



The only awarding body
run *by* counsellors
for counsellors

2026 - 2027

Candidate Guide

Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3)

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

Qualification/learning aim number: 600/5104/8

Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

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Please note:

This document, along with candidate support materials, can be downloaded from the [CPCAB website](#). These provide you with the information needed to enable you to maximise your learning on this course and to complete the qualification successfully. If you need help with the accessibility of this document, please email contact@cpcab.co.uk with your request.

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1. Introduction for Candidates

You are undertaking a course that leads to a nationally regulated qualification awarded by the Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB) – the only nationally regulated awarding body to specialise in the field of counselling and supervision.

This qualification is intended for candidates who have already acquired a recognised qualification in counselling skills and want to:

- Take the next step in training to become a counsellor.
- Learn more about counselling theory, ethics and mental health.
- Be prepared for work as a professional counsellor in an agency setting.

This qualification leads to employment and increases employability for those whose role is to support others in sectors such as health and social care work, teaching and learning, advocacy and mediation, support and project work, and other helping roles. It provides additional skills for those already in employment and is likely to lead to increased opportunities for promotion and advancement towards practitioner-level qualifications (TC-L4).

This qualification has been given [Recognised Qualification status by the National Counselling & Psychotherapy Society \(NCPS\)](#). This qualification has been assessed and deemed to have met the standards expected for introduction level training for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

This qualification forms an important part of a progression route in counselling training, but on its own, it does not allow a graduate to practice as a qualified counsellor, gain entry to an Accredited Register or refer to themselves as 'a specialist' in the subject matter unless they have other qualifications/training to support this.

Tip:

Know your limits: this course won't train you to be a counsellor, but it will prepare you for the next step in training as a counsellor. It can also provide a great stepping off point to enter into, or progress in an allied profession.

2. Qualification Structure

This qualification is made up of seven learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria. This structure is based on the seven processes of the [CPCAB's Model](#).

Tip:

Think of the assessment criteria as learning tasks which you complete and then record so that your tutor can see you have achieved the task.

To achieve the qualification, you **MUST** be internally assessed by your tutor as **Proficient** in all 7 learning outcomes.

Tip:

Remember you can gain a great deal from the course without necessarily gaining the qualification. The journey is as important as the destination.

This qualification is eligible for fully in-person, blended or online delivery.

3. Internal Assessment

Art students keep a portfolio of their coursework which they use to show other people what they, as artists, have learnt. In a similar way you need to keep a portfolio of your coursework, which you can use to show your tutor what you have learnt. Keeping a portfolio of your coursework will not only provide your tutor with evidence of your learning, but also really help you with the learning process itself.

You also need to complete your ([Candidate Learning Record \(CLR\)](#)), which should be placed at the front of your portfolio to signpost the evidence for each assessment criterion. The CLR has brief notes beside each assessment criterion to help you understand what is being asked for and guidelines on how to record your learning.

You must give **two** pieces of evidence for each criterion. In addition, the CLR (when complete) must include references to the following three types of course work¹:

¹ Please note that if it is appropriate you can reference the same section of your portfolio, or the same piece of work, a number of times.

1. **Documents** – You must include the regular exploration of your learning (called the learning review) which contains your reflections on the input, discussions, experiences and readings for the course and which you start right from the beginning of the course. You must also include here 1 self-review (see section below on the tutor-assessed self-review), 1 practice case presentation² and at least 2 assignments (See [CST-L3 Examples of Written Assignments](#)). You might also include here a practice case study, review of audio/video recordings (including verbatim transcripts), tutorial records (when written by you) and notes on your personal development.³
2. **Tutor observation** – You must include records of tutor feedback on your counselling practice sessions: you must refer to at least 1 example of being observed by your tutor (which might be via audio or video recording)⁴. You must include tutor feedback on your practice case presentation. You might also include here tutorial records (when written by your tutor), and tutor feedback on your group discussions (including contributions to seminars, group-work and training group supervision).
3. **Testimony** – You must include records of peer feedback on your counselling practice sessions. You might also include peer feedback on case presentations and group discussions (including contributions to seminars, group-work and group training supervision).
 - See [CST-L3 Specification](#) for a summary of minimum assessment requirements.
 - See the CPCAB film on [How to build a student portfolio](#).

