



**Working in independent practice  
with First Psychology**



## **Introduction**

**Do you want the flexibility and autonomy of running your own independent practice as a self employed professional?**

**Does working in partnership with a strongly established clinical organisation offering you referrals, a comfortable clinical location and the opportunity to become part of a growing community of like-minded practitioners appeal to you?**

**If it does, working in partnership with First Psychology might be for you!**



**As an organisation, First Psychology holds a pluralistic ethos that values different psychological approaches and therapies**

## About us

First Psychology is a leading independent provider of counselling and psychological therapies to individuals, couples, families, organisations and businesses in the UK. Originally established in 2006, our professional organisation has grown to twelve dedicated clinical centres throughout Scotland and England. We work with over 100 practitioners from a range of backgrounds including counselling and psychotherapy, CBT, and counselling/clinical psychology. We work with self-referred clients and those with health insurance. We also receive referrals from GPs, psychiatry services, allied health professionals and educational institutions. In addition, we operate a business-to-business brand, First Psychology Assistance, offering therapeutic services, training, consultancy and research in the field of mental health and wellbeing to businesses and organisations. We provide services in person and also online or by telephone via our First Psychology Online web portal.

## Our ethos and approach

As an organisation, First Psychology holds a pluralistic ethos that values different psychological approaches and therapies, and celebrates the diverse cultures and domains of expertise held by different professions in the psychotherapeutic field. We strongly believe in a skills-mix model that enables our clients to select what is right for them, and we work to ensure maximum accessibility to our services. Our aspiration is to 'inspire wellbeing' in all that we do, and we work tirelessly to promote this ethos throughout our organisation and in collaboration with our clients.

## Working in partnership

Our approach is underpinned by a partnership model with practitioners. This model allows First Psychology to provide the business infrastructure and organisational framework for delivery of high quality therapeutic services to clients. Our independent practitioner partners deliver these services in ways that fit with their training and interests. The model thus offers self employed practitioners an opportunity to develop an independent practice in partnership, offering the benefits of self-employment but minimising the level of business activity and administration involved.



## What First Psychology offers practitioners

First Psychology provides the organisational, business, and clinical infrastructure to enable practitioners working with us as partners to focus on their clinical work. We do this by offering the following:

- An in-house admin team whose role it is to manage client enquiries, make bookings and to be a friendly voice on the phone.
- A guaranteed room to see clients at your agreed clinic times in one of our comfortable, bespoke consulting centres offering free wifi and business supplies (including tea and coffee).
- A high rate of referrals generated by our extensive marketing activities, with initial mentoring and ongoing liaison and support to enable the effective development of your independent practice.
- Market-leading fees for all sessions completed with clients.
- Opportunities at practitioner, senior practitioner, and consultant practitioner levels.
- A personalised page on one of our highly ranked websites, detailing your interests and the services you offer.
- Between 3-8 clinics per week (up to 4 days) – days and times to be agreed.
- Use of our shared online diary, a personal email address to receive referrals and communicate with clients, access to our range of information and leaflets, and all materials on the dedicated practitioner resource area of our website .
- Access to one of the largest networks of independent practitioners in Scotland, with regular forums, peer support and supervision networks, online resources, and low cost CPD opportunities.
- Opportunities to undertake a range of other types of work including training, supervision, and consultancy services with our organisational clients.
- Access to a range of high quality CPD and training opportunities through our newly launched First Psychology Institute.
- An allocated partnership coordinator during the first year to facilitate adaption to the culture, systems and expectations of working in partnership with First Psychology.

## The practitioner's role

First Psychology works with practitioners as independent contractors, and assumes all colleagues who are in partnership with us will offer a professional and effective service to clients. At the commencement of the partnership (and reviewed on a bi-annual basis), a 'schedule of services' between First Psychology and the practitioner is agreed, detailing the specific clinical services to be provided and the times and days of clinics. The schedule is supported by a service level agreement outlining the responsibilities held by both First Psychology and our partner practitioners.

Referrals are made to practitioners in terms of the clinical services detailed in the schedule, and will normally lead to an initial session where the practitioner undertakes a clinical assessment and determines, with the client, the appropriate next step. Practitioners are responsible for the clinical management of all clients referred to them, including ensuring appropriate contracting (or re-referral), therapeutic planning/delivery, and clinical liaison.

