

How to find a counselling job

This article is the third in a series aimed at newly qualified counsellors who are seeking paid work in counselling. It concentrates upon using different approaches to find a job.

In this article, we shall look at different ways or routes of finding work, which are available to counsellors. The article refers at all times to finding work within existing organisations, rather than setting up your own counselling practice. The types of organisations in mind may include counselling agencies: specific or general, counselling services within NHS trusts, in educational establishments and within employee assistance programs. Of course, there are other settings where counselling jobs exist. But the ones mentioned act as examples of where you may seek a paid counselling position.

Some of these routes to finding jobs are well known, such as following up advertisements in journals, starting with CPJ, naturally, and in newspapers or via web sites on the Internet. Other routes are less well known and so we'll examine how they work and what you will need to do to use them. They are called the unadvertised routes. We'll begin with the advertised ones.

Advertised Routes

Advertised routes refer to ways of finding vacancies, open to anyone to access, via advertisements. Essentially there are two such routes:

1. Advertisements in national or regional newspapers, professional journals or newsletters
2. Advertisements via the Internet.

Both routes are likely to attract a number of candidates, for that is their purpose, to obtain enough

suitable applicants from whom one candidate will be selected. Any one of us can buy a national newspaper and those of us with Internet access can click on specific web sites. So, although these routes are available, it's their availability to us all that make them likely to be very competitive. Do remember not to base your entire search for jobs on these routes alone.

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

• 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. Watch out for words such as “ideally,” “preferably” and “an advantage,” suggesting that the employer is flexible about this requirement.

• **Job titles can be very misleading.** Scrutinise the text closely to obtain a fuller picture of the job. If you think you're suitable, then apply.

• **Salary is often negotiable and equally often, not mentioned at all in advertisements.** This defeats the notion that applicants will self-select themselves in or out of applying for specific jobs according to the details stated about them. If you don't want to waste time applying for jobs, which you can't afford to accept, be prepared to ring up the agency or organisation advertising and enquire about salary. In doing so, expect to answer questions on what you're seeking for your salary.

The outcome of doing this may mean you choose not to apply, using the self-select concept, which then frees you up to follow up more suitable positions.

• **Follow the 80/20 Principle as described below.** A likely result of making many applications and not getting jobs, or even interviews, is that you risk losing some motivation and may become totally disheartened and negative about finding work. The 80/20 principle helps you assess your suitability realistically for any advertised job. It works like this:

- i) Examine the description of the job and the requirements for a candidate to be successful. Using a highlighter pen (biro will do), identify 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 your matching efforts equal 80% or more of the text, go ahead and apply. If they don't, 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, then you're more likely to obtain interviews where you can convince others, too. Being invited to interviews, rather than not rejected, is likely to assist you in maintaining motivation and also in retaining your determination and

persistence! These qualities are much needed when searching for a job.

If you use the Internet and have BACP membership, you can utilise BACP's web site to enter the counselling jobs online service reached via the Public Information page. At the time of writing, there were 26 vacancies advertised on it. The BACP's online address is www.bacp.co.uk

Unadvertised Routes

Essentially, the routes outlined below are of use 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 the other routes to recruit as fairly as possible. So why use the unadvertised routes, you may be wondering. Using the unadvertised routes provides you with a chance to obtain information to help your job search.

The two unadvertised routes are

- i) developing personal contacts and
- ii) making direct approaches to specific organisations in which you wish to work.

Let's take developing personal contacts first. Consulting your friends, relatives and acquaintances can help you to achieve these aims:

- To identify organisations which may have job opportunities coming up
- To increase your knowledge of likely local employers
- To give you practise in talking about your experience and your suitability.

Before you start doing this, it will be helpful if you make some preparations. Identify whom you can talk to and what will you talk about? Clarify why, for example,

talking to your ex-counselling tutor will be useful. Develop some ideas on what would be helpful for you to learn at this point in your search for a new job. For example, you could research which organisations you would like to work for and see if you can get to talk to people from these organisations. Maybe through existing personal contacts, you can be introduced to others in your identified organisations? When you do meet people from different counselling organisations, find out what experience and skills are needed in their workplaces. Learn more about their cultures and values. What is the typical profile of a counsellor in these organisations, both in terms of knowledge and previous experience?

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. Developing personal contacts in your chosen field is unlikely to get you a job. You will still 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. Sometimes, it's possible to go straight into the perfect job via your personal networking, before it you becomes advertised. In that case, it's your lucky break. Enjoy!

The other unadvertised route is by making direct applications to specific counselling employers, which is the direct approach. 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's 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. Of course, by doing some research, this applicant will have discovered what the organisation's

aims and values are. The timing may be due to good fortune, but perhaps it's due to effective networking and/or researching and owes little to luck.

To be successful using the direct approach requires determination to reach key people in any organisation. Also, you need to know how and where to research and to remain positive. Useful information for research is available on many counselling web sites, many of which give good links to other sites. If you enter the BACP site and click on Useful Links under Public Information, you will see other sites in the categories of:

- Helplines
- Social problems
- Health
- National and International

Many sites not only provide links, but also contain plenty of information about the work done in that organisation, different departments and their functions, with even contact names and addresses. With the emergence of the Net, it's never been easier to obtain research information.

We've examined different routes to use in seeking counselling jobs. They consist of following up printed advertisements as well as Internet ones, developing personal contacts who can give you advice, information and support and making direct approaches to key people in organisations. The first two routes are more competitive, as they are the public ones to which we all have access. The last two require greater efforts on your part. You will need to be willing to talk to your personal contacts and to conduct research to get closer to the sort of counselling opportunities that you want. My advice is to use all four routes in a "blended approach." I hope that use of these four job search routes will help you to find your next counselling job.

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