Tip:

It is a good idea to outline possible sections in your portfolio, for example:

- Document: learning reviews, self-review, assignments
- Tutor observation: tutor feedback on counselling practice
- Testimony: peer feedback on counselling practice

An example reference in your CLR might read: *Learning review p 21, para 3, lines 3-6 (document)*

Essay p. 4, para 1, lines 2-8 (document)

CPCAB recommends that you attach [Criteria Assessment Sheet \(CAS\)](#) to any work you hand in to your tutor for assessment. Your tutor can use the CAS to tell you which criteria you have met and to give you helpful feedback throughout the course. In this way you can gradually collect evidence as you go along and keep track of what evidence you still need to look out for.

² Here, within a group training supervision session, you talk about (for example) your experience of a counselling practice session.

³ Your personal development may result from insights gained from the course, other personal development work, tutorials or from personal counselling.

⁴ In the case of the audio or video recording, your tutor may choose to listen/or watch the recording, rather than observe you directly.

Self-review

Towards the end of your course your tutor will support you to complete a self-review of your learning. A template document is available on the [CPCAB website](#). This will allow you to reflect on what you have learnt and show your understanding of counselling theory and skills. Your tutor will assess your self-review and provide you with feedback on how you are progressing towards competence in all 7 areas. If you need to undertake any specific activities to address areas for development your tutor's feedback will explain how to do so.

Tip:

Meeting criteria is important, but the overall experience of learning about counselling skills should be much richer than criteria. Try to keep a balance.

After you have completed your portfolio your tutor will look at the evidence you have referenced in your [Candidate Learning Record \(CLR\)](#) and assess whether or not you have completed the assessment criteria, achieved the learning outcomes and met all the other qualification requirements. They may well decide that you are not yet Proficient – and will identify what you still need to complete/achieve and how you might work towards doing this.

- Your tutor will give you further guidance on developing your portfolio, the three types of coursework and filling in the Candidate Learning Record.

The final assessment of your work is recorded on the [Completion Statement](#) at the end of your Candidate Learning Record.

Tip:

It is important to realise that simply presenting evidence to meet criteria may not be sufficient to meet the overall learning outcomes and/or the qualification requirements. Your tutor may have observed substantive evidence which indicates that a specific assessment criterion or learning outcome has not been met despite evidence you have submitted. If that is the case, they may record a final result of Not Proficient on the basis of contraindications.

Please note that all the work you include in your portfolio is *assessable material*, so it may be seen not just by your tutor but also by all those involved in your training centre's internal assessment process or any associated appeal or complaint. Such people will include the internal moderator and verifier as part of internal quality assurance (IQA) as well as the CPCAB external verifier.

4. Equal Opportunities and Reasonable Adjustments

In order to make sure that assessment is fair to all candidates, CPCAB requires all recognised centres to have an effective candidate support system in place and to make appropriate arrangements to meet individual assessment needs. You can ensure that your own learning and assessment needs are being met by discussing your own needs/difficulties with your tutor, who can ensure that you receive the appropriate support at your centre. Please talk to your centre prior to your enrolment and about any additional support that you may need regarding learning and assessment.

Please see CPCAB's [Reasonable Adjustment Guidance for Centres](#).

Both CPCAB and centres are required to recognise and comply with both the spirit and the word of equal opportunities legislation. Previous Acts were amalgamated into the [Equality Act 2010](#).

See [CPCAB's Equal Opportunities Policy](#).

5. Appeals and Complaints

CPCAB are committed to maintaining standards across our recognised centres so that the public can have confidence in us and our qualifications. We provide our own complaints and appeals policies for the benefit of centres and candidates.

- Please view our policies on Complaints, Appeals and Whistleblowing on the [CPCAB website](#).

All CPCAB approved centres are required to have a complaints and appeals procedure which is available to candidates. Candidates must address all appeals about internal assessment or complaints about any aspect of their learning experience on the course via the centre's own internal complaints and appeals procedures. It is the centre's responsibility to make these procedures available to candidates.

Candidates who contact CPCAB directly on these issues will normally be directed back to their centre.

