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for counsellors

2026-2027

Specification

Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills & Theory (CBT-L5)

This RQF qualification is regulated by Ofqual in England, Qualifications Wales in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland.

Qualification/learning aim number: 500/8460/4

Sector subject area: 1.3 Health and Social Care

Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

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Please note:

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1. Qualification Information

Purpose Statement

This qualification is for candidates who are already working as counselling practitioners and who want to develop their skills in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and use these skills as an integral part of their work. Candidates are expected to be working with clients within a professional framework in order to apply their learning on this course and to meet the assessment requirements.

It is designed to enhance the employability of counsellors in organisational settings and as independent practitioners by giving them a solid grounding in CBT skills and theory. CBT is one of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommended psychological therapies and counsellors with CBT skills are often sought after in multidisciplinary psychological therapy teams especially within NHS Talking Therapies (formerly known as IAPT – Improving Access to Psychological Therapies).

Career progression opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- An autonomous counsellor in private practice or agency settings.
- Work as a senior counsellor in a counselling agency.
- A private counsellor working for an organisation, for example in a wellness/ mental health setting.
- Employment in NHS and private health care settings.

See below for progression opportunities.

Funding

The qualification is eligible in England for Advanced Learner Loans (19+)

The link to the government website which provides details of funding for this qualification can be found here: [DfE: funding rules, rates and formula](#)

Level

5¹

Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

120 (minimum)

Total Qualification Time (TQT)

388

¹ Equivalent to European Qualification Framework (EQF) level 5 and Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 8.

Credit value	39
Minimum Age	19 years ² . Please see CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements
Entry Requirements	CPCAB Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) or an equivalent level 4 or above qualification of at least 300 GLH, aligned to SCoPEd Column A competences. Please see: • CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements for criteria considered important in selecting applicants for a programme leading to CBT-L5. • CPCAB's Entry Requirements and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy.
Assessment	Proficient (Pass)/Not Proficient (Fail) Candidates must be Proficient in internal assessment and meet all the qualification requirements including all placement hours to achieve the qualification. Internal assessment: tutor assessment of candidate portfolio evidencing minimum assessment requirements and verified by CPCAB. See CPCAB's Minimum Assessment Requirements.
Additional Qualification Requirements	Client work: a minimum of 30 hours one-to-one client work with at least three different clients using the CBT model. Clinical Supervision: either group or one-to-one supervision – as per the supervision ratio requirements of the candidate's chosen ethical framework or professional membership association.³
Staffing and Resources	One tutor-assessor is required for the internal assessment of CBT-L5 candidates. Tutors must be qualified CBT practitioners with current knowledge and experience. See Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience for further details of CPCAB requirements.

² This age requirement is linked to Ofqual's system for categorising qualifications.

³ CPCAB recommends that candidates access appropriate clinical supervision to meet the requirements of their chosen ethical framework or professional membership association. For example, [BACP Supervision Guidelines](#) for trainees require a minimum of 1½ hours individual supervision per month (or the equivalent if in group supervision) or 1 hour of supervision for every 8 hours of client work.

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)	Centres are required to have robust IQA (internal moderation and verification) processes that are verified by CPCAB. See CPCAB IQA Policy
Progression	• Open University Foundation Degree in Counselling.⁴ • CPCAB Level 6 Certificate in Therapeutic Counselling Supervision (TCSU-L6) plus a recommended minimum 450 supervised practice hours⁵ • Credit transfer to university study such as Open University⁶ See CPCAB's Progression Route for details.
Candidate Registration Fee	£398
Centre Application for CPCAB Approval to Offer the Qualification	Centre application fee: £422 (one-off fee). ⁷ Centres are expected to design their own training programmes. ⁸ Sample schemes of work are available from CPCAB on request.
Online Delivery Options	This qualification is eligible for fully in-person, blended or online delivery. Please see how to run CPCAB's qualifications online for more information.

⁴ To access the OU Foundation Degree candidates must have completed the CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4). CPCAB level 5 qualifications contribute 30 credits towards the achievement of the [Foundation Degree](#).

⁵ This is in line with BACP counsellor individual accreditation requirements.

⁶ Contact the Open University or your chosen HE institution directly to discuss credit transfer options.

⁷ In order for your application to be processed the application fee will need to accompany your application. This is non-refundable. Payment can be made by cheque payable to CPCAB or via Bacs payment. Please contact finance@cpcab.co.uk for more information.

⁸ All centre designed courses must be approved by CPCAB before candidates can be registered. Although the delivery of courses may differ from centre to centre, all delivery must enable the candidates to achieve the learning outcomes of the qualification.