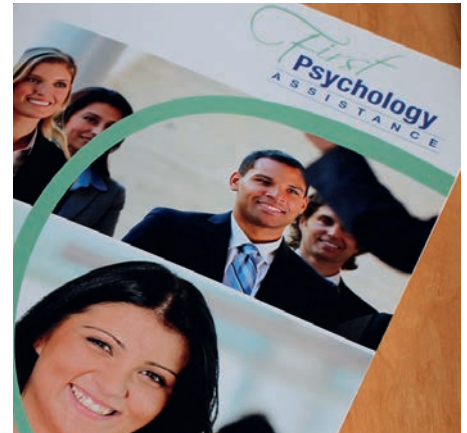
Practitioners manage all aspects of the business relationship with the client (when the client is self-funding) - including agreeing the fee (if concession is to be offered), taking payments and so on.

Practitioners are responsible for ensuring they receive appropriate clinical supervision for their work in line with their status as an independent practitioner. All or a proportion of supervision for FP clients must be 'healthcare aligned' – see *below*. First Psychology does not monitor or supervise a practitioner's activities, but will offer management support in line with the requirements of the service level agreement.

Mentoring and assistance are provided via a partnership coordinator for the first year at First Psychology. Partnership coordinators are self-employed clinicians who have been practitioners at First Psychology for a number of years. Through a series of meetings during the first year, partnership coordinators help new practitioners adapt to the culture, systems, processes and expectations of working in partnership with our organisation.

Practitioners are expected to supply an internet enabled device for connecting to our online diary (ideally a laptop), a mobile phone for client/office contact and to supply all materials they may wish to use in their clinical work with clients (including printed worksheets). First Psychology does not supply printers, but some local arrangements are in place where costs are shared among those working in that location.

First Psychology takes the experiences of its clients extremely seriously, and we work in partnership with practitioners to ensure all aspects of our centres are welcoming, friendly, and properly resourced. We do not have a reception in our locations as they are 'clinician-led' so we rely on partners to help us make sure everything is as it should be at all times.





Above: First Psychology Glasgow – located in Glasgow's West End



Above: First Psychology's Edinburgh - Polwarth centre in Polwarth Crescent

## How does it work in practice?

Practitioners want different things from their independent practice in partnership with us. Some wish to undertake a number of days clinical work to constitute their primary income source, while others are looking for a small number of clinics to run flexibly, often alongside other commitments such as a job, a growing family, or caring responsibilities. First Psychology is able to work with practitioners in a range of ways to ensure their unique aspirations and needs can 'fit' with the requirements of running an independent practice.

Perhaps the best way of demonstrating this is to show it in action, through the words of practitioners who work with us.

“

**I started working in partnership with First Psychology to give me a bit of variety. My day job was in the NHS and I enjoyed the flexibility of being able to work in a slightly less time-pressured way, and I also wanted to develop my experience in working with couples and families.**

**Since then, my independent practice has grown and I have reduced my NHS hours accordingly. I was worried about the financial implications of this at first, but First Psychology offers me more than enough work to keep my income at the level that I need. My new working structure is much better for me. I love the autonomy and challenge of working independently. I also really enjoy the company of, and debates with, colleagues from such a diverse range of backgrounds. ”**

*L, CBT Therapist*

“

I have worked in partnership with First Psychology since I completed my professional psychology training at university. My income is more than comparable to classmates who found a full-time job, and I love the fact that I have the flexibility to manage my working life as I wish, to take holidays and time off when I want, and to feel fully autonomous in the clinical work I do. I'm extremely busy as well, so have built up a huge amount of actual clinical experience which will stand me in good stead for the future. ”

*A, Counselling Psychologist*



“

I've always had a portfolio career, and really enjoyed the challenge of maintaining a wide range of professional activities. First Psychology really works for me, as the partnership model means that I can focus my clinical 'strand' on working with clients, and not have to deal with the numerous hassles of marketing, websites, maintaining clinical rooms, responding to phone and email enquiries, etc. The partnership approach makes my life a lot easier and has the added benefit of providing a range of networking and development opportunities which I really value. ”

