

**Level 7 Apprenticeship Consultation
Level 7 Clinical Associate in Psychology
Association of Heads of Psychology Departments Response**

1. The Association of Heads of Psychology Departments (AHPD - <https://www.ahpd.ac.uk/>) is an organisation that represents the Heads of Psychology Departments across the UK.
2. The AHPD meet three times per year and discuss issues currently facing academic departments and the discipline of psychology more generally. We take an agile approach to engaging with any issues of concern to our members and convene virtually as needed.
3. As part of the response, the AHPD committee reached out to all 11 institutions currently listed as training providers in order to provide an assessment of the current role and importance of the Level 7 MSc Clinical Associate in Psychology (CAP) apprenticeship.
4. The AHPD committee also fed into the response.
5. This response has taken into account the comments of the provider institutions and the AHPD committee and has been signed off by the AHPD committee.
6. **Context.**
 - a. From the 19-20 to the 22-23 academic year 33-39k students per year started a UK psychology undergraduate degree <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/08-08-2024/sb269-higher-education-student-statistics/subjects>. Only students who study an award accredited by the British Psychological Society and gain a 2:2 or above can achieve Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership, which is required in order to complete further training to become a practitioner psychologist.
 - b. Prior to the introduction of the Level 7 MSc Clinical Associate in Psychology apprenticeship (CAP), the only route into qualified clinical psychological practice roles within the NHS was through completing postgraduate training to become a clinical psychologist (DClinPsy). From 2022-2024, there were between 1100-1200 NHS Clinical Psychologist (DClinPsy) training places annually <https://www.clearing-house.org.uk/about-us/number-places>.
 - c. The CAP apprenticeship was established in 2020 as entry level training into applied psychological practice roles within the NHS. Entry level psychological practice roles are at postgraduate level, as undergraduate level psychology degrees are not qualifications in psychological practice.
 - d. Since its introduction, the number of provisioners of CAPs has increased, and hundreds of CAPs have completed their apprenticeship and contributed to the psychological workforce in the NHS, with 395 enrolled since 2022 <https://feweek.co.uk/masters-level-apprenticeships-ban-risks-throwing-baby-out-with-bath-water/>.
 - e. The demand on mental health services is increasing and services are under pressure. For example, in 2022-2023 almost one million children and young people had active referrals for Children and Young People's Mental Health Services in England, a third of which were still waiting for support in March 2024, and 40% of which had their referrals closed before accessing support <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/over-a-quarter-of-a-million-children-still-waiting-for-mental-health-support/>. In October 2024 it was announced that NHS England mental health services had treated a record 3.8 million people in the last year, up almost two fifths compared to before the pandemic <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/10/englands-nhs-mental-health-services-treat-record-3-8-million-people-last-year/>.
 - f. The NHS Long Term Plan states that it "will deliver the fastest expansion in mental health services in the NHS's history, with thousands more adults being able to access talking

therapies for common disorders and better support being offered to children and young people”. <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/areas-of-work/mental-health/>.

- g. The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan outlines the ambition to grow psychological professionals roles by 20-33% and train 15k more individuals to undertake psychological therapist and psychological practitioner roles <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-2/#2-train-growing-the-workforce>.
- h. Mental health services are currently oversubscribed, and it is anticipated that demand for services is only going to increase in the coming years (NHS England, 2024). The Minister for mental health has been quoted as saying "too many people are struggling with poor mental health, made worse by the fact that waiting lists for support are far too long" (<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/10/englands-nhs-mental-health-services-treat-record-3-8-million-people-last-year/>). In every region of England, vacancy rates (as of Sept 2024) in mental health services are higher than the overall NHS vacancy rate, with the current vacancy rate being 12.5% <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-vacancies-survey/april-2015---september-2024-experimental-statistics>.

7. Role

- a. The Institute for Apprenticeships states that the role of the CAP is to provide high quality, evidence based psychological interventions to inform practice. It outlines that the CAP was introduced as part of a programme of work to provide greater access to psychologically informed mental health and wellbeing services and to fill an identified skills gap between assistant psychologist and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered practitioner psychologists. <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/clinical-associate-in-psychology-cap-integrated-degree-v1-0> .
- b. The CAP role is varied and includes delivering psychological interventions; providing training to others; supporting multidisciplinary teams; and undertaking service development and research (Markovich, Steverson, and Fisher, 2024).
- c. Table 1 provides a summary of the mental health settings hosting a CAP, based on a survey of 164 CAPS (O'Driscoll et al, 2024).

Table 1: CAP Work Settings based on a survey of 164 CAPS (O'Driscoll et al, 2024).