2. Qualification Summary

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria (CBT-L5)

Learning outcomes (<i>skills, knowledge, understanding</i>)	Assessment criteria (<i>to assess learning outcome</i>)
The learner will/will be able to:	The learner can:
1. Work safely, legally and ethically as a counsellor using the CBT approach	1.1 Work within an ethical, legal and professional framework for CBT work. 1.2 Prepare the client to work within a CBT framework. 1.3 Use CBT strategies to identify and manage risk. 1.4 Research and access appropriate personal and professional support.
2. Use the CBT framework to structure the therapeutic relationship	2.1 Critically reflect on the nature of the CBT therapeutic relationship. 2.2 Use CBT concepts and the case formulation to establish and maintain the therapeutic relationship. 2.3 Use the CBT framework to maintain and end the therapeutic relationship. 2.4 Use research findings on relationship factors to inform CBT work.
3. Integrate understanding of diversity in CBT work	3.1 Use theory and research on diversity to inform client assessment and treatment. 3.2 Reflect on diversity issues that contribute to clients' patterns and schemas. 3.3 Apply CBT theory to work with the idiosyncratic nature of clients' core beliefs, rules and assumptions. 3.4 Use research findings on client factors to inform CBT work. 3.5 Reflect on diversity issues which impact on clients accessing CBT.
4. Use a coherent CBT approach to work with individual clients and their needs	4.1 Use empirical evidence and assessment data to produce a problem list and initial case formulation. 4.2 Share the initial case formulation with the client and agree a treatment plan. 4.3 Use the case formulation to guide the work and facilitate the client's process of change. 4.4 Use ongoing assessment to monitor client progress.
5. Work with self-awareness as a counsellor using the CBT approach	5.1 Use CBT theory, tools and techniques to develop own self-awareness. 5.2 Use self-awareness in CBT work. 5.3 Produce a personal case formulation to develop understanding of self. 5.4 Use personal case formulation to work on personal patterns and schema that might impact on CBT work. 5.5 Use research findings on therapist factors to inform CBT work.

6. Use CBT theory, research and techniques coherently within counselling work	6.1 Critically reflect on the CBT model of emotional disorders and mental health problems. 6.2 Use CBT theory, tools and techniques to: • structure therapeutic work • work with client beliefs, behaviours and schemas • work with client's patterns of relating • work therapeutically with common life problems and common mental health problems. 6.3 Develop and evaluate homework tasks. 6.4 Use research findings on the effectiveness of treatments to inform CBT work. 6.5 Integrate concepts of psychopathology when assessing and referring clients.
7. Monitor and maintain professional effectiveness as a counsellor using the CBT approach	7.1 Use CBT supervision to: • evaluate the continuing validity of individual client case formulation. • support implementation of the treatment plan. • support the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process. • identify clients with severe or complex mental health problems and support the referral process. • monitor personal well-being, competence and efficacy. 7.2 Implement a clinical audit tool. 7.3 Research and plan own programme for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

See the [CBT-L5 Tutor Guide](#) for candidate guidance to criteria and notes for tutors.

3. Minimum Assessment Requirements

To achieve the qualification, candidates must be internally assessed as **Proficient** in all 7 learning outcomes of the qualification.

Candidates must give **two** pieces of evidence for each criterion. In addition, the Candidate Learning Record (CLR), when complete, must include references to all three assessment methods (documents, tutor observation and testimony).

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT – must include all three methods of assessment		
Course activities	Assessment method ⁹	Types of evidence (2 references for each assessment criterion)
Professional discussion and workshops Seminars and group work Projects and presentations Review of knowledge, skills and clinical work Tutorials	Documents	Learning review Client record (at least 30 hours counselling, one-to-one with at least 3 different clients, using CBT) Supervision record ¹⁰ 2 written assignments (3,000 - 3,500 words) Self-review ¹¹ Tutorials (when written by the candidate)
Assessed skills practice Assessed case presentation Simulated counselling practice sessions Group work Group training supervision Seminars and workshops Tutorials	Tutor observation	1 written assessment (by tutor) of tutor-observed counselling practice session using CBT skills 1 case presentation Tutorials (when written by the tutor)
Workplace experience (a minimum of 30 hours one-to-one counselling) using CBT skills with at least three different clients Skills practice Group work Case presentations Group training supervision Seminars and workshops	Testimony	1 supervisor's report Peer feedback
MARKING SCHEME		
Internal assessment:	Candidates must achieve all 7 learning outcomes and meet all the qualification requirements including all placement hours to be assessed as Proficient.	

⁹ Proforma and guide sheets for internal assessment can be downloaded from the [CPCAB website](#).

¹⁰ Supervision must meet the supervision ratio requirements of their chosen ethical framework or professional membership association.

¹¹ Self-review of learning, progress and completion of learning tasks (criteria). Template available on the [CPCAB website](#).

4. Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience

Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Therapeutic Skills and Theory (CBT-L5)					
	Minimum qualification	Personal therapy + professional association membership	On-going Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Minimum practice experience	Minimum experience as tutor
Tutor	CBT qualification or CBT training at level 5 or above e.g. CBT-L5 And 420 hours therapeutic counselling qualification at level 4 or above e.g. TC-L4	Minimum 10 hours personal therapeutic counselling And Member of a professional association for counselling or psychotherapy	30 hours per year CPD activities	100 hours post-qualifying supervised CBT counselling practice And Supervision qualification or experience of providing supervision to groups and individuals in a counselling setting	Teaching qualification And 1 year teaching and assessing at level 3 and 4 or above

5. Candidate Entry Requirements

This qualification is not suitable for those who are currently in a state of severe emotional difficulty and/or severe psychological distress. Centres need to ensure that all potential candidates are made aware of the nature of the course, and in particular that the course involves experiential elements that will involve some personal disclosure and associated personal developmental activities.

Title	Age	Entry requirements	Criteria considered important for selecting candidates
CBT-L5	19 or over	TC-L4 or an equivalent level 4 or above qualification of at least 300 GLH, aligned with SCoPEd Column A competences. Plus appropriate pre-TC-L4 training.	✓ Provide references ✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Possess personal qualities: imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development ✓ Ability to form a therapeutic relationship ✓ Have self-awareness, insight, honesty and integrity ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Able to challenge and be challenged

We recommend that tutors carry out a face-to-face individual interview to ascertain a candidate's suitability for this level of training.

6. Fit for Purpose

This qualification leads to being a qualified counsellor and fulfils the requirements of a range of professional association registers. It also maps to a range of competency frameworks, and occupational standards. This section is intended to help learners make informed choices about the qualifications they wish to study and how they will enable learners to reach their personal and professional goals.

As a learner continues their journey with the **CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills & Theory**, they are progressing into post-practitioner training which enables them to increase their skills, knowledge and depth of therapeutic practice by incorporating the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach as an integral part of their work as a counsellor. This improves employment opportunities and provides greater scope for working in a range of practitioner roles.

CPCAB qualifications are designed to build upon each other, ensuring that the required skills and knowledge are developed alongside the personal growth of the learner. This qualification is based on current research and adheres to the [CPCAB's model](#) for practitioner development, ensuring that training meets the highest professional standards.

Learners will receive live teaching either in-person or in an online classroom, which will include real-time interaction with peers and tutor(s). They will practice what they are learning, receive feedback on their use of counselling skills, and gain insights about themselves through their engagement with others. This live human connection is considered essential when training in an area such as counselling.

Counselling and Psychotherapy Career Progression

The CBT-L5 enables learners to register with the following counselling professional association registers, which are accredited by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA):

- ✓ BACP – British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- ✓ NCPS – National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society
- ✓ ACC – Association of Christians in Counselling and Linked Professions
- ✓ COSCA – Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland

This qualification is mapped to the requirements of the Scope of Practice and Education (SCoPEd) framework.

- ✓ The CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills and Theory, building on the competence of SCoPEd A compliant Level 4 prior practitioner training, meets the requirements of SCoPEd Column A.

Occupational Mapping

This qualification is mapped to a range of the competencies within the following suite of National Occupational Standards (NOS), developed and maintained by the Sector Skills Council – Skills for Health:

- ✓ Psychological Therapies
- ✓ General Health Care
- ✓ Health and Social Care
- ✓ Mental Health – Adults

This qualification builds on the competencies within the approved occupational standard ‘Counsellor’ in the [Skills England occupational maps](#) which is recognised as a Higher Technical Occupation within the Health & Science Pathway.

This qualification also provides a range of competencies for allied and linked professions for those who are completing this training to improve employability and progression in a range of other occupations. The skills and knowledge gained in this qualification contribute towards employability in a range of occupational standards represented in the Skills England occupational maps.

The qualification is mapped to:

- ✓ The Cognitive Therapy Scale (CTS-R)

This alignment ensures that this qualification is not only comprehensive but also up-to-date with the latest practices in counselling, psychotherapy and other linked professions.

The assessment strategy maintains a focus on practitioner skills and qualities as well as on written evidence. The combination of tutor assessment and separate external verification by CPCAB values both objective independent scrutiny and the relational knowledge of the candidate and their work. The qualification is reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose.

Centres have to meet robust centre approval requirements before they can deliver this qualification. All tutors are approved and standardised by CPCAB and centres are visited twice a year by a CPCAB external verifier.

7. Progression Routes

CBT-L5 is part of a suite of CPCAB qualifications. Once the candidate has completed this qualification and acquired sufficient client work experience, they may wish to progress to the Open University's Foundation Degree in Counselling. Following sufficient client work experience they can also progress to CPCAB Level 6 Certificate in Therapeutic Counselling Supervision (TCSU-L6). This qualification is also accepted for credit transfer at HE institutions such as the Open University.

For details of all CPCAB qualifications please see below or click here: [Qualifications - CPCAB](#) for further information.

