This article explains how educational psychologists support children with additional support needs and answers common questions we hear about from parents and carers about their role. (It was written with input from members of the Scottish Division of Educational Psychologists and the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists. Practice may differ in some local authority areas.)

**What is the role of an educational psychologist?**

Educational psychologists work within local authorities, in partnership with families and other professionals, to help children and young people achieve their full potential. Educational psychologists support schools and the local authority to improve all children’s experiences of learning.

They use their training in psychology and knowledge of child development to assess difficulties children may be having with their learning. They provide advice and training on how schools might help children to learn and develop. They recommend methods, or develop strategies in partnership with schools, to help a child learn more effectively. Strategies may include teaching approaches, improvements to learning environments, advice on curriculum materials and behaviour support.

Educational psychologists also keep up-to-date with best practice, policy and research relating to how children learn and make sure this informs local policy and practice.

Educational psychologists may also be involved in, and advise, local authority groups considering additional support for learning policy or provision. For more detailed information see the SDEP website.

**How are educational psychology services organised?**

Educational psychology services may differ from area to area. In many cases a school, cluster of schools or local area will be assigned an educational psychologist or team of psychologists who work closely with school staff to support them.

In most areas a practice agreement between the school/s and the educational psychology service is drawn up, setting out the services that will be provided throughout the school year. This is reviewed and checked to make sure it is working for everyone involved.

**How do educational psychologists get involved with a child?**

A child may come to the attention of an educational psychologist in a number of ways. If a child is born with a condition that means they may have learning difficulties, or it is clear from an early age they may need extra support to learn or develop, an educational psychologist may be part of an early years multi-agency assessment team.

Once a child is attending pre-school or school a child’s additional support needs may be picked up during play, normal classroom teaching or the school’s own assessment processes. A teacher may raise concerns with the educational psychologist and request further assessment, advice or support. Any direct work with a child is done with the full consent of a child’s parents or carers.

If a parent is concerned their child is struggling at school, they have the right to ask their education authority to find out whether their child has additional support needs and to request a specific assessment (which can include an educational psychology assessment). To find out more information see The parents’ guide to additional support for learning.

**How do educational psychologists assess a child?**

The assessment of a child’s additional support needs is not a one-off activity carried out by an educational psychologist. Assessment is part of the day-to day routine of learning and teaching. In some cases, an educational psychologist will carry out further investigation of a child’s needs. Assessment is not separate from the strategies that are put in place to support a child. The information which educational psychologists gather contributes to the planning, action and review process.

If further investigation is needed, the educational psychologist will collect information about the child’s learning and development. This may be done by:

* talking to the child’s current or previous teachers
* talking to the child’s parents
* analysing the child’s school work and approach to learning
* observing the child in the classroom
* considering the child’s emotional and social development and behaviour
* talking to the child themselves.

In some cases an assessment may be carried out without involving the child directly.

**How do educational psychologists support schools?**

Educational psychologists work with schools to help them look at the needs of the whole child so they are able to be included fully in class, school and community life.

They provide advice to head teachers and school staff where needed and provide training to help staff to develop skills to support children with specific needs and enhance all children’s learning. They provide advice on target setting for children’s learning plans. They are not responsible for drawing up or implementing plans in schools.

They help schools to communicate about a child’s needs and support them to fully involve parents.

Do educational psychologists only work with school age children?

Educational psychologists do not just work with children and young people in school, they work with families with very young children in early years settings and in planning for young people leaving school and moving on to employment or further education.

**Do educational psychologists decide which school a child attends?**

Educational psychologists work for the local authority providing their analysis of children’s needs and how these can be met in particular environments. They may be involved in discussion, and consultation with parents, relating to which type of school placement would best meet a child’s educational needs. The final decision about where a child is placed lies with the local authority.

Parents have the right to make a placing request for their child to attend a particular school and to appeal this if refused. More information can be found in our Placing Request factsheet.

**ducational psychologists work with children, young people, families and schools, using psychology to promote positive outcomes in relation to wellbeing, communication and learning**

As an educational psychologist, you'll work collaboratively with children and young people from birth to 25 years old, alongside families and schools. You will support children with learning, social or communication difficulties, and help schools to meet the needs of young people who are finding it difficult to manage their emotions.

Educational psychologists work in several ways:

* **on an individual level** - assessing a child's needs and working with schools to implement provision that meets the identified needs
* **at a group level** - supporting a set of children with similar needs
* **supporting the systems around the child** - for example, supporting a school to develop their inclusion policy.

You'll use a variety of techniques when working directly with children and young people to assess their needs. These can include observations, tests, assessments, questionnaires and interviews. Consultation and collaboration with parents, carers, teachers, social workers, doctors and other people involved in the child's education are also important ways in which you can gather information.

From here, you will support schools and parents to develop a range of appropriate interventions and strategies. These can include learning programmes, strategies to support emotional regulation and collaborative work with teachers or parents.

You may also provide in-service training for teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals on issues such as staff wellbeing or a relational understanding of behaviour. A further aspect to the job is research and advising on educational provisions and policies.

