

Diversity in clinical psychology training at the University of Essex

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Introduction

According to the 2011 census, 19.5% of the population in England and Wales is from a background other than White British, including 5.4% describing themselves as White Other (including Irish, Gypsy or 'other'); and 14.1% describing themselves as from a Black, Asian, mixed or 'other' non-white background. In contrast, only [9.6% of qualified clinical psychologists in England and Wales are from an ethnic minority background](#). This cannot be accounted for by a smaller proportion of black and ethnic minority (BAME) applicants to training programmes. Indeed, the percentage of people applying to UK clinical psychology programmes from a BAME background in 2019 was 19.3%¹ (Clearing House, 2019); including those from the White other groups, increases this figure to 38.9%. The percentage of in BAME applicants gaining a place was only 13.8% and the percentage of all ethnic minorities gaining a place was 27.8%. Increasing concerns about this consistent disparity in selection and recruitment, to training programmes and hence in the profession, have led to a number of initiatives to [increase diversity in the profession by improving student recruitment to accredited training programmes](#).

The University of Essex (UoE) programme, is one of 30 accredited clinical psychology courses in the UK and has been running since 2005. There are a range of recruitment practices that have been in operation over several years which aim to ensure trainee diversity on the UoE programme. Since 2012 we have operated a system of separating out different parts of each application form, dividing applications into academic qualifications, personal statements and references. Different people assess these components so that any bias that may operate from reading one part of an application will not carry across to other elements of the application form. Academic qualifications are rated blind by one person systematically in a spreadsheet format where identifying details are not visible. The personal statements are distributed to raters without identifying or contextual information. References are considered

¹ Percentages calculated based on raw data available from:
<https://www.leeds.ac.uk/chpccp/equalopps.html>

separately and are used only to screen out applicants where serious concerns are raised by referees, given that referees may introduce biases. We do not take A-level performance into account, since performance on these is known to be impacted by social disadvantage. We look at the third-year average score in undergraduate degrees rather than the overall score because any disadvantage carried by young people into university can potentially be overcome during the course of a university degree, with grades increasing across the three years. We do not give any weighting to which university a degree came from. We do not look at any identifying characteristics until the interview stage of the process. However, applicants are invited to make us aware of any special requirement for the interview process or our literacy and numeracy test and we operate a 'two tick' or disability confidence scheme.

In order to explore whether these practices are working to maintain trainee diversity, this report details an audit of diversity of students trained on the UoE programme including ethnicity, gender and social backgrounds.

Methods

Equal opportunities data used in this audit

Data on gender, marital status, dependants, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, and age obtained from anonymised equal opportunities data collected by the Clearing House from 2018-2021. Anonymised equal opportunities data on ethnicity were available for applicants who accepted places on the UoE programme from 2011 onwards. Most data presented below therefore reflect the four intakes between 2018 and 2021; however, in the case of ethnicity, additional data is presented for a full ten years.

Socioeconomic status data

Postcode data at age 17 was available for 2018-2021 from the Clearing House. These data were converted into ranks based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IoD2019). The IoD2019 ranks every neighbourhood in England into deciles from 1 (most deprived area) to

32,844 (least deprived area) on a combination of income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and living environment metrics. Deciles are calculated by ranking from most deprived to least deprived and dividing them into 10 equal groups. In order to place the postcodes collected by the Clearing House into a decile, postcodes were converted into deciles using an online Postcode lookup tool: <https://imd-by-postcode.opendatacommunities.org/imd/2019>.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted by the UoE Faculty Research Committee. Ethical concerns raised related to data protection and applicants' confidentiality. Consent is obtained by the Clearing House, which asks applicants to select either:

- a) Purpose 1. Make the anonymised data public.
- b) Purpose 2. Centres using the information for audit and research only.
- c) Purpose 3. Give centres full access to the data to use in any way they see appropriate.
- d) Do not give consent for data to be shared.

Data used in this audit only included those who selected purpose 2 or 3, therefore giving consent for their data to be used in a way compatible with this audit. To enhance confidentiality, data was only used at a group level and by amalgamating 4 years of data together.

