



## How to find a counselling job

by Miriam James

**This article is aimed at newly qualified or soon to be qualified counsellors who are seeking paid work in counselling. It concentrates upon using different approaches to find employment.**

Some of the routes to finding jobs are well known, such as following up advertisements in journals, starting with Therapy Today and in newspapers or via websites such as [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk). Other routes are less well known - the unadvertised routes - and so we'll examine how they work and what you will need to do to start to use them.

### Advertised routes

Advertised routes are open to anyone who reads advertisements either via:

- National and regional newspapers,
- Journals
- The internet

These routes are likely to attract a number of candidates which makes them competitive. It is better not to base your entire job search to using only these routes.

Tips to help you with reading printed and Internet-based adverts

- Differentiate between 'essential' and 'desirable' in advertisements. 'Essential' means you must have whatever requirements are specified, whereas 'desirable' means it's a bonus to have the particular knowledge, skill or experience. Note words like 'ideally', 'preferably' and 'an advantage', which may suggest that the employer is not flexible here.
- Often salary is omitted so rather than waste time applying for jobs, without salary details, be prepared to ring up the agency or organisation advertising and enquire about salary. In doing so, you're likely to be asked what salary you are seeking.

- Follow the 80/20 principle below, which helps you assess your suitability for advertised jobs:
  - i. Examine the description of the job and the requirements for a candidate to be successful. Highlight all the text about the job or requirements where you match what is required. Be rigorous and ensure you consider every relevant aspect of the text.
  - ii. On completion of this, assess from the highlighted text how well you match the description. If you match 80 per cent or more of the relevant text, go ahead and apply. If not, don't apply. This may sound harsh, but other better-qualified candidates will be selected for interviews instead of you. This decision enables you to move on and make new applications, thus saving time and effort.
  - iii. If you can demonstrate good job matches to yourself i.e. over 80% matches, you're more likely to obtain interviews. Having interviews for suitable jobs rather than applying and being rejected will assist in maintaining motivation and self confidence. These two are much needed when searching for a new job.

### Unadvertised routes

Essentially, the routes outlined below are useful to help you discover where interesting vacancies exist, before they become publicised through the advertised routes. It's less likely that you will get your job directly through one of the unadvertised routes, as most counselling-related organisations prefer using advertisement routes to recruit as fairly as possible.

However using the unadvertised routes provides you with opportunities to obtain information to help your job search.

The two unadvertised routes are developing contacts and making direct approaches to specific organisations. Let's take developing contacts first.

## Developing contacts

We all have networks, e.g. family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues, peers, interest and sports groups, to name but a few. You never know who your contacts may know! Your job is to talk to more and more people who may know something which will help in your search.

I'm including some possible topics to give you ideas on what you may wish to talk about. It's not a complete list, just thoughts to stimulate your own thinking:

- Outline your future employment ideas and ask your contacts for responses and advice.
- Ask other counsellors how they got their first paid counselling job.
- Get feedback on your CV.
- Ask other counsellors "what do you like and dislike about your job?"
- Obtain recommendations of good suitable employers locally. Also ask for details of good employment agencies.
- Consult people on whether they can introduce you to people they know, who may help you gain more information.
- Talk to ex-tutors, supervisors, trainers, and co-ordinators of counselling agencies at which you've volunteered. Identify the topics to discuss with them in advance.



All these suggestions work from the premise that you do everything you can to equip yourself with knowledge to help you make really well-matched and informed applications for jobs.

You will need to demonstrate at interviews that you're the best candidate. But the more you discover about what's needed and where job possibilities are in your local counselling organisations, the stronger your applications are likely to become.

## Making direct approaches

The other unadvertised route is making direct applications to specific counselling employers. Some jobs are never advertised because they are filled internally. Sometimes, a very suitable external applicant applies directly to an organisation at the very time at which there is a vacancy. S/he will have done some research and will write to the most senior person who makes recruitment decisions in the organisation, explaining how s/he can help meet the organisation's aims and objectives. The timing may be due to good fortune but its due to effective networking and/or researching too.

You need lots of determination to reach key people in any organisation; remaining positive is important. Also, you need to know how and where to research. Useful

information for research is available on many counselling websites; several give good links to other sites.

Many sites provide plenty of information about the work done in that organisation whether it is a counselling agency, GP practice, university counselling service, employee advisory provider etc. Many give details of functions, different departments, with contact names and numbers.

We've examined different routes to use in seeking counselling jobs. My advice is to use all routes in a 'blended approach'. I hope that use of these job search routes will help you to find your next counselling job.

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