Responsibilities

As an educational psychologist, you'll need to:

* assess children's learning and emotional needs
* design, develop and support therapeutic and behaviour management programmes
* consult with multi-agency teams to advise on the best approaches and provisions to support learning and development
* support parents, carers, teachers and others involved with the education of children and young people
* design and develop projects involving children and young people
* write reports making recommendations on action to be taken
* advise, persuade, support and negotiate with teachers, parents and other education professionals
* attend case conferences involving multidisciplinary teams on how best to meet the social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of the children and young people in your care
* prioritise effectiveness - the context and environment that influence the child's development are seen as increasingly important
* conduct active research
* formulate interventions that focus on applying knowledge, skills and expertise to support local and national initiatives
* develop and apply effective interventions to promote psychological wellbeing, social, emotional and behavioural development, and to raise educational standards
* advise on policy planning and organisation if working within a local authority.

Salary

* Trainee educational psychologists in England and Wales are provided with a bursary of £16,266 (for courses outside London) and £16,715 (for courses in London) in year one. In years two and three, most employers offer practice placements during which you will continue to receive a bursary. However, some placements will offer a salaried role for trainees in years two and three, which can range from £29,872 to £37,473.
* Once fully qualified, salaries begin at £42,422 and rise incrementally up to £61,848. This can increase to £65,120 with the addition of structured professional assessment points.
* Senior and principal educational psychologists can earn from £52,678 to £74,297. With the addition of discretionary scale points and structured professional assessment points, this can increase to £86,587.
* Fully qualified educational psychologists in Scottish local authorities earn in the region of £54,438 to £69,246. Salaries for senior educational psychologists are £73,560 and can rise to up to £85,170 for principal educational psychologists.

Salaries and bursaries in the London area attract a London weighting.

In England and Wales most salaries are set using the [Soulbury Agreement](https://neu.org.uk/advice/soulbury-officers#soulbury-pay-scales-for-educational-psychologists).

Pay scales in Scotland are set by the [Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT)](https://www.snct.org.uk/index.php) and are similar to those set by the Soulbury committee.

Income figures are intended as a guide only.

Working hours

Working hours are usually 37 hours per week, Monday to Friday. This can include some evening work for parent-teacher meetings. Flexibility is common, provided the job requirements are met.

There are opportunities for part-time work, career breaks and job-sharing.

What to expect

* You'll usually have a central office base and travel locally to schools and clients' homes as required. Opportunities are available throughout the UK.
* You'll usually work as part of a multidisciplinary team and will collaborate closely with teachers, as well as with other education, health and social services professionals.
* Self-employment and freelance work as a consultant are an option for experienced educational psychologists. The work is more likely to be focused on individuals, or within certain sectors, such as independent schools.
* The work can be challenging as it involves contact with children and young people who are facing difficulties but can also be rewarding.
* Educational psychologists receive supervision throughout their career.

A logo for a university

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Qualifications

To practise as an educational psychologist in the UK you must be registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC), which involves training at postgraduate level.

To begin training you'll normally need Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC), which is achieved by completing a psychology degree or conversion course accredited by The British Psychological Society (BPS). For a full list of GBC qualifying courses, see [BPS - Accredited Courses](https://portal.bps.org.uk/Accredited-Courses).

For England, Wales and Northern Ireland, you'll then need to complete a three-year, BPS-accredited Doctorate in educational psychology (or equivalent).

The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) manages the recruitment process for courses in England. The government provides funding for the course in partnership with employers via the Educational Psychology Funded Training (EPFT) scheme. For full information and details of accredited courses, see [AEP - Training](http://www.aep.org.uk/training/). Self-funded places are occasionally available.

Courses in Wales and Northern Ireland are offered by [Cardiff University](https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/programmes/programme/doctorate-in-educational-psychology) and [Queen's University Belfast](https://www.qub.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate-research/educational-child-adolescent-psychology-dedchpsy.html) and are funded by the Welsh government and Northern Ireland Department of Education respectively. They have their own admissions process.

Entry onto an accredited Doctorate course is becoming increasingly competitive and requires a good first degree, usually a 2:1 or higher, as well as a minimum of one year's full-time experience working with children and young people in an education, health, social care, youth justice or childcare setting. Entry requirements vary between courses, so contact admissions tutors for full details.

Some universities may accept a 2:2 if you have extensive experience and have completed further professional development. They are looking for evidence that you can cope with the rigours of doctoral-level study, which usually means a research MSc or MPhil in an education-related subject. Check with universities direct before applying.

Most of your first year on the Doctorate is university-based, while in your second and third year you'll spend three to four days a week on a practice-based placement with a local authority educational psychology service or other approved provider. You'll also need to complete a substantial piece of research and a dissertation.

Successful completion of the Doctorate leads to eligibility to apply for chartered membership of the BPS, full membership of the BPS Division of Educational and Child Psychology, and entry to the HCPC register as an educational psychologist.

There are two stages of training to become an educational psychologist in Scotland. Stage 1 consists of completing a BPS-accredited two-year, full-time MSc in educational psychology at a Scottish university (currently the University of Dundee). Fees and living costs are paid via a partnership between the Scottish government and Scottish local authorities.

You will then go on Stage 2, the [Qualification in Educational Psychology (Scotland)](https://www.bps.org.uk/node/853), a doctoral-level qualification that consists of a year (or part-time equivalent) of supervised practice in a local authority educational psychology service. At the end of the training, you'll need to submit a portfolio of competence for assessment. Fees are paid by the Scottish government.