6. Additional Qualification Requirements

In addition to meeting the assessment criteria and learning outcomes you will need to meet the following additional course requirements:

Group Training Supervision

Group training supervision is an important part of the course and can be linked to the requirement for a case presentation. You are expected to present your work from counselling practice sessions, receive supervisory support and challenge from both your tutor and your peers and learn from and challenge

other candidates in the group. The emphasis here is to reflect on and develop counselling knowledge, skills and techniques. There is a qualification requirement for 10 hours group training supervision.

Personal counselling for candidates

There is no requirement for personal counselling. However, it is strongly suggested that you participate in some form of personal development outside of the course. Options for this might include workshops, group work, webinars, discussion forums, life coaching or counselling/therapy.

Personal tutorials

You will be offered tutorials throughout your course to support your progress and development. Your tutors may also use tutorials to raise any concerns likely to affect the outcome of your assessment. You need to keep a record of your tutorials in your portfolio.

Agency Research

You will be encouraged by your tutors to research agencies that offer counselling - to support your understanding of how an agency operates within an ethical, legal and procedural framework and to also become aware of what counselling services are available in your area. Although there is no requirement for you to have placement experience, it is strongly recommended that towards the end of CST-L3 you:

- gain some experience in a helping role within an agency that offers counselling.
- start to develop links with potential placement providers.

7. Candidate Feedback

Your feedback is vital to CPCAB to ensure the ongoing quality of our qualifications. Feedback enables us to meet our requirements as a regulated Awarding Organisation and contributes towards our annual qualification review process. Please ensure that you complete the online feedback survey at the conclusion of your course.

Please click on this link to access the survey - [Candidate feedback](#).

Appendix 1: Candidate Learning Record

Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3)

Instruction:

Print out (or otherwise detach) this Candidate Learning Record (CLR) and the Completion Statement which follows it. Then insert both documents in the front of your portfolio.

When you have completed your Candidate Learning Record please tick the following box to confirm that you have provided evidence all three types of coursework (i.e. documents, tutor observation and testimony): ☐

CST-L3		
LEARNING OUTCOME:	1. Prepare to work within an ethical framework for counselling	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
1.1 Apply understanding of an ethical framework to counselling practice sessions	- Consider and differentiate between what is required and what is recommended in a professional ethical framework – e.g. BACP, NCPS, ACC. - Consider how an ethical framework informs professional counselling practice. - Demonstrate understanding of how ethical practice is evident in counselling practice sessions. - Explore ethical dilemmas by focused discussion of your own experience from working with case scenarios in counselling practice sessions.	
1.2 Explain the importance of working within limits of proficiency	- Reflect on importance of 'limits of proficiency' in relation to ethical practice. - Discover the limits of your proficiency by focused discussion of your own experience of working with case scenarios in counselling practice sessions. - Show understanding by referring to new insights gained through discussion.	
1.3 Describe the ethical, legal and procedural framework in which an agency operates	- Explore an agency's ethical policy and procedure with reference to working ethically and safely. - Explore how legal processes might impact on an agency counselling service.	

1.4 Demonstrate understanding of client assessment and referral in an agency setting	• Understand the role and purpose of client assessment and how it informs the counselling work itself. • Identify the nature and range of information necessary to begin to get a sense of the client's perception of their problem and practice this process in counselling practice sessions. • Understand the importance of client assessment and explore referral issues. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	2. Understanding the counselling relationship	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
2.1 Explain the nature and constraints of the counsellor role within different settings	• Clearly differentiate between the role of the counsellor in an agency as opposed to (for example) a helper or key worker for a client in the same organisation. • Explore the limitations of counselling, in relation to expectations of clients, in a range of different agency settings – e.g. rehabilitation centre, GP surgery, drop-in centre, young person's advisory centre. Practise explaining your role to clients in counselling practice sessions.	
2.2 Establish and sustain the boundaries of the counsellor role in counselling practice sessions	• Explore boundary limits to the counselling relationship. • Identify situations and issues that challenge personal and professional boundaries and explore ways of managing these – e.g. "doorknob confessions", attraction between counsellor and client, confidentiality issues etc. • Practise establishing and sustaining boundary limits to the counselling relationship. • Reflect on your ability to establish and sustain boundaries.	
2.3 Explain how the counselling relationship contributes to the counselling work	• Clearly state what you feel and think is necessary to develop an effective (working) relationship with clients. • Define those characteristics of the counselling relationship that facilitate growth and change and identify attitudes which enable the counsellor to introduce those characteristics to the relationship. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	
2.4 Manage the stages of the counselling relationship	• Identify three different stages in the counselling session and process. • Be clear about the reasons for attending to, and effectively using, the beginning, middle and end for the purpose of developing, maintaining and concluding the counselling process. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	