*N, Counsellor/Psychotherapist*



## Our clinic model

Our centres provide a comfortable and welcoming environment for our clients. Most consulting rooms are used for morning, afternoon, and evening clinics with a few rooms having two longer clinics – morning/afternoon and afternoon/evening. We maintain a consistent approach to the running of our clinics, with structured and consistent start and end times for all clinics and sessions (in most centres, sessions last 50 minutes with a 10 minute turn around). The clinic start, end, and session timings are fixed for each room within every centre. We have staggered start and end times for different rooms, to minimise traffic in our communal areas at the same time. Practitioners are allocated clinics in accordance with the agreed schedule between us. We expect that most practitioners will undertake a minimum of three clinics. Mostly, practitioners work two consecutive clinics or a single clinic in any one day. Our expectation is that a practitioner is available to work with clients for a minimum of three client sessions in any one clinic (normally four sessions), although in line with the partnership model, practitioners are free to determine when they are available and when not – breaks, held-sessions and so on are determined by the practitioner. We have a shared online diary system to enable clear communication with regards to clinic usage and practitioner availability to receive new referrals.

## First Psychology ‘approved’ scheme

As a provider of professional, high quality therapeutic services, First Psychology operates an approved scheme designed to ensure every practitioner has in place, on an ongoing basis: a) appropriate professional membership/accreditation; b) professional indemnity insurance; c) up to date PVG and ICO memberships; d) a commitment towards continuing professional development; e) a preparedness to notify First Psychology of any professional complaint; and f) a clinical supervision arrangement for First Psychology clients that is ‘healthcare’ aligned.

The approved scheme operated by First Psychology is light touch and sits on top of the existing governance systems utilised by practitioners. It is designed to reinforce, to our clients and our wider stakeholders, the professionalism and high levels of governance maintained by our practitioners and our organisation as a whole.

## Healthcare aligned supervision

The stipulation for ‘healthcare aligned’ supervision requires any practitioner not registered with a statutory healthcare body in the UK (e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council, Health and Care Professions Council) to undertake clinical supervision (for their First Psychology clients) with a practitioner holding such a registration, such as a counselling/clinical/applied psychologist; nurse CBT therapist; art psychotherapist, etc. This stipulation ensures there is a robust statutory underpinning for all the clinical services provided by First Psychology in line with our branding as a healthcare provider in this field. We have a number of systems in place to support counsellor/psychotherapists and CBT therapists meet this requirement in a way that is supportive of the professional demands in these areas.



## Conflicts of interest

First Psychology seeks to build positive partnerships with practitioners, which are transparent and do not give rise to any conflicts of interest from a business or clinical perspective. Such conflicts arise when a practitioner is working within, or running, a business directly competing with First Psychology in the independent psychology, counselling, and therapy sector. Such businesses include independent practices operated by a single practitioner, particularly if operating in the same geographical area as one of our centres and/or targeting the same client groups. We will seek to ensure that the partnership does not present any conflicts of interest as a key element of our contract and service level agreement with all practitioners.

## What we look for in partner practitioners

First Psychology is a diverse community of practitioners. We embrace those from different backgrounds and celebrate the skills and specialist expertise brought by those we work in partnership with. In seeking to work with partner practitioners, it is important to find the right 'fit' between our organisation and the style of working, aspirations, and approach of the practitioner. To help us do this, there are some specific qualities we look for in seeking practitioners to join us in partnership. These are as follows:



- A strong academic background with a professional qualification and significant experience in either applied psychology (counselling/clinical), counselling/psychotherapy, CBT, and hypnotherapy. We normally expect practitioners to be accredited or registered (or in the final stages of working towards this).
- A highly professional and organised approach, with excellent administration, IT and management skills to meet the demands of a fast-paced clinical environment.
- A friendly, thoughtful and flexible approach to clinical practice, able to adapt to the different needs of clients and manage complex clinical circumstances/ referrals in a professional way. This will include an understanding of the systemic/dynamic factors that impact on delivering therapy in an independent setting as well as an openness to a variety of therapeutic models and approaches.
- Exceptional communication and interpersonal skills with the ability to work effectively within an organisational setting which encompasses a range of professionals in the mental health field.
- A commitment to a work/life portfolio that is realistic and 'fits' with the demands of running a busy independent practice in a consistent and professional way.
- An understanding of the challenges and opportunities of working independently in partnership, with a commitment to support this approach by being an active participant within it.



