most companies have dedicated career sections on their websites where they post job openings and accept applications through online forms.
- **Online Job Boards:** Websites like Indeed, NHS Jobs, and LinkedIn aggregate job postings from various companies and allow candidates to apply directly.

Tips for Online Applications:

- Create a professional email address and check it regularly.
- Prepare application materials (resume, cover letter) in advance and save them as Word documents.
- Pay close attention to word count limits and character limits.
- Proofread all submitted information carefully.
- Save a copy of your application for future reference.

2. Email Applications:

- **Direct Email:** Some companies may prefer or accept applications via email, especially if they don't have a formal online application system.

Tips for Email Applications:

- Use a clear and concise subject line.
- Address the recipient professionally and include a salutation.
- Use the body of the email to introduce yourself and summarise your qualifications.
- Attach your resume and cover letter as separate files.
- Proofread carefully before sending.

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3. Physical application forms

- **In-Person Applications:** Some companies, especially smaller businesses or those with a strong local presence, may still use paper application forms.

Tips for Physical Applications:

- Request a form from an employee or manager.
- Fill it out neatly and completely.
- If possible, submit it in person or arrange for a return date.
- Consider bringing a pre-filled sample form for reference.

4. Direct Contact:

- **Networking:** Reaching out to professionals in your field, attending industry events, or connecting on social media can lead to valuable job leads.
- **Employer Contact:** Reaching out to a company directly via email, phone, or even in person can be a great way to express your interest and inquire about potential opportunities.

5. Other Methods:

- **Job Fairs:** Attending job fairs can be a great way to meet with recruiters and learn about potential opportunities.
- **Referrals:** Having a referral from a current employee can significantly boost your chances of getting hired.
- **Internships/Volunteer Work:** Gaining experience through internships or volunteer work can make your resume stand out and help you connect with potential employers.

Personal statement versus CV

Think of the personal statement as your elevator pitch, while the CV is the full presentation

A personal statement highlights your skills, experience, and career goals, tailored to a specific job.

The personal statement serves as a concise summary and "pitch" to grab the recruiter's attention



Use when applying for jobs, particularly when the application requires a personal statement section or when you want to highlight specific skills and experiences for a particular role.

A CV (Curriculum Vitae) is a comprehensive document detailing your work history, education, skills, and qualifications

The CV provides a more detailed overview of your professional background.



Use for most job applications, graduate school applications, and when applying for research positions.

Key Differences:

- **Purpose:** The personal statement aims to attract the reader to the rest of your CV, while the CV provides the detailed information.
- **Length:** Personal statements are typically short (3-6 sentences or around 50-150 words), while CVs can be longer, often one to two pages.
- **Content:** The personal statement focuses on your most relevant skills, experience, and career goals for the specific job application, while the CV provides a complete record of your professional journey.
- **Specificity:** Personal statements are often tailored to each job application, while CVs can be more general and adapted with less frequent changes.

NOTE: most NHS jobs require personal statements

Drafting a personal statement – top tips

To create a compelling job application personal statement, focus on highlighting your relevant skills and experiences, tailoring it to each specific job, and using a clear, concise writing style. Provide specific examples to back up the points you make. Proofread carefully for any errors before submitting.

1. Tailor Your Statement:

- Carefully read the job description and identify the key skills and experiences the employer is seeking.
- Mirror the language used in the job description when describing your own qualifications.
- Showcase how your unique skills and experiences align with the specific requirements of the role.

2. Highlight Relevant Skills and Experience:

- Focus on skills and experiences directly related to the job.
- Use action verbs to describe your accomplishments and quantify them whenever possible.
- Instead of saying "I have good communication skills," try "I successfully presented project updates to stakeholders, resulting in increased project buy-in".

3. Showcase Your Personality and Enthusiasm:

- Let your passion for the role and the company shine through.
- Explain what excites you about the opportunity and how it fits into your career goals.
- Consider mentioning any relevant experiences, projects, or even individuals who have inspired you to pursue this career path.