LEARNING OUTCOME:	3. Understand difference and diversity issues to develop empathic understanding	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
3.1 Identify and reflect on diversity within personal relationships	• Learn about diversity through exploring the membership of the course group: the different beliefs and behaviour. Become aware of the demographics of your group – e.g. culture, family, nationality, race, age, gender, disability, sexuality etc. • Become aware of your own response and reactions to the differences within the group. Investigate and analyse the implications of being perceived as 'different'.	
3.2 Identify and reflect on a range of diversity issues in the wider social context	• Discover the range of ways in which people experience discrimination. • Familiarise yourself with the legal aspects of anti-discrimination. • Explore own experience(s) of discrimination and discriminating. • Use the learning gained from understanding of diversity issues to inform your counselling practice sessions. • Take account of diversity issues when developing a counselling relationship. • Consider the needs of a client who has experienced discriminatory responses in society. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	
3.3 Apply awareness of diversity issues to enhance empathic understanding	• Develop a more intimate sense of what another's experience of difference has been by listening to the feelings and personal cost related to perceived or real difference. • Be prepared for – and aware of – your responses to the experience of difference. • Identify and understand personal blocks to empathy and identify issues you feel unable to empathise with. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	4. Work within a user-centred approach to counselling	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
4.1 Establish the client's needs and expectations when agreeing to work together	• Involve the client in the process of offering and agreeing a working contract which takes account of the client's expectations as well as agency policies. • Understand the importance of listening for the client's agenda rather than responding from your own frame of reference. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	
4.2 Maintain the focus on the client's agenda and needs	• Show how you have used case discussion to review client work, including the contract. • Recognise the need to be clear and yet sensitive to changes in client needs and behaviour which affect the working contract. • Practise this criterion in case discussion sessions. • Show skills in observed counselling practice sessions.	

LEARNING OUTCOME:	5. Use counselling theory to develop self-awareness in counselling practice	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
5.1 Use counselling theory to understand own personality	• Reflect on ways in which theories introduced on the course have extended your understanding of yourself. • Reflect on one or more theories/ideas which help you to understand your personality more fully.	
5.2 Use counselling theory to understand own personal history	• Reflect on theoretical ideas and concepts which help you to understand your life events and your responses to those events. • Apply theory to challenging issues in your formative years and gain awareness of how the past might impact on the present.	
5.3 Use counselling theory to understand own relationships	• Reflect on theories which help you to understand your relationships, both past and present, and the way in which you form, develop, maintain and end those relationships.	
5.4 Evidence how self-awareness contributes to the ability to empathise with others	• Reflect on own difficult personal issues in order to raise your awareness of the importance of being understood empathically. • Apply empathic understanding gained from exploring yourself (own internal conflicts and/or difficult life events and/or relationships with others). • Show understanding of the relationship between 'exploring your own difficult issues' and increasing your 'ability to empathise with others'.	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	6. Understand theories of counselling and mental health	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
6.1 Explain why theory is important in counselling work	• Reflect what is meant by theory. • Reflect on the role of theory in counselling work. • Explain why counsellors need to take into account theory in counselling work.	
6.2 Describe the main theoretical approaches to counselling	• Develop understanding of the fundamental ideas behind the major theoretical approaches – e.g. psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive, transpersonal etc. Develop your understanding in relation to one or more counselling theories.	
6.3 Use counselling theory to understand the client	• Show how different theories offer a different language and different way of understanding the client's a) personality/self; b) personal history; c) patterns of relating (see the CPCAB model). Apply knowledge of theory to a range of presenting problems and client issues.	
6.4 Explain the nature of common mental health problems	• Identify and describe problems which are categorised as Common Mental Health Problems (CMHPs). Offer explanations for the incidence of these problems in society.	

