Occupational Psychology

A Career Guide for Psychology Students

This guide has been produced to assist students considering a career in occupational psychology to effectively plan their route into their chosen role.

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**Overview**

Occupational Psychologists are interested in workplace dynamics and how they can support organisations, to improve overall wellbeing and effectiveness in the workplace. The role involves working with managers and employees at the core of the business environment. Occupational Psychologists, both in-house and consultancy based practices, conduct a wide range of activities, depending on the needs of the organisation. The British Psychological Society divides the work of an Occupational Psychologist into eight different specialist areas, as follows:

1. **Human machine interaction**
   This area covers health and safety and design of working environments to ensure the equipment which is installed, computer systems both software and hardware, enhances staff performance. Occupational Psychologists introduce changes in the working environment, to reduce human error.

2. **Design of work environments**
   Appropriate working conditions can improve staff productivity, increase job satisfaction and protect the health of workers. Risk assessments are conducted to ensure the correct lighting, noise and room temperature are in place. Occupational Psychologists write reports and provide recommendations through evaluating the office environment, such as, lighting, furniture and noise level. They also implement effective projects to improve the health and safety of the organisation.

3. **Personnel selection and assessment**
   Organisations need to make sure that right person is selected for the job through using the most appropriate and current methods or recruitment and selection.
   The most recent methods of recruitment and selection may include psychometric testing, assessment centres, structured interviews and group tests.
4. Performance appraisal and career development

- It is important for organisations to ensure that their employees are performing. Occupational Psychologists do this through providing coaching, advice, guidance and mentoring, to support employees with planning their careers and making progress. They also design and implement effective appraisal systems to monitor, measure and reward staff performance.
- Organisations also need to be aware of employee underperformance, and identify the reasons for any incompetence.

5. Counselling and Personal Development: Occupational Psychologists support people to cope with stressful events, re-structuring and challenges in their personal lives. They also provide careers guidance and coaching to underperforming employees. Occupational Psychologists also provide support to newly promoted managers and introduce effective Mentoring schemes.

6. Training

Staff efficiency depends on training, developing staff and addressing any gaps in a cost-effective way. Occupational Psychologists have a specialism in delivering, evaluating effective training and development programmes. They also conduct training design, needs and analysis and also deliver leadership workshops.

7. Employee relations and motivation

The relationships between an organisation and its employees is paramount, to drive success and gain maximum results. For an organisation to be successful staff motivation is crucial however, it is difficult to measure this. Employees need to feel that their efforts are recognised and they are respected and rewarded.

Occupational Psychologists introduce effective methods to recognise and reward staff achievements. They also conduct employee attitude surveys and assess the reasons for high staff turnover and recommend appropriate solutions.

Organisational Development and change: Occupational Psychologists support organisations, to plan and manage organisational change, such as, re-structuring, down-sizing or new business processes.

Providing support to managers with managing organisation change and investigating work procedures to create structural change.
What skills will you need?

- Decision making skills
- Interpersonal, communication and influencing skills
- Negotiation and bargaining skills
- Project management skills
- Qualitative and quantitative research methods
- Problem solving ability
- Resilience and positive attitude
- In-depth knowledge of statistical analysis and psychometric testing, for some posts

Where do Occupational Psychologists Work?

Occupational Psychologists work in various different places, as follows:

- HR departments in large companies
- The Government
- Consultancies
- The Academic world
- Psychometric test publishers
- Employee Assistance programmes

Working in Government

- Ministry of Defence
- Civil service
- Home office
- HM prison service
- Army
- NHS
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Business Psychology Consultancies

- Impact Consulting Psychologist
- PLC Opening Minds
- Capita Resourcing
- Salt Global
- PearnKandola
- The Gap Partnership

Psychometric Test Publishers

- SHL Global
- Cubiks
- Opp Unlocking potential
- SavilleConsulting
- Pearson

The British Psychological Society has a directory of test publishers and test Distributors, please refer to the following list [www.psychtesting.org.uk/directories/directory-of-test-publishers-and-test-distributors.cfm](http://www.psychtesting.org.uk/directories/directory-of-test-publishers-and-test-distributors.cfm)
Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP)

- Bupa
- Care First
- Atos Healthcare

EAP Providers are organisations that have met strict criteria relating to EAP standards, professional practice and delivery, the following link has a list of companies registered with employee assistance programme [http://www.eapa.org.uk/find-an-eap-provider/](http://www.eapa.org.uk/find-an-eap-provider/)

Training routes and qualifications

**Occupational Psychology**

Completion of the Graduate Basis for Chartered membership (GBC). This is achieved by completing a Psychology BPS-accredited undergraduate degree with, at minimum, 2:2 honours.