On successful completion of the QEP(S), you're eligible for HCPC registration, as well as chartered membership of the BPS and full membership of the Scottish Division of Educational Psychology.

Funding arrangements for the Doctorate and QEP (Scotland) have conditions attached, such as the requirement to practise for a certain period of time post-qualification as an educational psychologist in the relevant funding nation. See the AEP website for details.

All students are subject to a criminal records check.

Skills

You'll need to have:

* excellent communication and interpersonal skills
* sensitivity, tact and diplomacy
* an open-minded and sensitive approach when dealing with children and young people
* the ability to explore emotional issues with children and young people
* a healthy curiosity and research-minded approach to work
* analytical skills
* the ability to work as part of a team
* the ability to be assertive, persuasive and an effective facilitator
* independence and self-motivation
* self-awareness, self-knowledge, security and self-belief
* the ability to work under pressure
* time management skills to manage a caseload and prioritise your workload
* a flexible and adaptable approach to work, with the ability to use your own initiative
* an understanding of confidentiality and how to deal with sensitive information
* understanding of cultural and religious diversity.

Work experience

While you are at university, try to get paid or voluntary experience of working with children and young people. Ideally, this experience should be an education, residential or special educational needs (SEN) setting.

To be accepted onto a postgraduate course, you'll need at least one year's full-time experience (or part-time equivalent) working with children and young people in an education, health, social care, early years or youth justice setting.

At least nine months of this experience must be paid employment. The other three months can be sustained relevant voluntary experience (or you can do the full 12 months as paid work).

Experience as a teacher is valuable, and many successful applicants are experienced teachers. Other relevant roles include education social worker or social work assistant, assistant psychologist, teaching assistant, learning mentor or literacy tutor, careers adviser, community education officer, residential child care officer, care worker, speech and language therapist, or early years worker.

Course providers will be looking at how you've applied your knowledge of psychology, what you've learnt from your experience and how it is relevant to the role of an educational psychologist.

Find out more about the different kinds of [work experience and internships](https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/work-experience-and-internships) that are available.

Employers

Most educational psychologists in England and Wales are employed by local authority children's services. In Scotland, most newly qualified educational psychologists are employed by the local authority educational psychology service or psychological service. In Northern Ireland, the main employer is the Education Authority.

Other employers include:

* colleges
* community environments
* NHS hospital trusts - typically in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
* nurseries
* private consultancies
* social enterprises
* schools (public and independent sector)
* special units
* voluntary and charitable organisations such as Barnardo's or the National Autistic Society.

There are also opportunities for experienced educational psychologists to work on a self-employed basis as a sole practitioner or in a private practice partnership.

You might also work in a research establishment or university and become involved in teaching as well as research.

Look for job vacancies at:

* [AEP Careers](https://www.aep.org.uk/careers/) - vacancies available to members.
* [Jobs in Psychology](https://www.jobsinpsychology.co.uk/)
* [LG Jobs](http://www.lgjobs.com/)
* [myjobscotland](https://www.myjobscotland.gov.uk/)
* [NHS Jobs](https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/)

Professional development

Once qualified, continuing professional development (CPD) will be an integral part of your career and is an essential requirement of retaining your HCPC registration.

Your ongoing development should include a mixture of directed and self-directed activities, including:

* post-qualification courses, which help to develop your knowledge of different theoretical approaches
* professional supervision
* lecturing, teaching or giving presentations
* attending workshops or conferences to learn about new therapeutic techniques or 'tools'
* topical research, writing articles or papers
* mentoring, supervising or assessing trainees
* development of expertise with a particular age group (e.g. pre-school or primary) or a particular condition, e.g. dyspraxia or autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Courses in areas such as IT skills, teamworking and time management are often available from your employer. A formal management qualification can be useful if you're looking to move into a senior role.

Membership of the AEP, the trade union and professional association for educational psychologists in the UK, is open to assistant, trainee and qualified educational psychologists. It provides a range of benefits including courses and events, legal advice and assistance, and access to the AEP's *Educational Psychology in Practice* journal.

You'll need to keep an up-to-date and accurate record of your professional development activities and show that your CPD contributes to the quality of your practice and service delivery, and benefits your clients.

More information can be found at [BPS Continuing Professional Development](https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologists/professional-development).

Career prospects

According to the AEP, career prospects for newly-qualified educational psychologists are currently good as demand generally outstrips supply in the public sector.

There's a defined organisational structure and a clear progression route in local authority work to senior and principal educational psychologist roles. However, there are a limited number of steps on the ladder.

In a large authority, psychological services are usually organised into districts, with individual psychologists responsible for most of the work in their own area. Also, there are likely to be some specialist posts held by experienced practitioners, for example working in specialist units or with one particular condition.

Career development can take many forms. For some people, the option to become self-employed, undertake work on a freelance basis or become an active member within the profession will provide new challenges. There are also opportunities to influence policies and develop best-practice models.

Another way you might develop your career is by specialising in a particular area of psychology, often selected through local need. If you're able to choose a specialty, opt for one that you have an affinity with as you should enjoy the research.