6.5 Describe how counselling can promote positive mental health	• Explore the features of positive mental health. • Suggest ways in which counselling might have a positive impact on mental health.	
6.6 Explain why research findings are important in counselling work	• Reflect on what is meant by research findings. • Explain why counsellors need to take account of research findings in counselling work.	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	7. Use feedback, reflection and supervision to support counselling studies	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
7.1 Use feedback from others to develop understanding of counselling	• Identify constructive guidance provided by peers and tutors which has informed your learning. • Write about personal and course goals and your thoughts about achieving those goals. • Show your ability to plan and reflect.	
7.2 Give constructive feedback to other counselling trainees	• Show your ability to critically evaluate counselling practice sessions. • Use feedback sheets to show your ability to give constructive feedback. • Show your ability to give verbal feedback to peers at the end of counselling practice sessions.	
7.3 Describe the nature and use of clinical supervision	• Reflect on the insights and understanding gained from case discussion. • Identify situations in which your limited knowledge and skills were helped and supported by close discussion with your tutor and/or a more experienced counsellor. • Show your understanding of the role and importance of supervision.	
7.4 Use supervisee skills to contribute to, and learn from, case discussion	• Record your input into case discussions. • Identify questions which help to provide support for a peer during case discussion. • Clarify the needs of the client by linking case information to counselling theory. • Record your use of insights gained from case discussion.	

Where do you plan to progress once you've finished this qualification?

Please enter corresponding number here:

1. Employment as a Counsellor (Full Time, Part Time or Self Employed)
2. Employment within Allied Professions (Full Time, Part Time or Self Employed)
3. Employment in Non Allied Professions Sector (Full Time, Part Time or Self Employed)
4. Further Study in Further Education (Counselling related subjects)
5. Further Study in Higher Education (Counselling related subjects)
6. Further Study in Further Education (Non-Counselling related subjects)
7. Further Study in Higher Education (Non-Counselling related subjects)
8. Voluntary Work – Counselling Sector
9. Voluntary Work – Allied Professions*
10. Voluntary Work – Non-Counselling/Allied Professions
11. Not in employment
12. I don't know

*Example list of allied professions (not an exhaustive list):

- Advice and advocacy support
- Befriender role
- Care worker
- Childline administrator
- Contact centre advisor
- Customer facing role
- Customer relations advisor
- Customer service representative/ advisor/ officer
- Family support worker
- Healthcare professionals
- Helpline operator
- Home care assistant
- Housing support worker
- Mentoring and support worker
- Promotion in current role
- Public services, including probation, substance misuse agencies and criminal justice sector
- Roles in health and social care
- Welfare and advice worker
- Youth worker

Appendix 2: Completion Statement for CST-L3

Completion statement for Candidate Learning Record Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3)			
Learning outcome		Contra-indications present Y/N	Tutor signature if learning outcome has been achieved
1	Prepare to work within an ethical framework for counselling		
2	Understand the counselling relationship		
3	Understand difference and diversity issues to develop empathic understanding		
4	Work within a user-centred approach to counselling		
5	Use counselling theory to develop self-awareness in counselling practice		
6	Understand theories of counselling and mental health		
7	Use feedback, reflection and supervision to support counselling studies		

To be completed by tutor:

Where the learning outcome has not been achieved please:

- (a) State clearly which learning outcome this relates to.
- (b) Give specific and relevant reasons why the learning outcome has not been achieved.
- (c) Record proposed course of action agreed between tutor and candidate to address/remedy concerns.

Learning outcome	Details of relevant contra-indications	Proposed course of action

I declare this Candidate Learning Record to be a true and authentic record of evidence submitted in my portfolio:

Candidate name: Candidate signature: Date:

I declare that this Completion Statement is a true record of the candidate's achievement:

I declare that this candidate has achieved all the above qualification requirements for CST-L3:

Tutor name: Tutor signature: Date:

Appendix 3: Criteria Assessment Sheet (CAS)

Candidate:

Group:

Qualification:

Coursework:

Candidates: In the table below, identify the criteria evidenced in the assignment concerned and cross-reference these in the relevant page margin of your assignment.

Assessors: Grade the robustness of the evidence identified by the candidate against the Assessment Criteria: YES (achieved) or NO (not yet achieved).

For completion by the candidate: Candidate reference to coursework			For completion by the tutor: Tutor assessment	
Unit (CAST-L3 and TC-L4 only)	Criteria number	Page number	YES/NO	Tutor feedback

General comments:

Tutor name: _____ Date: _____