

# CAREER VIEW

## PSYCHOLOGY

**What is intelligence? Is nature or nurture more important? What can sports people do to improve their performance? How can people communicate more effectively? Psychology, as the scientific study of the human mind and behaviour, asks and seeks to answer many fascinating questions about our species. Psychology focuses on the relationships between brain function and behaviour, between environment and behaviour, and on social interaction.**

It encompasses how people learn and remember; solve problems and use language; fall in love; how different brain structures control behaviour and what happens when these are damaged or affected by drugs; how humans develop throughout their lifetime; how individuals interact with their social environment and why they affiliate with different groups and are influenced by other people.

Psychology works towards solving social and behavioural problems and towards promoting human welfare and development. As it is a scientific discipline, psychology includes the study of research methods and statistical techniques.

### WHY STUDY PSYCHOLOGY?

An understanding of human behaviour is critical in an interconnected and complex world. Psychology studies will help you understand yourself and your interactions with others. It may help your learning and memory performance and your ability to cope with stress. Increasingly, employers realise that psychological knowledge, personal and interpersonal development are keys to success in the workplace. As a psychology graduate you can highlight these important and employable competencies when marketing your skills and aptitudes.

Psychology also trains the mind in scientific objectivity, in analytical thinking and research



methods that you will be able to apply to a wide range of careers. For example psychologists are employed across a number of industries that include health care and social welfare, criminal justice, public service, education and human resources.

The ability to interpret statistical results, acquired during psychology degree studies, is a huge plus in the workplace where mathematical and

statistical abilities are in high demand. Depending on your interests and your qualifications and aptitude, you may also find employment in other science-related areas such as data science or biological science.

### BECOMING A PSYCHOLOGIST

Psychology graduates can advance through postgraduate study to attain professional credentials and become registered psychologists. You are not allowed to call yourself a psychologist in New Zealand unless you are registered. This process is monitored and administered by the New Zealand Psychologists Board, which lays down four pathways to registration

*Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Careers and Employment.*

*Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene. Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.*

that combine different postgraduate study and supervised work experience options. The minimum requirement for registration is a Bachelor's degree with Honours in any field of psychology, other than educational psychology, together with a period of two years' supervised practice. For full details of all options check the website of the New Zealand Psychologists Board.

Psychology is a broad field with diverse applications, many of which involve specialised roles and work environments. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications or additional training. *Always check with the relevant professional body for full details.*

In general psychologists can expect, or be prepared, to:

- work with individuals, couples, families, hapu, iwi, government agencies and diverse social groups and community organisations
- work with children, adolescents and adults
- identify or diagnose problems, sometimes using assessment techniques
- introduce appropriate therapy or intervention to induce positive change, including long-term maintenance strategies
- work to prevent psychological difficulties developing
- write reports
- have a good understanding of cross-cultural perspectives and issues
- administer and interpret psychometric instruments (tests)
- work in multidisciplinary teams
- be aware of relevant legislation and statutory responsibilities
- enter into professional supervision arrangements
- maintain ethical standards and adhere to a professional code of conduct
- keep up with new research findings
- engage in ongoing professional development
- consider working on contract to organisations instead of being employed by them

**Clinical psychology** requires a Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology and registration with the New Zealand Psychologists Board. The term "clinical psychologist" refers to a professional qualification as well as being a job title. Psychologists who are clinically trained may therefore work under a specialised job title, such as Criminal Justice Psychologist. Clinical psychologists are employed in a range of government and community organisations such as District Health Boards, Child, Youth and Family, community mental health centres, addiction

rehabilitation agencies, private clinics, in business and industry and, increasingly, in private practice. Depending on experience, they may also work in schools and prisons.

**Counselling psychology:** A counselling psychologist is a registered psychologist who works with people to bring about and make positive change in their lives. Rehabilitation counselling is a growing field. Additional counselling or psychotherapeutic training may be useful. Counselling psychologists are employed across a range of government and community social service agencies and educational institutions, many are in private practice.