With a growing mental health crisis among young people—a trend both exacerbated and illuminated by Covid—the need for school psychologists is multiplying. School psychologists in the United States offer counseling, assess students for intervention needs, respond to crises, launch school-wide initiatives to reduce bullying—and more. Trained in psychology, child development, and education, these experts play a crucial role in identifying mental health needs in young people, especially in cases where families don’t speak English or don’t have resources to pursue evaluations on their own.

But school psychologists are in short supply in the U.S. During the 2021–22 school year, there was, on average, just one psychologist for every 1,127 students in kindergarten through 12th grade across the United States ([State Shortages Data Dashboard, National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), January 2023](https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard)). That’s far fewer than the goal of one for every 500 students set by NASP. There is a particular need for bilingual school psychologists to work in a culturally sensitive and inclusive way with an increasingly diverse student body. The shortage is notably extreme in rural areas and certain parts of the country, especially southern states.

In Mississippi, according to the best available data, there is one school psychologist for every 9,292 students. In New Mexico, the ratio is 19,811 to one. In rural Colorado, it’s 2,128 to one, compared with 942 to one in the state overall. Only a few states and territories meet or come close to the recommended ratio, including Utah and Puerto Rico.

“Our nation is seeing increasing numbers of students experiencing poverty and trauma and growing numbers of children with mental health disorders,” said Andrea Clyne, PhD, president of NASP in Bethesda, Maryland. “Schools are woefully underresourced when it comes to the provision of needed services for a population with diverse backgrounds and needs.”

To address the gap between supply and demand, a variety of efforts are underway to boost the numbers of mental health professionals in schools. Many of those efforts are buoyed by an influx of support from the U.S. Department of Education. In 2023, the department gave $141 million to 103 states and school districts. Grantees are working to raise the profile of school psychology as a profession and recruit more candidates by eliminating the barriers to entry. It is the biggest level of commitment counseling psychologist Dorothy Espelage, PhD, has seen in her 30 years in the field, and it is fueling long-overdue momentum.

“It took a crisis in the schools,” said Espelage, who is also a bullying-prevention expert at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. “We’ve had the shortage, but somehow—because of the suicide rates, because of school shootings and other crises—we’ve had an administration that said, ‘We’re going to pay attention to mental health.’”

Growing demands

Although a shortage of school psychologists has been a problem for decades, the Covid-19 pandemic made the situation worse, experts say, in part by exacerbating a growing mental health crisis among young people. Growing awareness also put a lens on the issue, in turn identifying more kids in need of support.

*[****Related****:*[*Boys are facing key challenges in school. Inside the effort to support their success*](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/04/boys-school-challenges-recommendations)*]*

In 2021, 42% of high school students and 57% of teen girls said they felt persistently sad or hopeless, according to a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report—the highest rate in 10 years ([*Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary and Trends Report* [PDF, 9.88 MB]](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf)). Some 20% of adolescents had major depressive disorder that year, according to a 2023 study, which found that fewer than half of those who needed treatment were getting it ([Flores, M. W., et al., *JAMA Pediatrics*, online first publication](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.3996)).

Suicide is also a rising concern. In 2021, according to the CDC report, 10% of high school students attempted suicide, and 22% seriously considered it. Certain groups of kids are particularly vulnerable to mental health and suicide risks. Among LGBTQ+ students, 69% felt persistently sad or hopeless, and 45% seriously considered attempting suicide. “These are dramatic and staggering numbers of children and youth who are struggling with their mental health,” Clyne said.

For younger kids, educators report seeing more aggressive behavior, dysregulation, bullying, and disruption—a lack of emotional regulation that appears linked to isolation during the pandemic. Kindergartners are running out of the classroom and away from school, and that behavior extends to older students, too, said Stephanie Corcoran, PhD, president of the Alabama Association for School Psychologists and program director for school psychology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Among high school students, rates of chronic absenteeism (defined as missing 10% or more of school days) has nearly doubled from about 15% to 30% since the pandemic, [according to an analysis of national data](https://www.attendanceworks.org/rising-tide-of-chronic-absence-challenges-schools/). Parents tell Espelage that their kids don’t seem to be hitting developmental milestones, and their kids say they don’t want to go to school. “I’m in schools every day, and sometimes I’ll turn to the teacher and say, ‘This is an eighth-grade classroom, right?’” Espelage said. “Why do I feel like I’m in a sixth-grade classroom?”

The growing demand has put a heavy strain on already-overworked school psychologists, who may be overseeing 10,000 or more students. The job can quickly become overwhelming. A psychologist needs to be present for every meeting to discuss any child’s individualized education plan, Espelage said, and each of those meetings can take a half a day. With such high student caseloads, that leaves little or no time left to do behavior interventions, help teachers, offer counseling, or other tasks. “What you end up doing is spending all of your time doing special education evaluations,” Corcoran said. “You’re just trying to keep your head above water.”

Barriers to entry

With escalating behavior problems that sometimes include violence alongside Covid-19-related academic losses, schools can be high-stress environments, and burnout rates are high for education professionals of all kinds. Around the country, there are shortages of school nurses, social workers, and counselors. New teachers leave the profession at a rate of 44% in the first 5 years, according to a 2018 study ([*Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*, Consortium for Policy Research in Education](https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/8354/)). In a 2022 survey of members of the American Federation of Teachers, 74% of teachers said they were dissatisfied with their jobs, and 40% said they thought they would leave the profession in the next two years ([*Under Siege: The Outlook of AFT Members*, Hart Research, 2022 [PDF, 768KB]](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2022/de-14326_aft_member_survey.pdf)).