Findings

Summary application numbers

Application to the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the UoE increased year-on-year between 2018 and 2021 with 293 applications in 2018 and 358 in 2021, a 22.8% increase. This increase is greater than the 17.5% increase in applications nationally between the same period, (3866 applications in 2018 and 4544 in 2021). The cohort size (determined by the

number of commissioned places offered by Health Education East of England) grew from 10 places in 2011, to 11 places in 2015, 18 places in 2020 and 31 places for 2021.

Diversity within training cohorts

Table 1: Ethnic diversity among trainees compared to UK and regional population

	UK population East of England (%)	UK population (%)	UoE cohorts 2011-2021 (%)	UoE 2018-2021 (%)
Asian	4.8	7.5	13.1	12.7
Black	2	3.3	6.2	14.3
Mixed	1.9	2.2	4.8	9.5
White British	85.3	80.5	53.8	55.6
White Other	5.5	5.4	22.1	7.9

Table 1 above shows diversity within training cohorts. Summing across all years 2011-2021, data show that the UoE programme has recruited Black, Mixed, Asian and White Other students in greater proportions to the East of England population.² The last column shows the data for the last 4 years only indicating that in recent years the proportion of White Other trainees has decreased and the proportion of Mixed and Black trainees has increased. The drop in trainees within the White Other group is likely related to the effects of Brexit in that EU applicants without “settled status” no longer qualified for Home fee status after Brexit and therefore largely stopped applying for NHS funded places. UoE cohorts from 2011-2021 consisted of 14.5% male trainees and 85.5% female trainees.

Table 2 below shows additional aspects of diversity among UoE cohorts from 2018-2021. Percentages are the percent of those reporting data for each category not including missing data. Missing data includes those who did not respond to the question or who selected

² ‘White Other’ includes White Irish, people from European backgrounds and other non-specified white other groups. ‘Asian’ includes an amalgamation of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian group as well as the subgroups of Middle Eastern, North African, Chinese and ‘Other’. These may not be the most ideal ways of grouping sub-categories but has been adopted to enable comparison with UK Clearing House data.

'Prefer not to say'. All data is self-report and has only been collected since 2018, hence not reported for all cohorts since 2011.

Table 2: Diversity among UoE trainees

Characteristic		UoE cohorts 2018-2021 (%)
Gender	Male	12.5
	Female	87.5
Socio-economic status	Most deprived 10%	3.9
	10-20%	5.9
	20-30%	19.6
	30-40%	3.9
	40-50%	5.9
	50-60%	11.8
	60-70%	9.8
	70-80%	7.8
	80-90%	9.8
	Least deprived 10%	21.6
	Most deprived 50%	39.2%
	Least deprived 50%	60.8%
Marital status	Single	64.5
	Married/cohabiting	35.5
	Divorced/separated	0
Dependants	Yes	10.0
	No	90.0
Sexuality	Heterosexual	88.7
	Gay/lesbian/other	11.3
Disability	Disability	14.8
	No disability	85.2
Age	20-30	71.0
	31-40	29.0
	41+	0

Deprivation data using the postcode at age 17 show that around 40% of trainees on the programme were from deciles 1-5 (the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods). More than half (64.5%) of trainees were single compared with 35% of the general population which reflects the age range which is predominantly 20-30. A minority (10%) have dependants. The majority of trainees are heterosexual which is similar to the general population (93.7%). Just under 15% of trainees reported a disability which is similar to the UK population (18%).³ While some aspects of trainee cohort diversity may be roughly in line with UK population diversity as indicated, it may be more important that trainee diversity reflects the diversity of people who may need to access mental health services. There is little concrete data on this to make

³ Sources for comparison UK data include ONS data and Employers Forum on Disability

clear-cut comparisons. However, it is well established that there are proportionately higher levels of mental health problems among LGBT populations⁴ as well as among other disadvantaged groups⁵.

Equality in selection processes

The following findings consider equity within the selection process from application to shortlisting, interviews and acceptance. The Clearing House equal opportunities data for all applicants to the programme enable detailed analysis of equity at each stage of the process. The first stage of the UoE selection process is to screen applications for minimum entry criteria. These criteria, published on the [Clearing House](#) website are: 1. to have a British Psychological Society accredited undergraduate degree in Psychology with a minimum of 65% average across third year marks; 2. To have a minimum of one year's experience in a work setting relevant to clinical psychology (interpreted broadly and not necessarily work supervised by a clinical psychologist); 3. Average of 7 on IELTS or equivalent; 4. Right to work in UK. After screening-in those applicants meeting the minimum entry criteria, it is possible to examine what percentage of eligible applicants are offered an interview; offered a place; and accept a place.