## Frequently asked questions

### **I am not yet accredited or registered in my professional field, is it worth applying?**

We are happy to receive applications from any practitioner who has completed a full professional training at diploma or masters level qualification and has some additional experience in a relevant field. We do expect the practitioners who work with us to be highly competent and capable but value colleagues who are in the early stages of their career as well as those who have a bit more experience.

### **Is it only psychologists that you work with?**

Not at all! We are a psychology-led service but take the view that psychology is a very broad field akin to a family of professions, rather than a specific discipline that defines things in its own terms. We welcome practitioners from counselling, psychotherapy, CBT and other backgrounds – all of whom we feel are a vital part of what we understand ‘psychology’ to be.

### **I run an independent practice at the moment. Can I work with you as well?**

We are always open to working with any practitioner who has appropriate skills and attributes, but are keen to ensure that we only establish partnerships that do not create any ‘conflicts of interest’ for either party. Any practitioner running an existing independent practice that is in direct competition for clients with First Psychology could have a number of ‘conflicts of interest’ if they also worked with us. We would want to discuss these and agree how to manage things before progressing. We are very happy to do this, and do have a number of practitioners who have joined us from existing independent practices.

### **Do I have to pay anything for my use of your rooms or facilities?**

No. We allocate a consulting room to you for your exclusive use when agreeing with you the times you wish to make available for your clinics. This is part of the infrastructure we provide for your clinics and there is no cost to you for this. We also provide other facilities such as free wifi, an online diary/email system and business stationery to use in communicating to referrers and other appropriate individuals.

### **Do you pay me if a client DNA's or doesn't pay?**

As an independent practitioner, part of your role with us is to manage the business relationship with clients you are working with. This includes collecting fees. If no fee is paid, First Psychology does not receive any revenue and therefore is not in a position to pay you for that session. In line with our emphasis on partnership, we unfortunately both 'lose out' in such situations. We offer clients a range of ways to pay including telephone, online, and chip and pin payments as well as accepting cheques and cash. You will receive mentoring and support to help you manage the process of effectively requesting and managing payments should you wish this.

### **Can I have other jobs or undertake other work when working with First Psychology?**

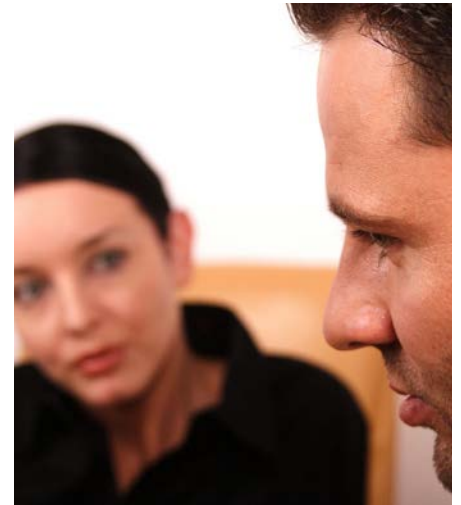
Yes. We make no requirements whatsoever on the work you do and how you do it. As a self-employed professional, you are able to undertake whatever work you wish to and we see this as a strength. We have many colleagues who work (or undertake freelance contracts) in settings such as higher education, schools, NHS and healthcare environments, training settings, and the third sector. The only things we ask is that you ensure you meet our service level agreement for the work you undertake on our behalf, and also that any other activities you engage in don't create a conflict of interest between us.

### **How do you distinguish between practitioners, senior practitioners and consultant practitioners?**

We have a clear model for this based on experience and breadth of training. We would normally expect any partner working at senior practitioner level to have a minimum of 3-5 years' post accreditation/registration experience, and clear leadership skills/attributes. Opportunities at consultant level require very substantial experience in the mental health field. We have a limited number of senior practitioner and consultant practitioner opportunities in each location.