School psychologists are vulnerable to the stresses of working in schools, too. Up to 90% of school psychologists report feeling burnt out sometimes, according to studies conducted before the pandemic ([Schilling, E. J., & Randolph, M., *Contemporary School Psychology*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2021](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00283-z)). In a 2018 survey in the southeastern United States, where shortages are most extreme, about 22% reported thinking about leaving their current position ([Schilling, E. J., et al. *Contemporary School Psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2018](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-017-0138-x)). “There are a lot of issues in schools,” Corcoran said. “Kids have significant needs, and there’s just not enough personnel to cover all the needs, so they can start to feel overwhelmed.”

Then there’s politics. In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis recently banned social-emotional learning, directly contrasting the efforts of school psychologists. It is illegal there, Espelage said, to teach topics related to social justice, intersectionality, and other concepts integral to psychologists’ work. [Similar bills have been proposed](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2023/09/social-emotional-learning-under-fire) in at least eight states.

Even for people who might be a good fit for the profession, school psychology has a visibility problem, Corcoran said. She was working as a special education teacher when she learned about the career, and many of her colleagues have similar stories. “You don’t hear about a lot of little girls and boys saying they want to be school psychologists,” she said. “We joke in the field that you kind of fall into it by accident.”

There is also a strain on the pipeline. Many university PhD programs, which take six or more years to complete, graduate just a handful of school psychologists a year, Espelage said. Boosting numbers more quickly, she said, will require increasing the number of programs that offer master’s-level EdS degrees, which generally require 2 years of coursework and a yearlong internship. “We don’t have time to wait for somebody for 5 to 6 years and then only put five [graduates] out, and then only three of them might actually be in schools,” she said. “It’s going to take decades to address this gap.”

Widening the pipeline

With help from federal funding as part of the U.S. Department of Education’s [School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/10/04/2022-21631/applications-for-new-awards-school-based-mental-health-services-grant-program), more school psychologists may soon be filling in some of the holes. This past fall, for example, UAB launched a 2-year program to retrain cohorts of 12 educators as school psychologists, earning them an EdS. Instead of the traditional full-time, in-person classroom model, the UAB program offers part-time, hybrid, and online options, Corcoran said. That flexibility expands access to people in rural areas, people who have families, and people who can’t or don’t want to leave their full-time jobs to complete the training. The program also collaborates with school districts to match program participants with fieldwork and internships.

UAB doesn’t require graduates to stay in the school system, Corcoran said, but because people who enter the program have already been working in schools, they are passionate about their work. “One of my students was just saying that they’re having such issues with severe behavior and elopement and that kind of thing, and no one knows how to handle that; they weren’t trained for that,” Corcoran said. “They want to help these kids. The kids are struggling, and the teachers are struggling because they don’t know what to do.”

Other grantees include the [University of Wisconsin, Lacrosse](https://www.uwlax.edu/news/posts/help-on-the-way/); the University of North Carolina, Greensboro; [Indiana University](https://news.iu.edu/live/news/28270-over-10m-in-grants-will-address-need-for-more); and the [University of Denver’s Morgridge College of Education](https://www.du.edu/news/innovative-project-addresses-dire-need-school-psychologists-colorados-rural-communities), which is using $3.82 million in federal grant money to recruit and train 32 school psychologists over the next 5 years, with a focus on placing people in Colorado’s rural communities, where ratios of school psychologists are significantly lower than the state average. [SUNY Oswego](https://www.oswego.edu/news/story/35m-federal-grant-oswego-meet-pressing-need-school-psychologists) is using its new 5-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to offer free tuition, a paid internship, and guaranteed placement after graduation in the Syracuse City School District.

One of the most promising strategies for boosting the ranks of school psychologists in the places where they are most needed may be with “grow your own” programs, which recruit people where they already live and work, said Stephanie Schmitz, PhD, a school psychologist at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. She and colleagues have used federal funding to recruit people with master’s degrees working in education around the state to respecialize as school psychologists.

The university’s EdS program is now working with its third cohort of five students and has made adjustments based on experience. Students in the grow-your-own program take classes part time and primarily online over two and a half years, instead of two as the program was originally designed, followed by a yearlong internship. They make a 3-year commitment to work in schools in their current geographical area after they graduate.

Few studies have examined the best way to retain school psychologists, Schmitz and colleagues wrote in a 2021 study, but grow-your-own programs offer opportunities to address many of the obstacles. “Within our state I feel like the momentum is definitely building for this,” she said. “There’s a lot of interest.”

In addition to recruitment efforts like these, NASP is working to increase job satisfaction through a focus on initiatives that improve working conditions and professional growth, Clyne said. They are advocating for more federal investments, as well as paid internships for graduate students, stipends, and other financial incentives for school psychologists who earn and maintain their credentials. The organization also offers guidance to school districts on how to create working conditions that help school psychologists do their jobs. And they are working to establish credentialing reciprocity so school psychologists can work across state lines.

