

# BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (BPS)

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## BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY (BPS)

**Type:** Professional Membership Body | **Primary Disciplinary Field(s):** Psychology, Applied Psychology, Psychological Science

### 1. Core Definition and Mandate

The **British Psychological Society (BPS)** is the representative professional body for psychologists and psychological practitioners in the United Kingdom. Operating simultaneously as a professional organization and a chartered charity, the BPS is dedicated to the development, application, and promotion of pure and applied psychology for the benefit of the public and the profession. Founded in 1901, the Society serves as a central authority for setting standards in psychological education, training, and ethical conduct, influencing both academic research and professional practice across diverse sectors, including health, education, industry, and forensic settings. Its broad mandate covers everything from certifying university courses to providing continuous professional development (CPD) and acting as a primary voice for psychological science in national policy debates. The BPS is instrumental in ensuring that the psychological workforce in the UK maintains the highest levels of competence and ethical integrity.

As a registered charity, the BPS commits to advancing the discipline of psychology as a science and a profession. This dual role means the organization is responsible not only for supporting its members but also for fostering public understanding of psychology and demonstrating how psychological knowledge can be effectively applied to address societal challenges. The Society's influence extends beyond its direct membership, shaping the curriculum in higher education institutions and collaborating with governmental bodies, such as the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), which holds the statutory duty for regulating applied psychologists in the UK. The BPS's activities are crucial for upholding the credibility and utility of psychological services across the nation.

### 2. Historical Development and Founding

The history of the BPS dates back to 1901, establishing it as one of the oldest national psychological societies globally. The founding occurred during a period when psychology was rapidly emerging as a distinct scientific discipline separate from philosophy and physiology. Initially, the Society functioned primarily as an academic discussion group, providing a forum for intellectuals and researchers interested in the burgeoning field of experimental psychology. Early membership included pioneers who were shaping the contours of psychological thought in Britain, focusing heavily on theoretical advancements and foundational research.

A significant shift in the Society's role occurred in the mid-20th century, particularly following the two World Wars. These conflicts demonstrated the immense practical value of psychology in areas

such as personnel selection, mental health treatment for combatants, and propaganda. This increased recognition of applied psychology led the BPS to evolve beyond a purely academic society into a robust professional body. The subsequent establishment of specialized Divisions and Sections marked the institutionalization of various psychological specialties, reflecting the growing diversity and professionalization of the field within the UK. This evolution solidified the BPS's position as the primary authority guiding professional standards.

In 1965, the Society received its Royal Charter, a pivotal moment that formally recognized its importance and granted it official authority to represent the profession. The Charter provided the foundation for the Society to establish the designation of **Chartered Psychologist**, a hallmark of professional competence and ethical standing. This formal recognition underscored the BPS's dedication to maintaining rigorous standards of professional practice and safeguarding the public interest.

### 3. Accreditation and Education Standards

One of the most essential functions of the BPS is its role in setting and maintaining standards for psychological education and training. The Society operates a comprehensive accreditation system for university degree programs, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral-level qualifications. Achieving BPS accreditation is vital for graduates seeking professional registration or aiming to progress to specialized training routes within applied psychology (such as Clinical, Educational, or Occupational psychology). This accreditation ensures that educational programs cover the required core knowledge areas and provide sufficient training in research methods and ethical practice, guaranteeing consistency across UK institutions.

The accreditation process involves detailed review and periodic re-accreditation visits by BPS teams. These reviews assess curriculum content, faculty qualifications, teaching resources, and student outcomes against the Society's rigorous criteria. Successful completion of a BPS-accredited undergraduate program (typically resulting in Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership, or GBC) is the foundational requirement for most further professional training routes. By controlling the quality of entry-level training, the BPS fundamentally shapes the future competency of the psychological workforce.

Furthermore, the BPS is responsible for managing the structure of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for its members. Psychology is an evolving field, and the BPS mandates that Chartered Psychologists engage in ongoing learning to maintain and enhance their professional skills and knowledge base. The requirement for structured CPD ensures that practitioners remain current with the latest research, best practices, and ethical guidelines, thereby protecting the quality of service delivery to the public.

