

Careers using skills from a Psychology degree

Case studies

Using your Psychology degree in other careers

A degree in psychology allows you to develop a wide range of sought after employability skills. While some graduates pursue a career as a professional psychologist, the majority use their degree to successfully develop or change their career in a variety of areas.

The following case studies of OU Psychology students and graduates highlight the skills gained from a Psychology degree and how it has enabled them to move into varied careers.

Career areas include:

- Carers Advocacy Officer
- Marketing Manager
- IT Consultant
- Careers Consultant and University Career Mentoring Manager

Danny Newland

- BSc (Hons) Psychology
- Carers Advocacy Officer



I currently work as a Carers Advocacy Officer at Enfield Carers Centre; I am the only advocate so I also take responsibility for the monitoring and reporting for the project. My role is to help those who have potential barriers to accessing statutory services have an equal footing by facilitating communication and ensuring they know their rights.

At the age of twenty one I was working in retail and was diagnosed as terminally ill , thankfully, making a recovery after receiving a heart transplant. As I recovered I offered voluntary support to patients on the transplant list and their families. I also would speak at medical meetings about the patient's perspective of transplant. I enjoyed doing this and realised that when I was ready to return to work I wanted a career that helped people on a practical level.

I studied a Psychology Degree, starting in 2001 and obtaining my BSc (Hons) in 2005. I decided to study for a Psychology Degree as I am interested in people and there were elements of reporting and essay writing that I felt would help develop transitional skills that would be useful in any future work.

When I, eventually, felt ready to return to work I spoke to a disability job advisor, she informed me that my CV was woefully inadequate and suggested voluntary work as a way to improve my prospects.

I applied as a volunteer at Barnet Carers Centre in the hope that it would help me build a credible CV. I really enjoyed volunteering gaining skills in Microsoft Office and general admin. A support officer role opened up and I successfully applied.

After I finished my two year project I stayed on as a general support officer on a temporary basis and then a full time post opened as a Mental Health Carers Support Officer, which I successfully applied for. I was temporarily promoted to Team Supervisor and then following a successful tender, I became a Pan Borough Carer Support Officer.

I felt that my role had, because of politics, become limited in how I could support families and when I learnt that Enfield Carers Centre was looking for an Advocate I successfully applied and I feel that my skill sets suit this role well.

My whole career blossomed from my first support officer role and this required a degree to be shortlisted even for interview; so the Open University was instrumental for my career in a very real sense.

I tend to work alone, but am supported by my management. This is not dissimilar to how I studied, I did not attend many classes and preferred to read and assimilate information. I also had to understand the different viewpoints of conflicting psychological theories and put forward coherent arguments supporting one of these over others. As an advocate I have to understand the situation from both my client and the service provider's perspective so that I

produce an argument that best supports my client's need presented in a manner that would be justifiable under the eligibility of service delivery; so again the skills learnt during my course help lay foundations that I have since built upon.

The importance of providing advocacy is starting to be recognised and required by social care law. We are living in a time of austerity and obtaining services can be challenging and some of the more vulnerable in our society cannot do this unaided.

My advice to anyone who would like to get into advocacy is to seek voluntary work providing support alongside an independent advocate, to see if the role suits. Then see if the organisation would support you to train for a work related qualification.

The main difficulty I had studying was, as a mature student, trying to get my head around being a student again. I kept writing assignments as if it was a conversation about the topic rather than academically and this habit took a while to shake; with perseverance this was overcome.

I believe that obtaining a degree, through the Open University, shows that you are self-motivated and goal orientated, which are desirable skills in most professional sectors; it also is very rewarding when you get to graduate.

Sarah Holey

- BSc (Hons) Psychology, First Class
- Marketing Manager



I graduated from the OU with a first class honours (BSc) degree in Psychology in 2010. I've recently started working as a Marketing Channel Manager with a company in the Midlands. Essentially, I help to market the brand to national and independent plumbing merchants as well as installers.

I studied with the OU alongside working. I had a temporary job as a Marketing Administrator and progressed to Marketing Assistant while studying. After graduating, I went on to be a Marketing Executive and then Marketing Manager. I definitely think showing that I had the organisational skills to work and study was a positive for my employer at the time.

I think my career experience was hugely important for securing my recent job change but I'm certain that having an OU degree will have helped contribute to a positive perception of my experience and skills. I gained a lot of confidence during my degree through going to tutorials, engaging with other students and the research weeks that I attended. Having studied psychology, I do tend to always ask 'what would make people buy our product', 'how would people react to X or Y' when I'm thinking about a marketing strategy.

I loved studying Psychology but never found an area that I felt that I wanted to specialise in. I have continued to study on and off with the FutureLearn programme offered by the OU. I suppose I fell in to a marketing career whilst I was studying with the OU.

To current students I would say keep going! I remember struggling for motivation sometimes, particularly when assignments were due and I felt like I didn't really have much of a life outside of work and study. Remember that it will be worth it in the end!

Kevin Yeandel

- Currently studying Psychology and Counselling (BSc)Hons, final year
- IT Consultant



I work in IT and began my degree because I was driven to retrain as the result of "offshoring". For years I made the mistake of believing my career was safe, it wasn't and I was getting gaps in employment and finding it hard to hang on to my home.