CAP work setting	N=164	
Acute Inpatient	8	8%
Adult CMHT	59	57%
CAMHS	12	12%
Crisis Team/HTT	6	6%
Forensic Services - Low Secure	1	1%
Health	2	2%
Older Adult Community	10	10%
Primary Care	6	6%

8. AHPD view

- a. In the context of an increase in demand for mental health services and the popularity of the undergraduate psychology degree, there is a need to provide more routes into mental health practitioner roles. The CAP was based on an identified need for roles that could take

on greater responsibility for delivering psychological interventions, whilst their focus on working with specific populations means providing a more proscribed range of activities than HCPC registered practitioner psychologists.

- b. As noted in 6a, there are a large number of psychology graduates each year providing a large potential workforce for UK mental health services. Each year over 4000 applicants are not accepted to clinical psychology training, who may be suitable for alternative training routes such as CAPs <https://www.clearing-house.org.uk/about-us/number-places> .
- c. Our members believe that within the current context, CAPs are helping to diversify the workforce by bringing in a lower level of psychological professional to work under a more qualified clinical psychologist. As such CAPs offer increased resource and capacity for overstretched services at a time where there are recruitment challenges in the mental health workforce more generally.
- d. CAPs have been able to increase the offer of a more psychologically informed workforce within a short period of time, providing some relief in demand on the clinical psychology workforce which is always under-capacity in comparison with demand.
- e. CAPs provide a quality training approach that ensures rigorously assessed trainees are in practice. CAPs enhance the skills available to the NHS going beyond a brief training in a specific therapy mode, enabling enhancement of skills in a relatively rapid time, and a focus on quality delivery of psychological support.
- f. Our members report CAPs are appealing to undergraduate students as a training route but also appeal to older candidates, candidates returning to education and those from less traditional backgrounds.
- g. It is important to note that post-graduate qualifications are the entry level training into applied NHS psychological practice. As such a Level 7 Apprenticeship is both necessary and required.
- h. Training
 - i. Training CAPs takes a third of the time relative to training clinical psychologists. As such this training route can help grow the mental health workforce and have an impact on service delivery within a short period of time.
 - ii. As well as CAPs filling an important need within NHS mental health services, the CAP also offers both a progression route for graduates and assistant psychologists, offering additional training and support to deliver psychological therapies. This enables services to retain skilled and experienced staff, rather than lose them to further progression and courses. It also increases the viability and accessibility of psychological knowledge within teams (Slender and Taylor, 2022).
 - iii. This training route can currently draw on the apprenticeship levy that large organisations pay. It is unclear how similar roles would be funded in the absence of this funding for training.
- i. EDI
 - i. According to Marriott (2024) clinical psychology has long been known to suffer from workforce challenges related to equality, diversity and inclusion. Although there have been a range of actions to improve the diversity of the workforce, the introduction of CAPs appears to be accelerating this according to Marriott's analysis of admission data at his institution, with 32.1% of apprentices from the most deprived areas (IMD Quintile 1 or 2), and 35.7% of apprentices from areas with the lowest participation in Higher Education (POLAR Quintile 1 or 2).
- j. Partnership working

- i. Many CAPs have been set up at the encouragement of local partnerships to increase recruitment to the mental health workforce locally. Within the psychology discipline, a small number of institutions have worked with the NHS historically through provision of Clinical Psychology training. The creation of the CAPs has increased the number of institutions working with the NHS (of the 11 institutions currently listed as having a CAP program, three do not deliver DClinPsy training). We believe such partnership working is important for continued development of mental health provision.
 - ii. In the case of UEA, their experience is that the East of England had the lowest mental health workforce in the country and CAPs have helped the region grow its workforce, with many CAP posts coming from teams who have long standing vacancies and so are using CAPs to build their service. Similar advantages are found in the South-West of the UK.
 - iii. CAP training programmes have also increased the joint training opportunities between NHS organisations and Higher Education Institutions with innovations through exploration of different specialist CAP training approaches (e.g. older adults) that can be developed to meet changing local need.
- k. Training capacity
 - i. The UK university sector is currently in turmoil, with significant market shocks (e.g., international student numbers) creating variability in income streams with many institutions downsizing as a result. In light of this context, ceasing to support these Level 7 CAPs will inevitably reduce capacity for training in psychological practice at a time when access to psychological support is increasing in demand.

This response has been put together by the AHPD (led by Duncan Guest, AHPS committee member) and summarises responses from CAP providers and AHPD committee members. Particular thanks to Mike Marriott and Paul Fisher for their input.

References

- Markovich, G., Steverson, T., and Fisher, P. (2024) What Workplace Activities do Apprentice Clinical Associates in Psychology Report During Their Training? *Preprint*
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- O'Driscoll, C., Azmoodeh, K., Rana, R. et al. The identity of clinical associates in psychology: a cross sectional, national survey. *BMC Med Educ* 24, 825 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-024-05802-7>
- Slender, K., & Taylor, B. (2022). New ways of working in Psychology: Evaluating a pilot of the Clinical Associate Psychologist apprenticeship on an acute Mental health ward. *Journal of Psychiatric Intensive Care*, 18(2), 113–120. <https://doi.org/10.20299/jpi.2022.012> Slender and Taylor, 2022