Table 3 below presents percentages of eligible applicants within each group selected at each stage of selection. Focusing on eligible applicants is the more suitable indicator of equity across the process.

⁴ Semlyen, J., King, M., Varney, J., Hagger-Johnson, G., 2016. Sexual orientation and symptoms of common mental disorder or low wellbeing: combined meta-analysis of 12 UK population health surveys. *BMC Psychiatry* 16, 67. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-016-0767-z>

⁵ World Health Organisation, 2014. *Social determinants of mental health*. Geneva.

Table 3: Eligible applicants selected by group (2018-2021)

	Offered an interview ⁶ (% of eligible)	Offered a place (% of eligible)	Accepted (% of eligible)
Total	26.6	14.0	10.4
Asian	26.2	13.8	13.6
Black	32.8	17.9	13.4
Mixed	42.4	30.3	18.2
White British	23.5	11.2	8.0
White Other	28.1	15.6	19.2
Male	31.3	12.5	11.1
Female	25.0	13.9	11.5
Most deprived 10%	71.4	28.6	28.6
10-20%	36.4	15.2	9.1
20-30%	36.5	25.0	19.2
30-40%	19.5	7.3	4.9
40-50%	22.1	7.4	4.4
50-60%	32.9	17.1	8.6
60-70%	26.0	9.6	6.8
70-80%	20.8	12.5	8.3
80-90%	15.5	9.9	7.0
Least deprived 10%	25.0	17.6	16.2
Most deprived 50%	29.4	13.9	10.0
Least deprived 50%	24.2	13.3	9.4
Single	26.4	12.7	9.6
Married/cohabiting	24.2	16.1	11.8
Divorced/separated	28.6	0.0	0.0
Dependants	32.6	15.2	13.0
No dependants	25.4	12.7	9.5
Heterosexual	26.2	13.3	10.4
Gay/lesbian/other	27.9	11.8	10.3
Disability	47.5	16.9	15.3
No disability	23.4	13.1	9.4
20-30	23.6	12.9	9.0
31-40	38.1	16.9	15.3
41-50	0.0	0.0	0.0
50+	Not applicable (no eligible applicants)		

Table 3 above indicates that, when pooling across the years 2018-2021, about a quarter of all those eligible (26.6%) are offered an interview; 14% are offered a place; 10% accept a place.

⁶ First offers only i.e. not including those on a waiting list for interview

Eligible Black, Mixed and White Other applicants are more likely than other ethnic groups to be offered an interview, offered a place and accept. Eligible Asian applicants are about as likely as the overall group to be offered an interview, offered a place and slightly more likely to accept a place. White British applicants are less likely than other groups to be offered an interview, offered a place and to accept a place. Males and females have similar chances of being offered an interview, offered a place and to accept a place. Eligible applicants in the most deprived 50% of neighbourhoods were as likely to be offered an interview and to accept a place as people in the least deprived neighbourhoods. Marital status appears not to impact on being offered an interview, but eligible applicants who are divorced or separated are much less likely to be offered a place than other applicants (though there are extremely small numbers of divorced/separated applicants possibly due to age of applicants). Eligible applicants with dependants are slightly more likely to be offered an interview, offered a place and accept a place. Sexuality seems to have little impact at any stage of the selection process. People with a disability are more likely to be offered an interview, slightly more likely to be offered and accept a place. People in their 30s are more likely to be offered an interview, be offered a place and accept a place than people in their 20s. People over 40 have not been offered interviews (although only 14 were eligible across the period evaluated) and no-one over 50 was eligible.

The data below (Table 4) are based on the years 2018-2021 for the UoE but for 2020 entry only for the national data. The 2020 entry national data is the most recent available from the Clearing House (labelled as 2019 as Clearing House label according to the year of application rather than when they started programme).