**Educational and developmental psychology** requires a recognised postgraduate qualification in Psychology or Educational Psychology plus additional postgraduate study or work experience approved by the NZ Psychologists Board for registration. The Ministry of Education employs many educational psychologists under the Group Special Education. Other psychologists may work as private practitioners or under contract to schools, marae or other social service agencies.

**Criminal justice and forensic psychology** is a specialisation within the legal and criminal justice system. The work includes risk assessment reports and the provision of expert opinion to the courts. Most forensic psychologists are employed by the Department of Corrections. Registration is a requirement and a Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology is desirable. Positions are available for interns undergoing registration as part of a recognised postgraduate course in clinical psychology.

**Organisational psychology** focuses on working environments and work issues, such as recruitment and selection of staff, training, performance appraisal, career development, occupational safety and health, and organisational restructuring. Employment is in human resources departments in large organisations, some government departments such as the Ministry of Defence, and private companies and consultancies.

Other specialisations include community psychology, health psychology, sports psychology, clinical neuropsychology, academic psychology and psychological research.

**The New Zealand Psychological Society (NZPsS)** is the largest professional association for psychologists in Aotearoa/New Zealand with over 1500 practitioners, academic and student members. Postgraduate student members benefit from discounts, professional development workshops and webinars, mentoring and opportunities for networking.



## WHAT SKILLS DO PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATES HAVE?

Psychology graduates have all the skills employers expect of graduates, plus some that uniquely reflect their course of study.

**Communication skills** are high on the list of most employers. Both verbal and written communication skills are well developed in psychology courses, particularly for the development of concise, well-structured report writing.

**Relationship management skills:** Psychology graduates understand interpersonal processes, including the intentions and motivations behind actions and reactions. This is helpful in roles that involve a lot of personal interaction such as management, teaching and counselling. They are also likely to understand group dynamics and thus be effective in team situations.

**Analytical problem solving:** Psychology is a scientific, problem-solving discipline. Its graduates are trained to work logically with information which appears contradictory, to discriminate between what is normal and what is aberrant, to establish linkages between cause and effect, and to formulate conclusions and action plans based on valid data. People who can solve problems do well in work environments.

**Statistical and methodological understanding** is necessary to evaluate and interpret research reports and the use of different tests and scales. Many jobs, from policy analyst to market researcher, require an understanding of statistical concepts such as the properties of a normal curve, effect sizes and what is meant by a margin of error. Psychology graduates have mastered these concepts and have a good understanding of different methodologies and their strengths and weaknesses.

**Research skills and knowledge** are valuable in many jobs. The body of psychological literature is extensive—much is computer-based and psychology graduates are trained to access it, understand it and evaluate it. Understanding and expertise in such matters means you can take the initiative in projects that are dependent on such knowledge and expertise.

**Professional self-awareness:** Psychology graduates typically have a level of insight and self-awareness that allows them to discriminate between personal and professional behaviour. They therefore adapt well to roles in which ethical standards and codes of conduct are governing principles. This awareness and a capacity for professionalism also make for effective leaders and managers.

## WHERE DO PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATES WORK?

Psychology graduates with clinical and non-clinical degrees have a lot to offer to both public and private sectors where employment options are diverse and exciting. In many fields of work, from entry-level positions through to senior levels of management, the ability to understand and work with others is essential, along with well developed communication and thinking skills.

Technical expertise is not always the main criterion for employment, but a double degree or double major that includes other work related content such as commerce, information technology, law or management can be an advantage—Psychology is highly compatible with many courses of study. Employers always consider the strength of candidates' transferable skills, their university grades and how they would 'fit' into their team and organisational culture.

Where job advertisements do not specify a psychology degree it is important to relate your skills and knowledge to the basic functions of the job when emphasising your competitive edge. For example, if one of the basic functions of the job is to encourage and support people in roles such as *youth worker, manager, teacher, careers adviser, social worker, counsellor, sports coach, childcare worker or occupational therapist*, you might stress your understanding of social interaction, behaviour change and theories of motivation.

