

DClinPsy: Interview Guide

By @Trainee_Psych_Scribbles

Hi there!

I'm @Trainee_Psych_Scribbles, a Trainee Clinical Psychologist in the UK. I have an Instagram page where I share illustrations on topics in psychology and mental health. I also have a blog where I share some of my reflections and careers advice about being a Clinical Psychologist:

https://www.instagram.com/trainee_psych_scribbles/?hl=en

<https://psychscribbles.wordpress.com/>

I get lots of questions on my page about how to become a Clinical Psychologist. It's a career path that can be competitive and uncertain, but also really rewarding sometimes. I want to do what I can to make it more accessible to all.

That's why I've created this guide of how to prepare for interviews for the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy). The DClinPsy is a postgraduate course which allows you to become a Clinical Psychologist in the UK. Please see the Leeds Clearing House website for more information on the application process.

A few points and disclaimers

This guide is representative of the way I chose to prepare; there is no right or wrong way to do it. The topics I've listed might not cover every eventuality, but they were what I chose to learn for interview.

To help keep the process fair, I will not share details of specific interview questions I was asked or the courses where I interviewed in this guide; just the topics I prepared. I only have experience preparing for and interviewing at a small number of course centres. Other courses across the UK might do their interviews differently. It's worth speaking to trainees on the courses you are interested in or doing some research online.

For any examples of my clinical work, I kept cases anonymous. I minimised descriptive information about the case and focused on what I learned.

Also full warning: I'm a bit of a perfectionist and so this list is probably a bit too detailed. It worked for me and my coping style. A briefer, more focused list might work for you.



Table of Contents

<i>DClInPsy Interview Guide</i>	1
1. Resources	4
Useful documents/books to refer to	4
Sources of general information	4
Sources of support.....	4
2. Topics I Prepared: a checklist	5
Clinical Questions.....	5
.....	5
Research Questions	8
General Questions	10
Role Plays	11
Other possible components.....	11
3. Strategies for Preparing.....	12
4. The Interview day.....	13
5. FAQs	15



1. Resources

There are lots of resources available that could be helpful for doing some interview prep. Here are some that I used or would recommend:

Useful documents/books to refer to

- NICE guidelines. If you are in Scotland, there's also the SIGN guidelines and Psychological Therapies Matrix. I only focused on guidelines *relevant to my current role* at the time of interview.
- BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct <https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/bps-code-ethics-and-conduct>
- NHS constitution values
- The nine core competencies of a Clinical Psychologist <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Accreditation/Clinical%20Accreditation%20Handbook%202019.pdf>
- Research Methods and Data Analysis for Psychology (I used Wilson and MacLean) or any similar undergraduate stats textbook.
- Critical appraisal tools to develop skills in critiquing research papers (for example: <https://joannabriggs.org/critical-appraisal-tools>)
- The Psychologist magazine (useful for current issues/research digest in psychology)
- Books on psychological formulation like Formulation in Psychology and Psychotherapy: making sense of people's problems (Johnstone & Dallos, 2013) (or any relevant to your clinical work)

Sources of general information

- Leeds Clearing House <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp/>
- The Doctorate in Clinical Psychology page for the university (or universities) you are interviewing at

Sources of support

- Clinpsy forum <https://www.clinpsy.org.uk/forum/>
- Facebook groups such as "UK Clinical Psychology Doctorate Applicants"

Please note that the information on these forums and groups is contributed by users and may not be accurate. Please take the normal precautions that you would when accessing an online group/forum and access them at your own risk.



2. Topics I Prepared: a checklist

Clinical Questions

You might be asked some questions which focus on your clinical work experience. Here's a list of what I prepared.

Top tip: Use models like Gibb's Reflective Cycle (1988) to reflect on your examples

Top tip: You could have a small number of clinical examples (~3) which could be used to answer questions on multiple different topics relevant to clinical practice (e.g. clinical work, ethics, policy etc.). This could be helpful to limit the amount of information you need to learn.

Clinical Case Examples

- A small number of clinical case examples (~2/3)

Ideas for reflections:

- How did I assess the case? + why?
- How did I formulate the case? What psychological theories/models did I use? + why? Could another formulation have been used?
- What psychological intervention did I use? What theories underpinned this?
- Was there any systemic/MDT working involved? How did this go?
- Some reflective/critical points (e.g. using Gibbs Cycle)

Top tip: if you are an applicant with limited clinical experience, you could explain how you *would* or *could* have formulated a clinical case that you worked with (e.g. as a support worker). You could use this opportunity to reflect on how helpful would be to give staff a psychological understanding of their service users.



Ethics/Values/Professional Practice

- A small number of cases (~2) that were challenging in some way
- A few of my own values/NHS values
- Notes on BPS ethical principles/ethical concepts e.g. informed consent

Ideas for reflections:

- How did my own values develop? How do they impact my practice? How they were relevant to these challenging cases?
- How are the NHS values relevant to my work and these challenging cases?
- Were any ethical principles challenged/raised in this case? How did I try to act in line with these principles?