Table 4: Applicants by characteristic as % of total applications

	UoE 2018-2021	UK courses (2020 entry) ⁷
Asian	11.3	10.2
Black	12.8	4.7
Mixed	5.5	4.4
White British	56.8	61.1
White Other	13.6	19.4
	100	100
Male	17.0	17.3
Female	83.0	82.7
	100.0	100.0
Most deprived 10% ⁸	2.6	10.0
10-20%	7.8	
20-30%	10.6	14.9
30-40%	9.4	
40-50%	12.8	18.0
50-60%	12.6	
60-70%	11.8	14.4
70-80%	9.5	
80-90%	10.9	32.6
Least deprived 10%	11.8	
Most deprived 50%	43.3	
Least deprived 50%	56.7	
	100.0	100.0
Single	67.1	65.8
Married/cohabiting	29.3	32.8
Divorced/separated	3.6	1.4
	100.0	100.0
Dependants	10.3	9.9
No dependants	89.7	90.1
	100.0	100.0
Heterosexual	89.6	89.8
Gay/lesbian/other	10.4	10.2
	100.0	100.0
Disability	12.0	12.5
No disability	88.0	87.5
	100.0	100.0
20-29	71.9	Data incomplete
30-39	23.6	18.9
40-49	4.2	4.2
50+	0.3	0.6

⁷ Note that %s differ slightly from those reported in the Clearing House published report because the current analysis has recalculated percentages using the raw data provided but excluding missing data ('Prefer not to say') from the denominator. Calculations use data labelled as "2019" by Clearing House who label by year of application rather than year of entry.

⁸ The Clearing House analysis of socio-economic status does not use the Index of Multiple Deprivation but rather the POLAR index which categorises into 5 categories based on participation of students in Higher Education. This is therefore limited to categorisation of socio-economic deprivation based on education rather than all the other categories included in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Nevertheless, the 5 POLAR categories are placed alongside the 10 IoD2019 categories in Table 4 below for purposes of comparison.

The above data above suggest that UoE receives a higher percentage of applicants from ethnic minority groups than other programmes but that on other characteristics applications are roughly in line with national averages.

Table 5 below shows the percentage of all applicants within each group who were offered and accepted a place. The UK national acceptance rate for 2020 entry was 15.5% so in the UK column we would expect a figure of 15.5% for every group to indicate perfect equity. Figures higher than 15.5% indicate that the group might be favoured in selection (↑) and a figure lower than 15.5% suggests that the group might be disadvantaged in selection (↓). For the UoE, the overall acceptance rate is lower than the national rate (5.5%) owing to the small number of commissioned places relative to applicants. In the UoE column, a figure above 5.5% suggests that group has favourable chances (↑) and a figure below 5.5% suggests the group is disadvantaged (↓) in the process. Note these differences have not been tested statistically and are based on observation only.

Table 5: Percentage of applicants within each category who accepted a place

	UoE 2018-2021 ⁹	UK courses (2020 entry) a place ¹⁰
Overall acceptance rate	5.5%	15.5%
Asian	6.1 ↑	9.4 ↓
Black	6.0 ↑	9.9 ↓
Mixed	9.4 ↑	16.4 ↑
White British	5.3	18.4 ↑
White Other	3.2 ↓	11.1 ↓
Male	4.0 ↓	15.2
Female	5.7	15.6
Most deprived 10%	8.3 ↑	11.6 ↓
10-20%	4.2 ↓	
20-30%	10.3 ↑	15.0
30-40%	2.3 ↓	
40-50%	2.6 ↓	14.3 ↓
50-60%	5.2	
60-70%	4.6 ↓	17.4 ↑
70-80%	4.6 ↓	
80-90%	5.1	20.4 ↑
Least deprived 10%	10.2 ↑	
Most deprived 50%	5.1	
Least deprived 50%	4.6 ↓	
Single	5.0	14.5 ↓
Married/cohabiting	6.6 ↑	17.8 ↑
Divorced/separated	0.0	0.0
Dependants	4.9 ↓	9.9 ↓
No dependants	5.1	No data
Heterosexual	5.2	15.2
Gay/lesbian/other	5.7	18.5 ↑
Disability	6.4 ↑	16.5 ↑
No disability	5.0	15.3
20-29	5.2	Data incomplete
30-39	6.4 ↑	12.0 ↓
40-49	0	6.7 ↓
50+	0	0.0

It appears from Table 5 that ethnic minority applicants have a greater chance of successfully gaining a place at the UoE while White British applicants have a lower chance of success.

This contributes to the greater ethnic diversity in UoE training cohorts compared to the national picture.