If a basic function is to influence people such as with *sales, advertising, market research or public relations* roles, then your knowledge of attitude formation, attitude change, personality and group identification should be relevant.

If it is to provide information as in *help desk and technical support roles, librarian, policy adviser, economist, science technician, lawyer or systems analyst*, then your knowledge of research methods, learning, cognition or data analysis could be emphasised.

If the job involves working with groups as in *management positions, coaching, coordinator roles, teaching or human resources*, mention group dynamics, social psychology and your understanding of cross-cultural psychology.

**Government Ministries and Departments** such as the **Ministry of Education, Department of Internal Affairs and Accident Compensation Corporation** employ graduates to entry-level positions, internships or graduate development programmes. Role titles include: Analyst, Case Manager, Human Resources Advisor, Immigration Officer, Administration Officer or Assistant, Communications Officer or Advisor, Policy Analyst and Research Assistant.

In the **Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE)** psychology graduates may be employed in the Human Resources team. The **Department of Corrections** has Programme Facilitator roles that involve working with groups of offenders to promote behaviour changes. Registered psychologists work with offenders, providing clinical and risk assessment and treatment services and referral to appropriate agencies where necessary. The **Ministry of Social Development** recruits graduates to roles in policy, including research and evaluation; corporate support and service delivery. Examples of roles include Residential Youth Worker, Strategic Advisor, Analyst and Contact Centre Supervisor.

The **New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF)** employs people with postgraduate degrees as Psychologist Officers (Air Force and Navy) or Field Psychologists (Army). For all Services NZDF requires a Master's degree usually in Organisational or Industrial Psychology. NZDF Psychologists don't typically have a clinical role (except in preliminary diagnosis and referral); their role is to design and run selection activities, advise Commanders and individuals on personnel performance issues, and to undertake research of interest/use to the NZDF.

**Local Authorities** manage a very wide range of services for the community. Graduates with special interests find employment in areas such as housing, disability, sport and recreation, human resources, public health (homelessness, mental health, child health and safety, nutrition and physical activity), event management, emergency management, health and safety, community centres, holiday programmes,

urban design and planning. **Auckland Council**, for example, has a two-year graduate programme and relevant positions for psychology graduates in teams such as Customer and Digital Services, People and Capability, Community Development Arts and Culture.

**District Health Boards (DHBs)** employ registered psychologists in a number of teams such as mental health, children's health (pediatric diabetes, child development) and youth forensic. Some DHBs will offer internships while graduates work towards registration. Other relevant areas for non-clinical graduates are human resources, recruitment and organisational development.

#### **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)**

Psychology graduates have an edge with community social service agencies and the **Mental Health Foundation** where they are employed in a range of positions including *administration, case management, funding and research roles*. The Mental Health Foundation also has roles such as Information Officer and Mental Health Promoter. Other NGOs deliver services in areas such as mental health, alcohol and drug addiction and gambling, family support services, mental health promotion, support work, community work, telephone counselling, facilitation, youth work, child safety, and disability work.

#### **Consultancies and Companies**

Executive recruitment consultancies, like Sheffield or Hudson, employ psychologists to carry out organisational development, recruitment and other employment related functions. Companies as diverse as PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), DHL and Fonterra employ psychology graduates to roles in employment relations, human resources and in organisational development teams. Large companies often have graduate programmes and internships. Requirements for roles vary. For example an Employment Relations Coordinator role at Fonterra asks that candidates enjoy working with numbers in detail and be very solution-oriented. *"Diligence and a strong attention to detail are reckoned as your strengths. Also, you should have strong communication skills and intercultural competences. Advanced business, or social, or humanities, or cultural studies, psychology, computer sciences, mathematics or law complete your profile."* (Fonterra website)

Overseas, software companies use the knowledge of psychologists to assist in areas such as visual perception, human-computer interaction and the ergonomics of keyboard layout. Psychologists may also advise engineering companies on issues such as occupational safety (both for employees and as

## GRADUATE PROFILES

an aspect of the design of new products). In such instances, psychologists may either be employed directly by the company or on a consultancy basis.