When more school psychologists join the profession and stay there, Clyne said, the job gets more enjoyable for everyone—and more students can thrive.

Research shows that mental health is a desirable career path among psychology students but very few actually work in the field after graduation

Over the years, a lot of criticism has been levied at UK higher education institutions for hosting 'low quality' courses that lead to poor labour market outcomes for students. In fact, the former prime minister, Rishi Sunak, vowed to crack down university courses that don't improve student earning potentials, only making exceptions for courses that provide 'high social value' (e.g. nursing).1

Psychology graduates are among the lowest paid graduates in the UK. However, being equipped with a diverse, valuable and transferable set of skills, they play a vital role in a range of professional occupations. Moreover, in their research for the Department for Education, the Skills and Employability Board included therapy, counselling and psychology skills among those that they expect to become increasingly important in the future labour market.2

There is no question that psychology graduates leave university equipped with a skillset that enables them to make valuable contributions to society. But should there be more focus on getting psychology graduates into careers in mental health?

According to HESA's most recent Graduate Outcomes data, 63% of UK domiciled, first degree psychology graduates were in full (50.4%) or part-time (12.4%) employment 15 months after graduation, with a further 14% reporting that they were working alongside their studies. The majority (58%) were working in professional-level employment.

Nevertheless, a fifth (20%) of these graduates were working in healthcare professions when surveyed, 11% of which were working as therapy professionals.

**Jobs in healthcare**

| **Caring Personal Services** | **7.1%** |
| --- | --- |
| Therapy Professionals | 10.9% |
| Nursing Professionals | 0.7% |
| Health Associate Professionals | 0.4% |
| Managers and Proprietors in Health and Care Services | 0.3% |
| Other Health Professionals | 0.3% |
| Health and Social Services Managers and Directors | 0.1% |

While psychology is one of the most popular undergraduate courses in the UK, there appears to be a wide disparity between students' career aspirations at the outset of their degree and their eventual career outcomes. Recent research from the Nuffield Trust found that nine in ten (91%) psychology undergraduates appear to want a career in mental health at the outset of their degree, falling to 79% by their final year.3

Complex career pathways

Given the amount of education and experience needed to pursue certain psychological professions, potential career pathways are often more complex for the average psychology graduate than those who graduate with more vocational degrees. On top of that, psychology-specific jobs are not always visible to students. With many graduates having narrow career goals centered around academia, clinical and forensic psychology, they can have a limited view of the alternative, more easily accessible jobs.4

Subsequently, while the vast majority of psychology graduates have ambitions to pursue a career in mental health, it appears that the complex nature of the career pathways available to these graduates may put a lot of them off from working in their desired field. And those who aren't put off still have a long journey ahead.

According to the BPS Careers destination survey, due to postgraduate training and work experience requirements, it takes three to five years just to get a job that is part of their route to becoming a psychology professional. In addition, the survey also found that the more time that passed after graduation, the higher the chance that psychology graduates were employed in a non-professional job linked to their career goal5, and 78% of graduates obtained a non-professional job in their desired role after 12 months of graduation.6

Additionally, while just a fifth (20%) of first-degree psychology graduates were working in health or care roles when surveyed by HESA, nearly three quarters (71%) said that their current work fits within their plans for the future.

Looking at these findings, it is clear that we need to reevaluate how we see the career outcomes of first-degree psychology graduates. HESA's Graduate Outcomes data provides us with a useful snapshot of psychology graduates' early career outcomes; however, considering the complex nature of the career pathways available to these graduates, determining the value of a psychology degree based on the outcomes of first-degree psychology graduates 15 months after graduation is premature to say the least. Across all branches of psychology, very few psychologists are aged under 30.7

Postgraduate outcomes

Even using Graduate Outcomes data, we can see some of the effect that time and experience has on the outcomes of psychology graduates. Those who graduated from a postgraduate psychology course had better outcomes across the board 15 months after graduation.

**Top ten jobs held by undergraduates**

| **Therapy Professionals** | **10.9%** |
| --- | --- |
| Welfare and Housing Associate Professionals | 7.6% |
| Caring Personal Services | 7.1% |
| Teaching and Childcare Support Occupations | 5.3% |
| Teaching Professionals | 3.3% |
| Other Elementary Services Occupations | 2.9% |
| Sales Assistants and Retail Cashiers | 2.8% |
| Sales, Marketing and Related Associate Professionals | 2.3% |
| HR, Training and Other Vocational Associate Guidance Professionals | 2.2% |
| Other Administrative Occupations | 1.8% |

**Top ten jobs held by postgraduates**

| **Therapy Professionals** | **37.2%** |
| --- | --- |
| Welfare and Housing Associate Professionals | 8.8% |
| Teaching Professionals | 4.2% |
| Nursing Professionals | 4.0% |
| Caring Personal Services | 3.2% |
| Business, Research and Administrative Professionals | 2.3% |
| Research and Development (RandD) and Other Research Professionals | 1.9% |
| HR, Training and Other Vocational Associate Guidance Professionals | 1.9% |
| Teaching and Childcare Support Occupations | 1.7% |
| Natural and Social Science Professionals | 1.3% |

Three quarters of psychology postgraduates reported that they were in full (61%) or part-time (14%) employment when surveyed, with the vast majority (89%) working in professional level jobs - compared to 40% of undergraduates. Additionally, 47% were working a job in healthcare, with 37% working as therapy professionals.