### **How do you determine the fee paid to the practitioner?**

The fee paid to the practitioner is based on seniority/professional role and the type of therapy provided. First Psychology has a clear structure around fees paid based on a 'banding' system that is itself linked to the fee paid by a self-funded client.





## **How do I work out my likely income as a self-employed practitioner working in partnership with First Psychology?**

We always suggest the starting point is to work out your 'full-time' equivalent income by calculating the hourly fee you receive for working with clients and then multiplying this by 24 (the number of paid sessions we would assume a practitioner working 'full-time' in their practice would complete each week), and then again by 44 weeks (thus allowing six weeks for holiday, and two weeks for training/sickness, etc). You can then reduce this to the number of days or half days you are working in partnership with us to give yourself an indication of your likely income.

An example of this calculation would be: Paid session fee (£48) x 24 per week x 44 weeks = £50,688 per year.

The part-time equivalent of the above would be 3 days per week (0.6FTE) = (£50,688 x 0.6) = £30,413k per year. In this example we have assumed the practitioner would undertake no more than five clinics per week, to allow sufficient time for administration and preparation within the 3 days set aside.

First Psychology carefully calibrates the rates paid to practitioners to ensure a comparative or higher-level of income to similar employed and self-employed roles.

## **Why should I work in partnership with First Psychology when I can set up my own independent practice instead?**

Our experience is that practitioners working in partnership with us enjoy the best of both worlds – the autonomy of working independently but with the support and infrastructure of an organisation managing referrals, providing rooms/infrastructure, and working alongside a peer community of friendly, like-minded professionals.

Many colleagues working with us have previously run independent practices. They tell us that the costs of having to maintain a room irrespective of client flow are often challenging – particularly when rental agreements may be fixed for a year or more. This is alongside the time it takes to advertise/market their services, respond to client enquiries/ make bookings, administrate and run the basic elements of a consumer-facing business such as managing a website, etc. The partnership approach

removes many of these 'business-side' functions, and allows practitioners to focus on what they do best: clinical work with clients. Doing this within the context of a larger organisation provides advantages in terms of the smoothing of referrals to avoid the inevitable peaks and troughs of working in a sole practice environment. This is something of great importance in enabling a stable income while also offering the clinical autonomy many clinicians aspire to.

### **I already have supervision in place, do I have to change this arrangement to fulfill the 'healthcare aligned' supervision requirement?**

No. Many practitioners joining FP already have a supervisor and that is fine. However, unless that supervisor happens to be registered with a statutory healthcare body in the UK (e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council, Health and Care Professions Council) when joining FP, you will, in addition, need to either arrange some 1-1 supervision with a practitioner registered with a statutory healthcare body or join one of the supervision groups run on your behalf by FP. These monthly groups, usually with four members, are facilitated by an FP practitioner with a statutory registration. The cost of the supervisor's time is shared by the group members.

### **I have been working in this field for many years, why do I need a mentor?**

The mentorship programme at FP is not related to clinical experience, it is about helping new practitioners at all stages of their career to get used to our processes, procedures and culture. In order to facilitate 100+ practitioners to run the most effective private practices they can, over the years we have developed numerous systems. Our experience of bringing new practitioners into FP has shown that it can take a while for practitioners to settle in, but that this process can be made smoother with the support of one of our partnership coordinators. All our partnership coordinators are FP practitioners, who have been running successful independent practices in partnership with FP for many years.

### **What are the pros and cons of self-employment?**

Self-employment allows practitioners to work in more flexible ways than employment, especially in terms of when they work, how much they work, when they want to take holidays and in doing their own taxes. It does, however, not have the same guarantees or security as an employed role as you only get paid when you work. One way to adapt to this is for



self-employed practitioners to see themselves as their own employer and therefore to see themselves as responsible for accounting for their own pensions, holidays and tax liabilities when thinking about how much they wish to work.

### **What do you mean by working independently in partnership?**

This is a relationship. FP practitioners are in charge of their clinical work and management of the clients that we refer to them, but they do this within the systems that have been built up over the years at FP. These systems have evolved and been developed over the years as we have grown in size and are all there in order to maximise the effectiveness of each and every independent practitioner within FP. Our systems include our shared online diary, communication expectations, booking processes, financial record and invoice procedures, buildings use, shared documentation and many more. So, partnership means being independent within a shared system.

