

Have you ever thought of working in the Civil Service?

PSYCHOLOGISTS from a range of fields (forensic, clinical, occupational) are employed in a number of government departments. This may not be a career option you have considered, but the Civil Service provides real opportunities to combine leading-edge application of psychology with a commitment to public service. Some of the areas of work are outlined here.

Forensic psychologists have been employed in the Prison Service for 55 years. In April 2000 work began to develop a joint psychology service for both the National Probation Service and the Prison Service (see 'Working with offenders: The ins and outs' on p.236 of this issue). This is now becoming a reality as psychologists take up posts in the National Probation Service. There are more than 500 forensic psychologists and forensic trainees working in the joint psychology service, with numbers growing significantly in recent years. Forensic psychologists contribute to a wide range of tasks, such as the development of therapeutic communities, staff training, advice at hostage-taking incidents, developing constructive regimes and working with suicidal offenders. In the Prison Service and National Probation Service many psychologists design, develop and implement groupwork or quality assure delivery by others. The interventions are based on 'what works', developed on the principles shown to be effective in reducing reoffending. Risk assessment of offenders is another key role for psychologists, and many work with life-sentenced prisoners contributing to multidisciplinary assessments and individual psychological applications. In the community, psychologists' risk assessment and risk management will contribute to multidisciplinary panels.

A variety of psychologists also work within the Health and Safety Executive, including behavioural toxicologists and

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human factors specialists. They help to understand how and why ill health or accidents at work arise, and how these can be avoided in future.

Over a hundred occupational psychologists work in the Department for Work and Pensions, established following the last election. The Department is currently transforming its services, with a major programme of change. The majority of psychologists, within Jobcentre Plus (formerly the Employment Service), deliver



employment assessments to people with disabilities, helping them gain or retain work. This can involve work with employers on redesigning or adapting jobs. Psychologists liaise with academics, disability groups and test developers to ensure practice develops in line with increasing understanding of disability issues. Some psychologists work with Jobcentre advisers and managers to develop the general service and help more people to gain the work they want. Others contribute to organisational development, working with managers and staff to tackle a range of people issues, including those emerging from employee surveys, and helping develop organisation-wide strategies (for example to manage uncomfortable work pressure and stress).

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has a long history of employing occupational psychologists, frequently in multidisciplinary teams working alongside scientists from other disciplines. Currently some 40 are employed in designated psychologist posts, and their work covers the whole range of the occupational specialisation including: advising on and

developing recruitment and selection methods; evaluating training programmes; collecting data to inform policy decisions by means of interview programmes and surveys; and providing briefings and lectures. In addition, a considerable amount of research is carried out on behalf of the MOD by universities and external consultants. An important role of many MOD psychologists is to provide an 'intelligent customer' interface, ensuring that the external researchers provide what is required by their military clients, and that in turn they receive the assistance and support they need to access military personnel. Teams of clinical psychologists are also employed in the MOD's medical services, providing a specialist service to British military personnel throughout the world.

The occupational psychologists who work within the Home Office's Assessment and Consultancy Unit specialise in assessment and recruitment, ensuring assessment tools produce the right people for specific circumstances. They also design and deliver development centres to build leadership skills. The Cabinet Office uses occupational psychologists to deliver and develop the Civil Service fast stream recruitment programmes.

The traditional image of the Civil Service is being transformed through an increased focus on leadership skills, creativity and innovation, recognition of the benefits and value of diversity, and greater acceptance of new and flexible ways of working. Working as a psychologist in the Civil Service offers a real opportunity to use psychology to make a difference to people's lives, within an environment where professional development and skill is valued and supported.

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Articles, cartoons and other contributions for the 'Students' page are most welcome.

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For careers in the joint psychology service in the National Probation and Prison Services see www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk/corporate/recruit.asp