## 4. Ethical Oversight and Professional Regulation

The BPS provides the primary ethical framework governing the conduct of its members. The **BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct** is a comprehensive document that outlines the values, principles, and professional standards expected of all members, regardless of their specialization. This code is built upon four core principles: Respect, Competence, Responsibility, and Integrity. These principles guide decision-making in complex professional situations, ensuring that psychologists act in the best interests of clients, research participants, and the wider public.

The Society maintains a formal disciplinary procedure to investigate allegations of professional misconduct against its members. This system acts as a mechanism of self-regulation for the profession, addressing breaches of the ethical code and applying sanctions where appropriate, ranging from reprimands to the expulsion of membership. This commitment to ethical oversight is crucial for maintaining public trust in the profession. While the BPS handles membership conduct, it is important to distinguish its role from the statutory regulation provided by the HCPC. While the BPS grants Chartered status, the HCPC holds the legal authority to decide who can practice as an applied psychologist (e.g., Clinical Psychologist, Counselling Psychologist) in the UK.

## 5. Organizational Structure and Specialized Divisions

To effectively represent the vast array of specializations within modern psychology, the BPS is organized into a complex structure of representative bodies. This includes Divisions, Sections, and Special Interest Groups.

**Divisions:** These are the professional bodies that represent specific fields of applied practice, such as the Division of Clinical Psychology (DCP), the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP), the Division of Occupational Psychology (DOP), and the Division of Forensic Psychology. Divisions manage the training and professional standards specific to their respective domains.

**Sections:** These groups are based on academic or research interests, such as the History and Philosophy of Psychology Section or the Social Psychology Section. Sections facilitate conferences, seminars, and networking opportunities focused on research dissemination and theoretical development.

**Faculties and Special Interest Groups:** These structures address highly specific areas of practice or emerging issues that require specialized attention, ensuring that the BPS remains responsive to new developments in the field.

This complex organizational architecture ensures that specialized knowledge informs BPS policy and that practitioners across all fields receive appropriate support and representation. The governance structure is overseen by a Board of Trustees and various committees responsible for finance, ethics, and professional practice, ensuring democratic oversight and strategic direction.

## 6. Publishing and Research Dissemination

The BPS is a major player in the dissemination of psychological research globally through its publishing arm, **BPS Publications**, often in partnership with other major academic publishers. The Society publishes a range of peer-reviewed academic journals covering key areas of the discipline, including the *British Journal of Psychology*, the *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, and the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. These journals provide essential platforms for UK-based and international researchers to share findings and contribute to the scientific advancement of psychology.

In addition to academic journals, the BPS publishes *The Psychologist*, its monthly magazine, which serves as a crucial resource for members. *The Psychologist* provides updates on professional matters, ethical guidance, governmental policy implications, and accessible summaries of recent research, bridging the gap between cutting-edge science and professional practice. Through these publications, the BPS ensures that its members and the wider scientific community have access to high-quality, relevant information necessary for informed practice and research.

## 7. Significance and Societal Impact

The **BPS** holds profound significance in the UK, acting as the primary custodian of psychological standards and knowledge. By accrediting training routes, the Society ensures a high, consistent level of competence among new practitioners. By providing the ethical code, it establishes trust between practitioners and the public. Its influence is not limited to internal professional governance; the BPS frequently engages with government and legislative bodies, providing expert testimony and psychological analysis on major societal issues, such as mental health policy, educational reform, and criminal justice.

The status of **Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol)**, conferred by the BPS, is widely recognized as a benchmark of professional excellence and experience in the UK, signifying that an individual has achieved a high level of academic knowledge and supervised professional practice. While the HCPC manages statutory registration for health professionals, Chartered status remains a key marker of professional identity and commitment to the BPS's rigorous standards. Ultimately, the Society's enduring legacy lies in its success in promoting psychology as a vital science and a beneficial applied profession essential to modern society.

## Further Reading

[The British Psychological Society \(BPS\) Official Website](#)

[British Psychological Society - Wikipedia](#)

[Health and Care Professions Council \(HCPC\)](#)