### Public Relations, Communications and Marketing

Public relations specialists help maintain a company's public image and manage public opinion as well as informing staff and clients about what is happening within the organisation. At higher levels specialists advise on policy and strategy. Entry-level positions such as Communications Advisor may require additional qualifications such as media studies or journalism, however a psychology degree that gives an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and motivations is an excellent foundation. Many marketing companies use aspects of psychology to understand consumer decision-making and apply that in packaging, marketing and displaying products.

### Human Resources (HR)

Organisational psychology graduates may work in a consultancy, run their own business or work within the HR team of large public or private sector organisations. A Human Resources Officer develops, advises on and implements policies concerning the effective use of personnel within an organisation. Typical roles include Human Resource Advisor, Recruitment Coordinator and Training Officer. Human resource practitioners often have additional qualifications in business management, finance, human resources and other related fields.

### Education

Teaching at university level requires a PhD. Graduates can advance their research and teaching skills by undertaking a Master's degree or PhD and may have the opportunity to tutor undergraduate students. Other roles in tertiary institutions include Academic/Student Advisors, Human Resource Advisors, Career Consultants and Counsellors.

## JOB TITLES

The following is a sample of job titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications and training.

Alcohol and drug counsellor • analyst • animal behaviourist • careers adviser • case manager • claims manager • clinical psychologist • communications officer • community advisor • corrections officer • employment advisor • information officer • human resources advisor • family support worker • laboratory technician • marketing co-ordinator • market research analyst • mental health promoter • policy analyst • programme facilitator • project coordinator • qualitative research executive • recruitment coordinator • researcher • training and development advisor • youth worker.

### Roxanne Heffernan

*Programme Facilitator  
Department of Corrections*



After working and travelling overseas for a few years when I left secondary school, I headed for university and decided to study Psychology. The courses looked interesting and I wanted the opportunity to start a career where I would help others. During my undergraduate Psychology degree I became interested in criminal behaviour. I am passionate about understanding the causes of crime and working to reduce the harm it causes. Victoria University is the only place in New Zealand where you can study Forensic Psychology, which was one reason I chose to do my Honours and Master's research there. The other reason was the strong reputation of the University and the academic staff in the Psychology department.

My time at Victoria prepared me well for my current job, both with the theoretical underpinnings of correctional psychology and with practical interviewing and assessment skills. I am currently delivering interventions to offenders in Rimutaka prison, and in the future I hope to complete supervision to registration so I can register as a psychologist and continue to work with high-risk offenders. I am also interested in completing a PhD in the future, developing some of the ideas from my Master's thesis, and one of my long-term goals is to develop treatment programmes for prisoners.

I really enjoyed the Forensic Psychology programme, in particular the supportiveness of the staff and supervisors who are well known and respected in this field. I think it was a big factor in securing my current job, and it is definitely an advantage that will help me succeed and progress within the Department.

I also enjoyed the creativity of undertaking a theoretical thesis. I like working with existing ideas and theories, and considering how they could be improved upon in order to better explain patterns of behaviour. This way of thinking has helped me when it comes to understanding individuals with very different backgrounds to my own, and to considering how they interact with their environments in order to reach their goals.

I would definitely recommend Victoria University, and particularly the Forensic Psychology programme, to others who are interested in criminal behaviour. It is a decision that has led me to a challenging and rewarding career.

**Will Brown**

*Self-employed, part time, 3D printing business, Brainform Internet sales/promotion, Regional Wines and Spirits*



I had five years' break between secondary school and university, doing various jobs. During that time I read a lot of material and found I was craving knowledge.

I was very interested in the philosophy of the mind, and studying Psychology at university was a way to try and understand that.

I've found that Psychology can give you profound insight into who and what we are, and also insight into other people, which builds tolerance and acceptance of difference. A deeper understanding of Psychology can decrease prejudice and reduce any anger we might have towards those around us because it exposes the various biases that can change our thinking and affect decision-making.