Top tip: if a case has triggered an emotional reaction within you, it is likely it has brought up some of your own values/ethical principles

Policies/Legislation/Guidance

- A **short** list of policies, legislation and guidance related to my current role/clinical work
- A few examples where I could show I had applied these

Points for reflections

- What did I learn about this policy/legislation/guidance document? What are my opinions on it (what's good or bad about it)? What role does a clinical psychologist have in applying or helping inform guidelines/policies/legislation

Challenges/ topical issues

- A few challenges of working clinically in the NHS (e.g. impact of austerity)
- A couple current/topical issues (e.g. the impact of COVID in the NHS)

Ideas for reflections

- What's my experience of these issues?
- How do these topics link to my values? What roles does a Clinical Psychologist have in these issues?



Theories/models/research

- A **small** bank of common psychology models and theories, with brief notes on them (e.g. 5Ps, 5 areas, cognitive, behavioural, attachment theory); helpful in case of any case vignette style questions
- Some notes on a book/research paper which are relevant to my current practice



Research Questions

Most interviews include some questions which focus on research or academic work. Your notes on psychology theories or models might also be helpful in this section. Here are some additional topics I prepared:

- Summarise undergraduate notes on stats, including basics in research design (e.g. IV/DV, between/within subjects etc.) and statistics

Example(s) of my own research work and interests

- 3-5 minute “elevator pitch” of the background, methods, results and discussion of 2-3 of my research projects.
- A brief idea of a research project I would like to do for my doctorate qualification (background, importance, proposed methods and potential impact).

Reflections

- Why did I chose that method/stats?
- Why is this research important?
- What research skills did I develop? What did I learn?

Top tip: some courses might specify that you can't discuss an audit or systematic review for this type of question. I would prepare to talk about at least one empirical research project (e.g. your undergraduate dissertation) just in case.

Note: it doesn't matter what grade you got in it or whether it was published (although that would be a bonus). What's more important is how you reflect on it.



Research Design

- Use undergraduate research design notes to map out some of the points I'd try to make if asked to design or critique a research study (e.g. prep work/intro, design, participants, measures, procedure, ethics, statistics)
- Critique on a recent research paper (relevant to my current practice)
- A list of research methods terminology definitions e.g. types of validity and reliability

Top tip: I find stats test flow charts helpful to think about which stats design to use for different types of data

Top Tip: you could take some notes from a critical appraisal tool (see resource section) to help guide your critical appraisals

Research skills and a Clinical Psychologist's Role

- A few skills Clinical Psychologists can bring to research
- A few reasons they *should* be involved in research work in the NHS (a topic which is sometimes debated) + reflections on this
- A few points on how research can inform clinical work
- A few points on "hot topic" issues in research e.g. the replication crisis



General Questions

You might be asked some more general questions that could be applied to lots of different aspects of a Clinical Psychologist's role.

Reasons for applying

- Reasons why I want to be a Clinical Psychologist
- A few reasons why this course centre interests me in particular
- A few things I'd hope to gain/my expectations for training

Ideas for reflections

- What experiences of mine are relevant to my decision? Could be work or personal. How did they shape me and my values?
- What are my interests, skills and values? How did these develop and how did they lead to my decision?

The skills of a Clinical Psychologist

- A list the skills of a Clinical Psychologist (core competencies of a Clinical Psychologist)
- A brief example for each skill (I didn't have some experience in some of these e.g. leadership or supervision, and some examples overlapped with my clinical case examples) + some reflections
- A few notes on how this role is changing in the NHS today and my thoughts on this

Top tip: The first thing many people think about when they think about a Clinical Psychologist is their therapeutic work. The reality is that this is less and less part of their role in the NHS today. Answers which show an awareness of this are probably likely to do well.

Managing your wellbeing

- A few demands I might experience on the course (e.g. balancing academic, research and clinical work)
- An example of a time I have experienced stress in the workplace + reflections + how I would apply this on the course

Role Plays

Some interviews might have a role-play component. Courses will usually specify this in advance. You might be asked to reflect back on your performance afterwards. Here's how I prepared:

- ❑ A short list of key skills and qualities to try and demonstrate (e.g. empathy, listening skills, warm, asking open questions, being non-judgemental)
- ❑ A few topics which I could reflect on, such as: What emotions were they experiencing and how did I know this? What were they looking for from me? What went well? What didn't go well? What would I do next if this was a real situation? Would I need to consider any ethical issues? Did this bring up any of my own values?

Other possible components

Some courses may also have other components such as a written task, a research task, a service user panel or a group task. This list isn't exhaustive, they are some of the ones that I have come across. I didn't do any additional prep for these other than what I had prepared above and felt relatively well prepared for them.