⁹ Figures above 5.5% suggests that group has favourable chances and figures below 5.5% suggests the group is disadvantaged in the process

¹⁰ Figures above 15.5% suggests that group has favourable chances and figures below 15.5% suggests the group is disadvantaged in the process

Data in Table 5 suggest males and females have a similar chance of being selected nationally, while males have a slightly lower chance of being selected at UoE. However, referring back to Table 3, it appears that men and women who meet eligibility criteria have equal chances of being selected at UoE, suggesting that more men apply who do not meet essential criteria. As noted earlier, we consider the % of eligible applicants to be a more reliable indicator of equity rather than the % of all applicants.

It is difficult to compare the UoE with national data on socio-economic disadvantage as different indicators have been used. Nevertheless, it appears that people from the least deprived backgrounds are slightly disadvantaged in the UoE selection process; whereas people in the least advantaged backgrounds have an advantage nationally in the selection process.

On other characteristics UoE is similar to the national picture except that UoE seems to favour people in the 30-39 age group; whereas this group is disadvantaged in the national data.

Conclusions

This audit set out to explore whether the recruitment practices on the UoE clinical psychology programme are working to maintain trainee diversity and ensure equity of access. The findings indicate that there is relatively good equity of access for disadvantaged groups, particularly people from minority ethnic groups and socially deprived backgrounds. Trainee diversity is also broadly similar to the UK population on most characteristics; although it is important to acknowledge that trainee diversity is not necessarily similar to the population that might access mental health services.

We do not currently apply any other forms of contextual admission processes (“the practice of using additional information, such as where a potential student lives or which school they go to, to assess their attainment and potential”¹¹). Other programmes are currently looking into the possibility of doing this but the concept has been developed mostly in relation to A-level students accessing undergraduate education and is under-developed as a principle for recruitment to doctorate level professional programmes. Clinical psychology trainees are NHS employees, and contextual admissions raise issues around employment law which are under ongoing exploration. Our data suggest that it may not be necessary to apply contextual admission processes in order to achieve diversity reflecting the UK population which is the current goal of programme commissioners (Health Education England). However, Health Education England and the clinical psychology training community in the UK may consider that expectations of diversity should go beyond this and aim for a trainee population which better reflects mental health services user populations; in which case further measures may be required.

People with a disability are more likely to be interviewed at UoE which is likely a result of operating the Disability Confident scheme. Similarly, more people with a disability are offered a place and accept a place at UoE, suggesting that the Disability Confident scheme is having a positive impact. The Disability Confident scheme is an important form of contextual admission already developed as a principle and embedded into employment practice and law by many employers including NHS Trusts. We are aware there are other issues including disproportionate applications from females, intersectionality and forms of socio-economic disadvantages that are difficult to categorise, which merit consideration in some form of contextual admission processes. However, it is also important not to introduce a new system which might inadvertently reduce the currently high levels of diversity achieved by the existing process.

¹¹ www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/contextual-admissions

In spite of there being several positive findings in relation to diversity and equity in recruitment processed at UoE, it is important to note that there are several other issues needing addressing in relation to equality and diversity on the programme. To address these wider issues, alongside other programmes in England, funding was received from Health Education England in 2021 with which we launched our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) programme. This includes a Mentoring Scheme and a Diversity Action Plan. The Mentoring Scheme has been very successfully led and operationalized by Julie Baah, who is on a 0.2 whole time equivalent post on the programme.

However, the EDI programme as a whole, has been the vision of the whole staff team, led by the programme director (and 3rd author) Frances Blumenfeld who comes from a mixed heritage and the postgraduate director in the school who is a female from a Black ethnic background. This leadership commitment makes UoE relatively unique in terms of BAME leadership. The EDI programme entails termly anti-racist workshops for trainees, staff and supervisors; ongoing curriculum review to de-colonise the curriculum; the Independent Advisor Mentoring scheme to support BAME trainees; and an outreach mentoring scheme for aspiring clinical psychologists from a BAME background, the latter two led by Julie Baah. The current audit also comprises part of the wider EDI programme in our commitment to transparent reporting of our recruitment data. Further plans for audit and review include evaluation of the mentoring schemes, plans to repeat the current audit on a 3 yearly cycle, and an analysis of any attainment gap for trainees on the programme. Much work remains in this area, which the UoE programme team is committed to, and this requires ongoing commitment for funding from programme commissioners.