4. Keep it Concise and Engaging:

- Aim for a paragraph or two, ensuring it's easy to read and digest.
- Use clear and simple language, avoiding jargon or clichés.
- Prioritise impactful statements and avoid filler phrases.

IMPORTANT:
demonstrate how you meet the essential criteria of the person spec (ideally in the context of the job description)

Activity: Building your personal statement

Objective: Students will draft a compelling and reflective personal statement tailored to a mental health job application by identifying key motivations, experiences and values.

 **Time**
Required: 45–60 minutes

Can be adjusted depending on time and depth of discussion

1. Warm-Up Reflection (10 minutes)

- **Prompt students with these questions (write answers in bullet points):**
 - Why do I want to work in the mental health field?
 - What personal or academic experiences inspired this interest?
 - What qualities make me suited to this work (e.g. empathy, patience, communication)?
 - What do I hope to contribute to the mental health field?

Tip: You can do this as a written reflection or small group discussion first

2. Skills and Experience Inventory (10 minutes)

- Ask students to write down:
 - Three relevant **academic experiences** (e.g., psychology classes, research projects)
 - Two relevant **practical experiences** (e.g., volunteering, caring for a friend, support roles)
 - Three **soft skills** that are important in mental health roles (e.g., listening, resilience)
- Then have them choose 1–2 of these to elaborate on in 2–3 sentences each.

Activity: Building your personal statement

3. Drafting Activity (20–25 minutes)

- **Structure the personal statement using a guided framework:**
- **Template for Drafting**
 - **Opening Paragraph:** Introduce your interest in mental health and what motivates you.
 - **Body Paragraph 1:** Describe a meaningful experience that shaped your interest.
 - **Body Paragraph 2:** Talk about your skills, training, or education that prepare you for the role.
 - **Closing Paragraph:** Share your goals and what you hope to bring to the organization/team.
- Encourage students to keep their tone professional yet personal.

4. Peer Review & Feedback (Optional – 10–15 minutes)

- Students can exchange drafts with a partner for feedback using simple guiding questions:
 - Is the motivation clear and authentic?
 - Are the experiences specific and relevant?
 - Does the tone match a professional mental health role?

Activity: STAR Stories

A **STAR story** is a structured way to describe a past experience that shows your **skills, problem-solving, and impact**—especially useful for interviews and applications.

- A helpful strategy is to support and enable students to structure their experiences using the **STAR** method:
 - **Situation** – Describe the context or background
 - **Task** – Explain your specific responsibility or goal
 - **Action** – Describe what steps you took and how you did it
 - **Result** – Share the outcome – quantified if possible
- This helps them effectively describe how they've demonstrated key KSAEs.

★ STAR Example: Supporting a Peer in Crisis

S – Situation:

During my second year of my psychology degree, I volunteered as a peer mentor through our university's mental health support initiative. One evening, a first-year student I was mentoring reached out feeling overwhelmed and experiencing symptoms of anxiety and panic.

T – Task:

My responsibility was to support them emotionally, help them feel safe, and guide them toward appropriate professional resources—all while staying within my role as a peer, not a counsellor.

A – Action:

I first validated their feelings and practiced active listening, giving them space to talk without interruption. I gently asked questions to better understand their situation and ensured they knew they weren't alone. I encouraged them to use grounding techniques we had covered in training and shared contact information for the campus counselling centre. I also followed up the next day to check in and confirm they had connected with professional help.

R – Result:

The student later told me that my calm presence helped them get through the night. They booked a counselling appointment and thanked me for not pressuring them but still guiding them toward support. I reflected on the experience in supervision and used it to improve how I handle crisis conversations in future roles.

Skills Demonstrated:

- Empathy and active listening
- Boundaries and ethical awareness
- Crisis communication
- Advocacy and follow-up

Portfolio of Evidence

A student's portfolio of evidence for employability is a collection of materials that showcase their knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences (KSAEs) to potential employers.

It helps students stand out by providing concrete proof of what they can do—not just what they say they can do.