Among the skills I developed during my degree studies, I found writing and critical thinking were the most important. At later stages of my degree and at postgraduate level I gained the ability to closely analyse scientific publications – another key skill that I value highly.

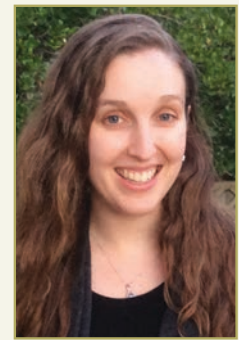
The academic staff in Psychology are incredible – a diverse group of scientists, accepting of philosophical differences and very involved with the students. There is little hierarchy between staff and students within the department and communication is actively encouraged.

In my postgraduate degree I was encouraged to do research and laboratory work and began developing a 3D printing programme for a part-time business. I found that you have quite a distant connection with this thing you study in Psychology – the brain, the thing that is also doing the studying. When you learn about how the brain is organised, how different areas interact and about brain damage you generally learn from images, models and diagrams. I wanted a more tangible connection. Now I can print full scale and anatomically correct models of the outside surface of brains from MRI scans. So in effect you can examine your own brain and create a more accurate mental image of the thing that's creating the images...

There is something for everyone in Psychology. I find the skills I've gained are useful across the board in my personal and professional life.

**Rewa Murphy**

*Clinical Psychologist Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family (Mental Health) Service, Hutt Valley District Health Board*



Studying Psychology felt like an easy choice. I was interested in people's stories about themselves, and knew I wanted a career that was about helping other people in some way. I'd had fun working with children as a teenager, and thought that becoming a psychologist would be a way to continue with that. Having said that, the range of topics and choices on offer was quite a lot broader than the 'mental health' focus I expected from studying Psychology – it was great.

As a graduate student I really started to find my niche in discursive psychology, which is interested in how we produce meaning, knowledge and power from everyday things like language and images. I was fortunate enough to undertake a research project about media messages that encourage young women to 'love' their bodies, and even got to present some of my research at a conference in Europe where I met other psychologists from around the world.

I work as a clinician and we talk a lot about using research evidence to help guide us as to the best way to support the people who come under our care. The experience of doing my own research really got me thinking – what is good evidence anyway? and who gets to decide what makes someone well again? Importantly, I learned to always reflect on what I do and how I bring myself each day into my work – to always be curious and always ask, how could this be different?

Going out on clinical placement was a definite highlight of my studies; you get to spend time working alongside qualified mental health professionals, and it was so exciting to meet my first clients and so humbling to hear what they had to share.

I would suggest that new students take the time to connect with other people on their course – it's the best way to study and learn. My classmates were a great support network throughout my time at university and have now become my colleagues. I was very grateful to the senior students who shared their experiences with me, and then as a postgraduate student valued the chance to introduce new students to a subject I was really passionate about.

### Adam Stewart

*Advanced Reproductive Technologies Technician  
Malaghan Institute*



To be completely honest, I can't remember the exact reasons I decided to study Psychology. I had spent a year working full time while I mulled my future over and over in my head, and before I knew it I was living in Wellington studying a Bachelor of Science (BSc). It's not a decision I regret though.

My entire academic life has been focused around science in various forms; studying things – anything – in a methodical, logical way just seems to suit me. Psychology is this fantastic mix of the scientific and the spiritual, where data drives you but intuition is your map. I'd highly recommend it to anybody who is looking to better understand society, individuals or themselves.

The skills you learn are valuable in any workplace, from statistical analysis to reading people's minds. Open mindedness, empathy and curiosity are all traits that get well-exercised while learning about things ranging from friendly social interactions to when a healthy mind develops mental illness, and even the inner workings of the criminal mind.

On a personal level, Behavioural and Social Psychology were my favourite courses. Learning about the innate motivations behind behaviours really helped me understand people and freed me from a lot of prejudices that I didn't even realise I had. Working with adorable rats in the lab exercises was a bonus also.