Although there isn't much difference between groups in terms earnings, considering that getting a postgraduate degree is only the first step to their desired role for many psychology graduates, it is safe to say that the average salaries of these graduates will increase over time.

**Psychology graduate salaries**

| **Subject** | **Undergraduate** | **Postgraduate** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Counselling, psychotherapy and occupational therapy | 28254 | 26684 |
| Psychology (non-specific) | 25286 | 25437 |
| Applied psychology | 24581 | 24388 |
| Developmental psychology | 23600 | 26492 |
| Psychology and health | 23810 | 22376 |

For instance, a trainee clinical psychologists salary starts at £32,306, rising to £40,057 after qualification. More experienced psychologists can earn between £47,126 and £63,862, with consultant-level clinical psychologist roles typically ranging from £65,664 to £90,387 and heads of psychology services possibly earning in the region of £93,735 to £108,075.8

The importance of experience is also apparent when we consider how respondents reflect on their activities. When asked if their work is meaningful, 84% of undergrads agreed compared 93% of postgrads. The difference is even more pronounced when they were asked if they were utilising the skills that they learned during their studies in their current work, with 63% of undergrads saying this compared to 82% of postgrads.

Raising awareness

To ensure that more psychology graduates are going into careers in mental health, universities and their careers services need to do more to make psychology graduates aware of the career pathways available to them. It is also vital that students are made aware of the specific jobs that are available to them immediately after gradation (e.g. psychological support work, research assistance, HR etc.).9

Furthermore, a large number of psychologists appear to be working in roles that do not require them to register. The BPS Careers destination survey found that there could be around 9,000 people in psychology-related, but not registered, roles in every graduate cohort - something to be mindful of when looking at the outcomes of first-degree psychology graduates.10

**How to become an educational psychologist: steps and definitions**

Written by

Indeed Editorial Team

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Psychology is a diverse field with a variety of rewarding career opportunities. For those who are passionate about education and supporting the academic achievement of others, becoming an educational psychologist might be an excellent career choice. However, before committing to this job role, it's important to understand what educational psychologists do and what it takes to become one.In this article, we discuss what an educational psychologist is, what they do and how to become one with additional considerations for their [skills](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-skills) and daily responsibilities.**Key takeaways:**

* Educational psychology uses psychological principles and research to refine teaching strategies and improve student learning, often focusing on diagnosing and addressing intellectual disabilities
* Becoming an educational psychologist requires an accredited undergraduate psychology degree, followed by postgraduate study such as a doctorate in the field, and registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)
* Alongside academic knowledge, the role also requires a range of skills including effective communication, public speaking, [attention to detail](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/attention-to-detail), empathy, psychological assessment, data analysis and database management

**Related jobs on Indeed**

[**Psychologist jobs**](https://uk.indeed.com/jobs?cgtk=28f5fd75-7c06-4a3d-87db-296202e3db8f&from=careerguidepromo-GB&q=Psychologist)

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[**Full-time jobs**](https://uk.indeed.com/jobs?cgtk=28f5fd75-7c06-4a3d-87db-296202e3db8f&from=careerguidepromo-GB&q=full%20time)

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**What is an educational psychologist?**

An educational psychologist is a specialist who uses their understanding of learning habits and retention strategies to develop teaching methods. They apply psychological theories, research and techniques to understand learning behaviours. Based on their research, they may create techniques to refine teaching strategies and improve student learning. Some educational psychologists may specialise in working with young people, adult students or students with intellectual disabilities.**Related:** [**How to become a psychologist in the UK**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-to-become-a-psychologist)

**What does an educational psychologist do?**

An [educational psychologist](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/what-does-educational-psychologist-do) has various responsibilities related to improving the learning of students. Some typical duties for an educational psychologist include:

* reviewing existing course materials, exam formats and teaching methods to evaluate their effectiveness
* collaborating with students, teachers and parents to develop alternative teaching practices and assess their value
* recording testing data, analysing student progress and compiling reports
* remaining knowledgeable about different intellectual disabilities, including their symptoms, diagnostic criteria and methods for intervention and support
* working alongside other education researchers and mental health specialists to conduct research studies
* training educators to help them identify the signs of intellectual disabilities, developmental delays and behavioural conditions
* diagnosing intellectual disabilities, behavioural conditions and developmental disorders by reviewing student files, meeting with parents and educators and performing psychological assessments

**Where do educational psychologists work?**

Educational psychologists can work in diverse settings. Most work in the public sector, such as with local authority children's services. Others may work in NHS trusts like Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), schools and school groups, volunteer organisations and social enterprises. Some may even work in private practice, while others might work for a university as a lecturer and researcher.**Related:** [**How to become a youth worker**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/youth-worker)

**How to become an educational psychologist**

Here are the steps for becoming an educational psychologist:

**1. Start early**

For students who haven't started an undergraduate degree yet but are interested in a [career](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/educational-psychology-careers) as a psychologist, there are some steps you can take to prepare for entering this field. First, students can take GCSE or A-Level subjects in psychology. Though not always required for entry to a degree course in psychology, these can provide you with a foundation of knowledge in psychological theories, approaches and research methods in [social sciences](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-are-social-sciences).In addition to your studies, you might look for opportunities to gain experience working in the field. For example, you might volunteer in an educational, health, youth support or social care setting. After graduation, you may look for employment in a related field. Gaining practical experience may help you decide whether this is the right career choice for you, and your experience may reflect favourably on your application to an advanced degree programme.**Related:** [**GCSE equivalent qualifications**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/gcse-equivalent)

**2. Earn an undergraduate degree**

The next step in the application process to become an educational psychologist is earning an undergraduate degree in psychology. Earning your undergraduate degree through an accredited programme recognised by the British Psychological Society (BPS) is important. Accredited programmes meet certain standards for academic rigour, so students in these programmes know their institution provides a high quality of education.However, if you've already completed your undergraduate degree in another field, you may need to take an approved psychology training course. A conversion course in psychology is a one to two-year full-time accredited programme that can grant you eligibility for a Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership (GBC), which is a prerequisite for enrolment in a doctorate programme. Another option is to pursue a master's degree in psychology. Earning any of these credentials can help you develop a strong basis of knowledge in psychology so you can prepare for and excel in a doctorate programme.**Related:**[**How to become a play therapist (definition and skills)**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/how-to-become-play-therapist)

**3. Complete a doctoral training programme**

To qualify for a position as an educational psychologist, candidates need to earn a doctorate. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, a doctorate programme requires students to complete a three-year training. The first year of this programme typically focuses on classroom education. The second and third years involve designing and implementing an original research study and writing a dissertation.Some common entry requirements for enrolment in a doctorate include:

* **Proof of GBC membership:** Students can gain GBC membership either by earning an undergraduate degree through an accredited programme, completing a conversion course, passing the British Psychological Society Qualifying Examination or reading for a psychology-based master's degree.
* **Relevant**[**work experience**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/work-experience)**:** Candidates need at least one year of full-time relevant experience (or its part-time equivalent) working with children or youths in an educational, health, social care, youth justice, childcare or community setting before they can qualify for a doctorate training programme.
* **Academic and professional references:** Many programmes require candidates to submit two references. They typically require one academic reference to verify the candidate's academic abilities and one [professional reference](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/cvs-cover-letters/professional-reference) to provide insight into the candidate's relevant work experience.

**4. Become registered**

Before they can offer a public service, educational psychologists must register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The HCPC regulates all practitioner psychologists to ensure their suitability for practice. Registration can also demonstrate that you meet a high standard of professional proficiency for your clients.In addition to your initial registration, you may need to renew your registration regularly. This can encourage you to continue your professional development by prompting you to keep your skills and knowledge current to meet the highest standards of care for your clients. The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) has further information and resources including professional development, learning and [networking](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/business-networking) opportunities on their UK [website](https://www.aep.org.uk/).

**Skills for success**

Psychologists use both hard and [soft skills](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/soft-skills) to succeed in their roles. Some skills they use include:

**Communication**

Communication is an important skill for psychologists because they often work directly with clients and collaborate with other professionals. In an educational setting, a psychologist may use their communication skills to build connections with diverse audiences. They may work with parents and educators, students and other mental health or education specialists. Good communication skills can help them adapt their communication [strategy](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-is-strategy) to meet the needs of these different groups.**Related:** [**Interpersonal communication: definitions and examples**](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/interpersonal-communication)

**Public speaking**

There may be times when an educational psychologist needs to talk in front of a group. For example, they may present research at a conference or lead a workshop to instruct educators on methods for working with students who have special educational needs such as those with intellectual disabilities. Other psychologists may work as lecturers at a university where they may teach classes to large groups of students.

**Attention to detail**

Good attention to detail may help psychologists make accurate diagnoses and keep records. They may use keen observation skills in their clinical work, or pay close attention when recording data and reporting insights in their research.

**Empathy**

These psychologists use [empathy](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-is-empathy) to build meaningful relationships with those they work with. Empathy helps psychologists understand the perspectives of their clients and work with them to develop effective solutions to the challenges they face. Having empathy can also help psychologists establish trust with students which can improve communication and facilitate the psychologist's ability to help the student.

**Psychological assessment**

Assessing students for intellectual disabilities is an important part of an educational psychologists job. They may need to understand the different types of psychological assessment and how to implement them to make accurate diagnoses. This can include gathering information from documents like medical records and teacher reports. It may also involve interviewing family members, teachers and the student. Being thorough with these assessments is essential to ensuring that students get the correct diagnosis so they can receive the appropriate treatment and support throughout their education.

**Data analysis**

As researchers, psychologists collect and analyse data to draw conclusions. Psychologists need skills related to designing research, gathering data and analysing that data to gain insights into human behaviour. In addition to analysing data, psychologists interpret what the data means and create comprehensive reports that explain those findings to other professionals.

**Database management**

Database management is another important skill for research. A database can host extensive information related to a research project. Psychologists may use their database [management skills](https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/management-skills) to organise and access that information while conducting a study.*Please note that, at the time of this article's writing, the companies, institutions or organisations mentioned in this article may or may not be affiliated with Indeed, and their mention in this article does not imply a business relationship with Indeed.*