- Encourage students to:
 - Keep a running list
 - digital portfolio (e.g. Google Drive, OneDrive, Notion, Adobe Portfolio, or LinkedIn's featured section).
 - PDF or printable version: Well-organised and professional for in-person interviews or networking
 - Include resumes, projects, presentations, certificates, feedback, etc.
 - Update it regularly to stay interview-ready.
- Tips for Building and Using It
 - Keep it updated regularly (new projects, skills, accomplishments)
 - Tailor what you share for each job application
 - Practice talking through it in interviews or career fairs
 - Use it for performance reviews or internships too

Activity: What to include in a portfolio of evidence

1. Personal Information & Goals

- Career objective or professional summary
- Short bio or elevator pitch
- Résumé or CV
- Cover letter templates

2. Evidence of Knowledge & Education

- Academic transcripts (optional or excerpts)
- Degree/certificates
- Relevant coursework or honours
- Research projects or thesis abstracts

3. Skills Documentation

- Hard skills: coding, lab reports, data analysis, languages
- Soft skills: communication, teamwork, leadership
- Certificates (e.g., First Aid, Mental Health First Aid, Microsoft Office)

Activity: What to include in a portfolio of evidence

4. Work & Volunteer Experience

- Job descriptions and achievements from paid or unpaid roles
- STAR stories (structured reflections on key experiences)
- Reference letters or testimonials from supervisors

5. Projects and Portfolios

- Samples of work: writing, designs, lesson plans, presentations, case studies, videos
- Group work contributions (with clarification of your role)
- Screenshots, links to websites

6. Professional Development

- Workshops, conferences, webinars attended
- Reflection summaries on what was learned
- Mentorship or leadership experiences

7. Reflection & Self-Assessment

- Skills inventory or gap analysis
- Learning journals or career reflections
- Goals and development plans

Mock interviews

Mock interviews can help students to:

- Articulate their KSAEs in response to behavioural interview questions.
- Get comfortable talking about achievements and skills.
- Receive feedback on clarity, confidence, and content.

- To effectively conduct mock interviews with students, focus on creating a realistic experience, providing constructive feedback, and emphasising preparation.
- Start by simulating a real interview setting, including attire and professional conduct. Where possible, invite local employers to participate in facilitating the interview.
- Encourage students to prepare by researching the company and practicing common interview questions, especially those using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).
- After the interview, provide detailed feedback on both strengths and areas for improvement, focusing on delivery, body language, and thought structure.

Activity: Conducting mock interviews (part 1)

1. Preparation is Key:

- **Research:** Encourage students to research the company and the specific job or opportunity they are preparing for. This includes understanding the company's mission, values, and culture, as well as the specific requirements of the role.
- **Common Questions:** Provide a list of common interview questions and have students practice answering them, using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure their responses.
- **Dress Rehearsal:** Emphasise the importance of appropriate attire for the mock interview, just as they would for a real interview.
- **Set the Stage:** Choose a professional setting for the mock interview, whether in-person or online. If in-person, practice greetings, handshakes, and eye contact.

2. Conducting the Mock Interview:

- **Time Management:** Aim for a 20–30 minute session to simulate a realistic interview timeframe.
- **Professionalism:** Maintain a professional demeanour throughout the interview, just as a real interviewer would.
- **Active Listening:** Listen attentively to the student's responses and ask clarifying questions when needed.
- **STAR Method:** Assess the effectiveness of the student's use of the STAR method in their answers.
- **Note Taking:** Take detailed notes on the student's performance, including strengths and areas for improvement.

Activity: Conducting mock interviews (part 2)

There are a range of questions that can be used within an interview – these are examples of questions that could be used

General Questions

1. Tell us about your background and experience in mental health care.
2. Why did you choose a career in mental health?
3. What do you find most rewarding and most challenging about working in this field?
4. What are your long-term professional goals in mental health?
5. How do you handle high-stress or emotionally intense situations?
6. Describe a typical day in your current (or previous) role – whether as a volunteer or in paid employment

Education & Training

1. What have you learned in your coursework or practicum that you think will help you in a real clinical setting?
2. Tell us about a project or assignment that deepened your understanding of mental health.
3. What skills have you developed during your academic training that will support your work with clients?