Leading into my career the mathematical side of things was a big help. I work within tight space and budget constraints, as well as having a large inventory to manage. Having the ability to formulate a spreadsheet, pull forecasts out of data and generally interpret relationships between the many variables of my workplace helps me organise my workload in the most efficient manner possible. Having the backup skill of "workplace mediator" when personalities inevitably clash is an added bonus that people appreciate.

The interpersonal skills learned in Psychology translate exceptionally well to employee relations and staff management. If you have a desire to help people and aren't afraid of a moderate amount of statistics, this major will do you well no matter what your career goals.

### Jessica Edlin

*Advisor, Sector Investment  
Ministry of Justice*



As a high school student I wanted to make a difference, to help people overcome trauma, and to make good decisions. I thought that studying Psychology would lead to a career as a counsellor, but quickly learned that Psychology is much broader than this.

Psychology touches many aspects of our lives. If you are interested in the biological side of human behaviour you can study neuropsychology; if you are interested in understanding leadership and influence in the workplace, there's organisational psychology. Then there's social psychology, memory, abnormal psychology, cultural psychology... the options are just about endless.

I already had a passion for science so I chose to do a minor in Cell and Molecular Bioscience that would complement what I was learning about the biological aspects of mental health. In the later years of my study I also pursued an interest in organisational psychology.

While I was in my third year of study I got a job as a psychometric analyst, which related well to my interest in organisational psychology. I wrote reports analysing an individual's personality profile against the job description of the ideal candidate to inform the types of questions that the employer should ask the individual in the interview.

Statistical analysis really helped me in my current job as well, in particular understanding statistical significance and what an effect size is. In the public sector there is a strong focus on evidence-based decision making, so the ability to understand and use statistics is becoming increasingly important. One of the first tasks in my role was to do a literature review to ascertain if the services we provide are effective, which wouldn't have been possible without a working knowledge of statistics.

There are many opportunities available for graduates with a degree in Psychology, particularly if you have a second major in a related area like statistics, marketing or business. I'm glad to be in the public service and can see possibilities for future work in organisations like the Ministry of Health or PHARMAC where I'll be able to follow my science bent.

## PSYCHOLOGY AT VICTORIA

The School of Psychology teaches a full range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in many specialist areas. Students benefit from our excellent facilities and dedicated staff, many of whom have international reputations, and our Psychology school is the top-ranked research school in the country.

For students choosing to study at postgraduate level, the School offers several programmes:

- Graduate Diploma in Science
- Bachelor of Science with Honours
- Postgraduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology
- Master of Science in Psychology
- Master of Science in Cognitive and Behavioural Neuroscience
- Master of Science in Cross-Cultural Psychology
- Master of Science in Forensic Psychology
- Innovation and Commercialisation
- PhD

Those interested in pursuing a research career can obtain experience in our research laboratories from their third year of study.

The School maintains excellent links with Capital Coast Health and its mental health units, the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families, the Department of Corrections, the Family Centre, the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research and senior psychologists in private practice and in the public sector. Many researchers in the School maintain relationships with other groups within the University such as the School of Biological Sciences, the School of Government, and the Institute of Criminology.

If you are planning to study Law, Criminology or Commerce and are interested in people, a second

major in Psychology will give you an edge. Many of our students also study Biology, Statistics, Computer Science and Biomedical Science.

For more information, please check out the School's website or pay the friendly staff of the School of Psychology a visit.



## Special thanks to:

The School of Psychology, in particular Professor Garth Fletcher – Head of School, Dr Deirdre Brown – Chair, Marketing Committee and Alana Hamill – Administrator Graduate Programmes; graduates Will Brown, Jessica Edlin, Roxanne Heffernan, Rewa Murphy, Adam Stewart and all those people who contributed to this publication.

Career View is published by Careers and Employment.  
Victoria University of Wellington, Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui  
PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, Tel: 64-4-463 5393

[www.victoria.ac.nz/careers](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/careers)

Ref 811215

ISSN 1172-4315