3. Strategies for Preparing

Once you have the content you need in your notes, you'll need to think about *how* you get yourself ready for interview. Here are some of the things I did:

- Speak to current trainees or Clinical Psychologists. Ask them how they found their interviews and if they have any tips for you.
- Make a list of likely or possible types of questions you might be asked from research online
- Practice talking through your answers to questions. Keeping an eye on the time. When I prepared, I tried get used to limit my answers to about 5-6 minutes. I thought about how to make my answers concise.
- Consolidate and revise your notes. See if you can cut them down or think about what information you'd like to prioritise when answering a question.
- Set up mock interviews with colleagues/friends.

A brief note again, that these are some of the things I did to prepare. Other people I have spoken with have been successful when they were much less prepared and were more spontaneous on their interview day. I think what approach you take depends on who you are and what your preference is.

4. The Interview day

What to expect?

My experiences at interviews were that you usually began by checking in with the admin team, and getting any paperwork sorted. Then, there is usually a waiting area with opportunities to meet current students or other applicants.

You will be informed of the structure of different aspects of the interview, usually in advance of the interview day. It might be one interview panel with a series of questions. Alternatively, there might be separate panels or tasks that you will be invited into in turn.

- Clinical panels tend to have representatives from the local NHS trust(s) or health board(s). They tend to focus more on things like your clinical work experience, psychological theory and formulation.
- Research/academic panels tend to focus more on your research experience, research problems and tasks, or your knowledge of research or psychological theory.
- There may also be additional tasks. This will depend entirely on the course centre. In my experience, courses will tell shortlisted candidates about this in advance of the interview day. The ones I have come across in my experience or from talking to other candidates include: role plays, a service user panel, a written task, a research task or group task. It's worth checking the course website or asking previous trainees to find out more about this.
- At the end of the interview day, there might be an opportunity to de-brief/ask questions etc.

What to bring?

Most interviews will have most things you need, and so you really don't need to think about bringing much to interview. The main thing is to remember to bring any forms or documentation that the course have asked for. Things like water, tissues or a plain notepad can be helpful.

Video-call interview

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, many interviews recently have been via videocall. From what I've heard, last year (2020) some courses simplified the interview process (e.g. having one panel instead of several to make it easier to be conducted online). It's unclear what courses will continue to do in future as restrictions change and now that they have more time to adapt to this format. If your interview is over videocall, you might want also to think about things like:

- Testing the technology in advance
- Making sure there's adequate lighting and sound
- Having a professional backdrop

Managing Stress

In my experience, thinking about how to manage your stress on the day is really important. I became quite anxious and flustered at my first interview, and I think it affected my performance. Tips that worked for me were:

- Challenging some of my thoughts and worries about the interview beforehand
- Writing a list of things I am grateful for and what I could learn from the experience; if I wasn't successful
- Techniques to manage anxiety in the moment e.g. breathing techniques
- Not feeling the pressure to answer immediately, taking a moment to breathe and repeat the question to myself
- Reminding myself that the most important thing is to be myself and that's it's ok to ask for clarity on a question or to not be sure about how to answer.

I also recommend this article for suggestions on how to cope with the interviews (Milne & Blackwell, 2012):

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289180055> It's a crying shame Suggestions on coping with the Doctorate interview

5. FAQs

How do you bring your personality across?

The way I approached this was by just being genuine. I acted as if I was just talking to a new colleague in the lunch room and tried to let my natural personality shine through.

I did try to reflect on my own values and qualities at some points of the interview. For example, when reflecting on a clinical case, you could mention how you enjoy art and how you used your creativity to create a new resource for a patient. Mentioning your own interests and opinions in psychology can also let the interviewers know a little bit about you. All of these things could make you a bit more distinctive in the panel's mind.

How much of “ourselves” should we share?

In my experience, it's absolutely appropriate to share your personality (see above), as long as you don't act unprofessionally (of course). I would also say you can share personal experiences in response to certain questions. Our personal experiences can shape our values and our decision to become a Clinical Psychologist. However, don't feel pressure to share anything you don't feel comfortable with. Depending on what the personal experiences are, you might want to be brief, vague and be able to contain your emotional reaction which discussing these. You could focus less on describing the experience and more on the impact these experiences have had on your values and the role of a Clinical Psychologist.

How did you manage to talk about clinical examples concisely?

This can be tough. The approach I took was to highlight key details of cases **very** briefly (keeping the patient's details anonymous, the patient population, a brief description of the presenting problem), and then quickly move on to answer the question. If their formulation was complex, I explained which model(s) I used and I explained was going to only mention a few of the key points, due to time constraints. I practiced keeping descriptive information to a minimum and leaving at least a minute or two at the end to reflect.

How can you make your answers more reflective?

I've listed some ideas for reflections in my list of things to prepare above, which will hopefully help with this. Using reflective cycles and models (such as Gibbs) can help prompt your reflections. Generally, it's helpful to think about how yourself and others were feeling and why. Then to think about whether things like your values, ethical principles, or psychological theories which could be relevant to make sense of the situation. Then, thinking about what you can learn from it.

Should I ask the interviewer any questions?

My experience at interviews was that there was an opportunity to ask questions to staff or current students sometime outside of the interview (e.g. in the waiting area). So when it came to the interview, I didn't ask the interviewers any questions.