Inspired perhaps by my grandmother (who was a mental health sister) and my mother (who, now aged 70, remains a brilliant practicing BACS counsellor) I decided to do a degree in Psychology and Counselling so that when I qualified I would have a new skill. What has happened since I began is not what I expected.

In my first and second year, I was disappointed and shocked to discover my documentation was less perfect than I first thought. The results from my TMA's were a wakeup call: I had made a living out of writing documentation as part of my job but it hadn't struck me that my writing skills left room for improvement!

My career in IT, since starting the degree, took me (over a period of only two years) from a moderate career position to that of Acting Chief Information Officer at a large government organisation. I have elevated at least 5 grades in two years and accredit in part to self motivation but much of this to being able to communicate more eloquently and to my seniors. In fact, I recently had my first meeting in Parliament with Senior Information Technology Specialists.

What has Psychology got to do with IT? Well, a lot actually but a small sample from the second year would include the psychology of Milgram's experiments and that of authority - something enabling me to discuss security weakness with authority figures. In particular, those managing apprentices and in terms of password sharing and conditioning which could erode national security.

Being able to offer a business proposal and explain how to measure the effectiveness through chi-square is both impressive and a means to offer the recipient confidence in your proposal and increase the likeliness they will buy into your idea.

That's just relevant content from a single year! I didn't mention the thematic analysis and 'coding' and what that has to do with 'requirements gathering' in Business Analysis or anything to do with 'stakeholder management'.

As I work for the local authorities (councils), the relevance of the first year's Social Sciences has been useful in understanding how society works and the value the authorities add. It was a very good foundation to the psychology course.

The understanding of focus groups, questionnaire design (acquiescence and response bias) has also been extremely useful in appreciating the concerns of staff during a digital transformation programme which requires them to spend more time working from home.

I also used last year's material in mentoring a young adult in regards to his understanding of attachment and conditioning. I was an occasional caregiver to him since he was 11. Understanding the work of Harlow with the cloth and wire monkeys was useful. He comes from a domestically unstable background and I introduced him to concepts through involving him in discussions relating to my course that were causing him distress. It's part of an ongoing healing/reparenting thing that I've been doing since 2011. He's now at university and doing quite well.

I'm really looking forward to my year 3 and feel that at aged 44, it isn't too late. Although wonderfully nostalgic to be in a classroom again, if I could turn the clock back 20 years, the first thing I would do is sign up with the OU - it is genuinely an institution offering materials and tutoring of exceptional quality that reaches people of all ages and backgrounds - regardless of previous school grades. A chance exists for most to obtain a highly recognised qualification and change their lives very positively.

Tania Lyden

- BSc (Hons) Psychology, First Class
- Currently studying: PhD in Education
- Careers Consultant and University Career Mentoring Manager



Current Employment and future career interests

The main part of my role at the University of Reading is working as a Careers Consultant. I am one of a team of about nearly 30 staff all focusing on developing the employability and career development skills of students.

The other part of my job has been the setting up of a Career Mentoring scheme using our alumni to mentor our undergraduates. This has been fascinating and has led me to undertake a PhD in Education. My title is : "Career Mentoring of undergraduates my university alumni: do socially diversified dyads produce different outcomes, and if so why?" .

Previously I worked as a Careers Adviser at the University of Oxford, where I studied Psychology with the OU. Prior to that I worked in Human Resources for PwC and Thames Water. I completed my Psychology degree in 2005.

The reason I chose to study with the Open University was because I wanted to take a different perspective to my colleagues in terms of how I look at my work. Rather than complete the Diploma in Careers Guidance I chose to do something different and had the kind backing of the Careers Director at Oxford.

I don't think that achieving my Psychology degree was the make or break of securing my current job role, but I think indirectly it gave me the critical skills to raise my own job performance and to be both creative and innovative in the projects I have been involved in. I developed a number of IT tools that had psychological, sociological and careers theory at the heart of the work which proved rewarding and provided great evidence of my project management skills. More than anything, the psychology degree gave me the incentive to look at issues from multiple perspectives and to this day I enjoy doing this in everything I do.

When I think about my psychology degree, I believe the most useful aspects for me were looking at things from different psychological perspectives and the freedom this gives you to be critical and analytical. I also enjoyed the social constructionist aspects hugely and this has influenced my thinking about careers guidance and has led to my constructing career choice web tools.

Juggling a new baby, a job and a part time degree really developed my self-management skills, my problem solving skills too as well as my ability to really think critically and write well.

My advice to OU Psychology students and graduates would be:

If you have a career that really inspires you but that you worry you aren't good enough for, make sure you explore it thoroughly before ruling it out perception and reality are not the same.

If you apply for a job then make sure every application you make is excellent, otherwise it really is a waste of your time and make sure you ask for help to get it as good as it can be. It can be very hard to effectively critique your own work.

Make sure you network too. Networking feels a little unethical to many of us, but in reality we all do it. If you think about it, it is simply asking people more about what they do and asking for advice. If you don't have connections to people in the types of careers that interest you then use your course peers, your lecturers and OU alumni and careers professionals.

Open University students are typically: mature, resilient, flexible, organised, highly motivated and very intelligent almost everything an employer desires: so feel proud about what you can offer any employer.