



JESSICA DELO

A Clinical Associate in Psychology Apprenticeship Journey.

My name is Jess, I am a Clinical Associate Psychologist (CAP) working in Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust.

INTRODUCTION

Clinical Psychology is an ever-growing field which looks at mental health and the difficulties one might be experiencing in their own mental health, and how it can be understood, treated, and prevented. Clinical Psychology will look at difficulties across someone's lifespan, and will work with difficulties such as stress, trauma, adjustment difficulties, and crises.

The Clinical Associate Psychologist (CAP) is a new role designed to bridge gaps in mental health services and treatment provisions. The role sits in-between an Assistant Psychologist (often an entry level role after completing a degree in Psychology) and a qualified Psychologist (e.g. Clinical, Counselling Psychologist, who have completed a doctorate in their field). It is an integrated degree apprenticeship, where the training involves completing a masters degree alongside a level 7 apprenticeship.

BACKGROUND

I studied A-Levels in Psychology, Sociology and History, along with an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) in which I chose to explore 'Intelligence: What is it and how can it be measured'.

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Following this, I completed an undergraduate degree in Psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU). This was a course accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS), and alongside my degree I was able to complete a placement year in a Clinical Psychology setting. During my placement, I worked in a private mental health service that provided support for adult and child mental health, Autism and ADHD diagnosis and support, and neuropsychology rehabilitation. There was also an NHS primary care talking therapies service that was housed there and so I spent time working in this team as well.

I completed a Master's degree in Foundations in Clinical Psychology at CCCU after my undergraduate degree in order to provide me with further knowledge of the field, as BPS accredited degrees in Psychology will often teach a broad overview of the field, rather than specialising in one particular area.

Once I had completed my Master's, I began applying for jobs in the relevant fields, including roles as a support worker and as an assistant psychologist. I successfully got a job working as an assistant psychologist working in Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust, where I was supported and supervised by a clinical psychologist. I was able to use my theoretical knowledge learned from university in a practical way and begin to work with service users to aid their mental health recovery.



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SELECTION PROCESS & APPRENTICESHIP DETAILS

I applied for the apprenticeship through the NHS Jobs website. I was asked about my educational and professional background, and had to write a statement providing evidence as to what I could bring to this new role and how I would be suited to the apprenticeship. I was selected for interview, where I was asked questions by the interview panel about my previous clinical experience, and how I would manage the apprenticeship requirements. I was also asked about the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust Values and asked to give examples of how I have or may use them in my work.

The apprenticeship lasts 18 months. During this time, you are employed by the Trust at which you complete your placement. For me this was Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust. You spend 3.5 days a week at your placement, 1 day at university, and 0.5 day completing independent study.

The training consists of 5 modules, covering topics such as assessment, formulation and treatment in mental health, ethics and professional practice, and clinical research. These made up the Masters component of the qualification.

The apprenticeship component is completed during your placement, where you compile a portfolio of the clinical work you have done, demonstrating key elements of knowledge, skills and behaviour.

Your clinical supervisor at your placement will observe you, perhaps doing an assessment or some clinical intervention. You will also have regular meetings with the university and staff at your placement to assess your progress and what targets you can be working towards.



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As you are a paid member of staff at your placement, you will be working as a clinician and using the theory learned at university to inform your practice with the support of your clinical supervisor. At the end of the training, you complete an End Point Assessment. This involves a clinical interview, and several 'role play' based scenarios where you are presented with clinical scenarios and are examined on how you manage them. This, combined with your portfolio, completed the apprenticeship component of the qualification.

WORK EXPERIENCE

During my placement, I began delivering short structured interventions to clients with mental health difficulties that included bipolar, schizophrenia and personality disorders. I attended regular supervision and had many training opportunities. As I developed confidence, I began offering longer term interventions and conducting clinical assessments using different models (e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Psychodynamic Therapy). I began delivering group therapy with a co-facilitator too. Although the majority of my work focused on the clinical treatments, I was required to attend daily meetings to discuss risk, systemic changes in the team, policy changes or reflections. I also had other clinical roles such as being a 'carers champion', meaning I was the contact for any support that carers may need, and I was also the advocate for patient feedback.

A challenging project was completing a Quality Improvement Project, this is a piece of work where you identify a practice which could potentially be improved, and complete some analysis on it and present your findings and suggestions to the wider team. This was a requirement to complete during my apprenticeship. For someone who struggled with presenting to a large group of people, this was quite a daunting prospect, but ultimately once this hurdle was overcome my confidence in public speaking greatly improved.

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TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT



I was given a large amount of training during this apprenticeship. Not only was the university training invaluable in developing my clinical skills, the placement offered me a wealth of training including: risk assessments, managing conflict, data protection and security, working with learning disabilities and improving communication. I was also given the opportunity to learn sign language!

Some of the training was mandatory to the role (such as data protection and awareness), but opportunities were given for personal development too (such as sign language). I was also given training for each clinical treatment I delivered.

During my placement, I learned how to confidently complete a thorough psychological assessment using a CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Treatment) model, treating clients using CBT, risk assessing and managing crises, effectively delivering a group therapy, and most importantly learning when I don't know something and how to discuss this in supervision.

MENTORSHIP

During the apprenticeship, I had a clinical supervisor at the university who would support me with the academic aspects of the qualification, and a clinical supervisor at my placement who would support me with my clinical caseload and practical training. As this was the first time the CAP course was offered by Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust we didn't have a mentor, however we would often discuss our experiences with the wider cohort and have regular group supervisions and reflective practices.

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The guidance I got was invaluable in developing my skills. Both clinical supervisors were incredibly knowledgeable and experienced in their respective fields and so I felt very supported throughout. They would be able to offer me advice and guidance as to how to improve my work and helped me work towards my targets by setting out a plan of how to reach them.

CHALLENGES

Being the first cohort for the Trust was challenging at times. There were some benefits, for example that we could develop and shape the role ourselves. However, we were often met with clinicians not knowing who we were or what we did. I managed this by discussing my role with my supervisor and sharing this with the wider team. I had to be patient, as in the early months I would be asked daily if I could do 'X Y or Z', but over time this became less frequent and the team got to know me and what I could do. I think being a friendly and approachable member of staff helps with this.



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IMPACT ON CAREER

I think the CAP role has been fantastic in creating another direction for clinical psychology. It has created home grown practitioners who are skilled and confident in their practice, and who can contribute a huge amount to their teams.

Prior to the development of the CAP course, my options were somewhat limited. I was an assistant psychologist, but the next step in my career was the doctorate or accredited CBT therapy training, both of which are highly competitive and I did not feel ready for this personally or professionally. The CAP programme has given me an opportunity to become a psychological practitioner at a step that works for me.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I think there is still some work to be done in skilling the teams as to the role of a CAP. I am aware that other CAPs in different teams had different experiences and roles during training (and after qualification!) and so consistency needs to be addressed.

For future apprentices, I would advise gaining clinical experiences in a few different services, not just as a support worker or assistant psychologist, but perhaps volunteering at an inpatient ward, or at a community dementia group, or as I did which is working as a receptionist at an older adult's community team. Knowing more about the population you will be working with is incredibly valuable, firstly to equip you prior to placement (it can be pretty scary walking into a clinical environment for the first time), and secondly to establish if this is the right pathway for you. Clinical Psychology as a field is one of the most rewarding environments to work, but it can be very hard and exhausting. Check in with yourself, take some time to reflect and then make the decision that is best for you.