Professionalism & Ethics

1. What does confidentiality mean to you, and why is it important in mental health work?
2. How would you handle a situation where a client disclosed something serious but asked you not to tell anyone?
3. What are the boundaries between a mental health professional and their clients?

Activity: Conducting mock interviews (part 2)

There are a range of questions that can be used within an interview – these are examples of questions that could be used

Skills & Techniques

1. What therapeutic approaches are you familiar with?
2. How would you ensure your therapeutic approach is evidence-based?
3. How would you maintain professional boundaries with clients?
4. How would you handle confidentiality, especially in tricky situations involving family or legal concerns?
5. What role should cultural competence play in your practice?
6. Imagine a client becomes upset during a session. How would you handle it?
7. What would you do if you didn't know how to respond to a client's question?
8. If you suspected a client was at risk of harming themselves, what steps would you take?

Collaboration & Communication

1. How do you work with a multidisciplinary team?
2. How would you handle disagreements with colleagues regarding a client's treatment?
3. How would you involve family members in a client's care (when appropriate)?
4. Describe a situation where you had to advocate for someone.
5. How do you communicate complex or sensitive information to people?

Activity: Conducting mock interviews (part 2)

There are a range of questions that can be used within an interview – these are examples of questions that could be used

Behavioural questions using STAR Format

1. Tell me about a time you worked with someone from a different background than you. What did you learn?
2. Describe a situation where you had to manage a conflict or disagreement.
3. Can you give an example of a time you had to be patient or understanding in a challenging situation?

Self-Awareness, Growth and Professional Development

1. What areas do you think you still need to grow in professionally?
2. How do you take care of your own mental health?
3. What would you do if you made a mistake during a session or interaction with a client?
4. How do you practice self-care and prevent burnout?
5. What are your long-term goals in the mental health field?
6. Describe a time when you received constructive feedback. How did you respond?
7. How do you stay current with developments in mental health research or best practices?
8. Are you receiving supervision or ongoing training? If so, how has it impacted your practice

Activity: Conducting mock interviews (part 3)

3. Providing Feedback:

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Begin by highlighting the student's strengths and what they did well.
- **Constructive Criticism:** Focus on specific areas for improvement, such as delivery, body language, and thought structure.
- **Clarity and Conciseness:** Assess whether the student's answers were easy to understand and to the point.
- **Debrief:** Engage in a discussion with the student about their performance, allowing them to share their own assessment and reflect on the feedback.

4. Follow-up:

- **Written Feedback:** Provide the student with written feedback summarizing the key points from the debrief.
- **Actionable Steps:** Help the student develop specific action steps for improvement based on the feedback.
- **Continued Practice:** Encourage the student to continue practicing and refining their interview skills.

By following these steps, mock interviews can be a valuable tool for helping students develop the skills and confidence they need to succeed in real job interviews

Networking

Encouraging networking and informational interviews can help students to:

- learn real-world expectations
- hear how professionals talk about their work
- practice explaining their own KSAEs in a casual setting
- open doors beyond what's listed in job ads or career fairs
- access hidden job opportunities
- build relationships and mentorship
- gain sector/ industry insights
- develop communication and interpersonal skills
- create support systems

How Students Can Start Networking

- Attend career fairs, workshops, and industry talks.
- Join student clubs or professional associations related to their field.
- Use LinkedIn to connect with alumni, professors, and professionals.
- Conduct informational interviews to learn about careers and build rapport.
- Volunteer or intern to meet people and demonstrate skills firsthand.

Further information

What else can we
do to support you?

What more do you
want to know?

Psychological Professions Network – [PPN – Home](#)

- Career Map
- Psychological Professions Network newsletter
- Aspiring Psychological Professional Membership
 - you are not currently in a psychological profession, or training for a psychological profession, but you are considering a career in one of the psychological professional roles.

NHS Jobs – [Search for jobs in the NHS](#)

Healthcareers – [Health Careers I](#)

Local NHS foundation trusts – in Cheshire and Merseyside these are: Merseycare; Cheshire and Wirral Partnership; Alder Hey

- Organisational and service information
- Vacancies
- LinkedIn/ Instagram/X