Society’s accredited MSc in Occupational Psychology

Chartered Occupational Psychologist
Stage 1: BPS accredited masters in Occupational Psychology. Covering the 8 core knowledge areas, statistical methods and research project.

OR
Doctorate in Occupational Psychology

Registration with the health professional council
Work Experience

Gaining work experience in the following areas, may increase your chances of pursuing a career as an Occupational Psychologist:

- Business Psychology consultancy companies
- Management consultancies
- University Careers Guidance Service: getting involved in training, workshops and assessment centres
- Human resource management companies
- Local and national government
- Graduate recruitment programmes
- Civil Service
- Home Office
- Psychometric testing companies

It is crucial to think outside the box and gain experience of the eight different specialist areas, mentioned above. Majority of the large companies in the UK, will have Occupational Psychologists working for them. Also approach companies directly and make speculative enquires and send your CV and covering letter to a wide range of companies.

Top Tips

- Obtain a broad range of work experience in the different areas of occupational psychology
- Start looking for internships as some companies have 6-12 months placements for recent MSc Occupational Psychology graduates
- Speak to your tutors: Your tutors are a good point of contact and may have links with occupational psychology organisations or contacts
- Join the British Psychological Society’s Division of Occupational Psychologists and attend networking events and conferences. This will develop your commercial awareness and give you an understanding of what is happening in the industry and will enable you to make contacts
- A large number of employers use psychometric testing as part of the recruitment and selection process, this can be very daunting for potential candidates. The key is to start preparing earlier on to become proficient and do well in the actual tests
- Research: It is important to have commercial awareness and a thorough understanding what is happening in the industry, to prepare for applications and interviews. This knowledge can be gained through books, twitter, Blogs and Linked-in discussions
- Sometimes it may take time to gain direct experience, think about fields which overlap with occupational psychology. It may be useful to get experience in HR, training, management consultancy, health psychology and clinical psychology

Useful resources at UEL

Mentoring

The Careers and Student Employability team runs a mentoring scheme with enrolment in the Autumn, Spring and Summer terms. Mentoring is a professional relationship between two individuals where one benefits from the experience, skills, networks and assistance of the other. For further information please refer to the following website www.uel.ac.uk/eet
Societies

UEL operates a great number of student-run societies, academic and subject societies, campaigns and community societies, hobby and common interest societies. It would be beneficial to join a society to demonstrate an enthusiasm for the subject and develop commercial awareness. For further information please refer to the following website www.uelunion.org/societies/atoz/

Volunteering

Volunteering provides the opportunity to develop relevant skills to support your knowledge and technical ability gained whilst studying on your degree. Excellent communication skills, problem solving abilities, and leadership skills can all be gained and developed, along with the ability to develop a strategic view on how minor interventions can effect and be impacted by wider events in the world. For further information please refer to the following website www.uel.ac.uk/eet

Useful Links

Graduate Prospects: Provides an in-depth overview on psychology careers, entry requirements, salary and employers http://www.prospects.ac.uk (Refer to careers in Psychology sections)
The Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP): Supports members by providing training, advice, regular events, latest sector updates and news http://www.bps.org.uk (Refer to the Division of Occupational Psychology section)
Psychology Appointments: This is a recruitment site for psychologists which list psychology jobs, employer list, careers information, practice psychometric tests used in selection www.psychapp.co.uk
Psychology employability guide: The Higher Education Academy (HEA) has published two psychology employability guides - one aimed at students and one at academic departments. The guides cover traditional, new and emerging psychology careers and include case studies from graduates and also departments that have successfully helped their students develop their employability www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Employability_Guide_0.pdf

Careers Support at UEL

Take a look at our rich array of career resources to help activate your career journey - http://www.uel.ac.uk/eet/students/plan/. From the first step towards making a career choice that is right for you, to the next stride which enables you to develop and evidence many of the core competencies and aptitudes that graduate employers expect via our volunteering, mentoring and internship opportunities to the final interview preparation stage, we can help you move ahead at the pace that is right for you. If, you engage with us.

Want to talk through your options and how to prepare to get to where you want to be? Book an appointment with the Careers Consultant for the School of Psychology: Rehana Ladha r.l.ladha@uel.ac.uk

If self employment is of interest whether now or in the future. The Enterprise team can help you prepare a viable business plan. Contact Timothy Isle – t.isle@uel.ac.uk to find out more.