### **What kinds of CPD opportunities might I access through the First Psychology Institute?**

Our Institute has courses that are designed to enhance the professional and clinical skills of practitioners in the field of psychological therapy. Trainings range from 3-hour 'professional skills' courses that can be completed at a time and pace convenient to the learner, to 6-hour 'short courses' with a workshop element, to 50-100 hours 'clinical skills' courses which include group tutorials and supervision. We cover a wide range of topics, both practical (relating to running a practice) and applied (building knowledge of particular therapeutic skills and courses, e.g. CBT and Schema Therapy). Our courses are delivered by experienced, highly-skilled practitioners working in independent practice.

### **Do I need to pay for course through the First Psychology Institute?**

No. Courses are currently free to First Psychology practitioners.



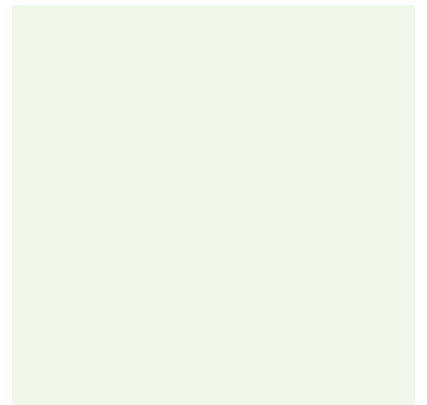
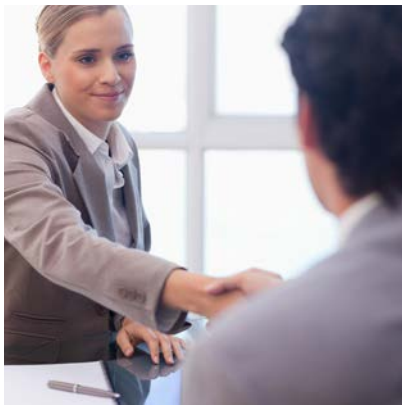
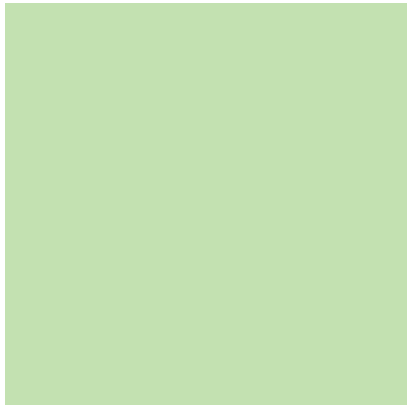
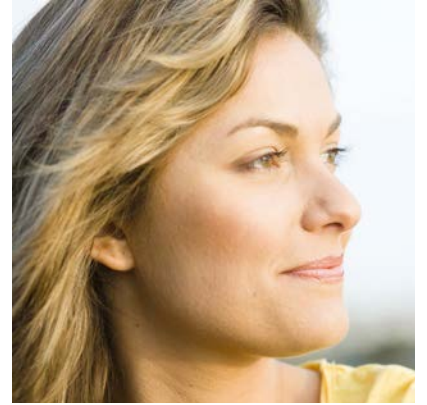
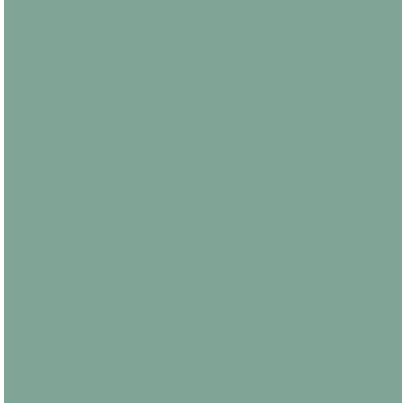
## **Keen to work with us?**

**Please email us on the email address below.**

**We'd love to hear from you!**

**[hello@firstpsychology.co.uk](mailto:hello@firstpsychology.co.uk)**

Please note: All information contained in this booklet is correct at the time of writing but may be subject to change for operational reasons.



## First Psychology offers:

Therapy & coaching services for individuals, couples, children, young people & families.

Employee support & assistance, training, consultancy, assessment, & performance development services for organisations & businesses.

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