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for counsellors

2026-2027

Specification

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

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 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 will enable successful candidates to work as skilled supporters within a range of job and career opportunities, which include but are not limited to:

- 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

Please see below for progression opportunities.

Funding	This qualification is not currently eligible for funding.
Level	3 ¹
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	90 (minimum)
Total Qualification Time (TQT)	196
Credit value	20
Minimum Age	18 years ² .
Entry Requirements	CPCAB Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (CSK-L2) or an equivalent qualification of at least 75 GLH. Please see: • CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements for criteria considered important in selecting applicants for a programme leading to CST-L3. • CPCAB's Entry Requirements and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy.
Assessment	Proficient (Pass)/Not Proficient (Fail) Candidates must be Proficient in internal assessment 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	None required.
Staffing and Resources	At least one tutor-assessor must be involved in all aspects of internal candidate assessment. See Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience for further details of CPCAB requirements.
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.

¹ Equivalent to level 4 on the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

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

Progression	Candidates completing the Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (CSK-L2) and CPCAB Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3), or their equivalents may progress to the CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4). Tutors can allow progression to the first year of TC-L4 for candidates who have not yet completed their assessment for CST-L3. However, such candidates must successfully complete the qualification prior to entry into the 2nd year of TC-L4. See CPCAB's Progression Route for details. This qualification has been allocated UCAS points. Please refer to the UCAS website for further details of the points allocation and the most up-to-date information.
Candidate Registration Fee	£195
Centre Application for CPCAB Approval to Offer the Qualification	Centre application fee: £233 (one-off fee).³ Centres are expected to design their own training programmes.⁴ 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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 (CST-L3)

Learning outcomes (<i>skills, knowledge, understanding</i>) The learner will/will be able to:	Assessment criteria (<i>to assess learning outcome</i>) The learner can:
1. Prepare to work within an ethical framework for counselling	1.1 Apply understanding of an ethical framework to counselling practice sessions. 1.2 Explain the importance of working within limits of proficiency. 1.3 Describe the ethical, legal and procedural framework in which an agency operates. 1.4 Demonstrate understanding of client assessment and referral in an agency setting.
2. Understand the counselling relationship	2.1 Explain the nature and constraints of the counsellor role within different settings. 2.2 Establish and sustain the boundaries of the counsellor role in counselling practice sessions. 2.3 Explain how the counselling relationship contributes to the counselling work. 2.4 Manage the stages of the counselling relationship.
3. Understand difference and diversity issues to develop empathic understanding	3.1 Identify and reflect on diversity within personal relationships. 3.2 Identify and reflect on a range of diversity issues in the wider social context. 3.3 Apply awareness of diversity issues to enhance empathic understanding.
4. Work within a user-centred approach to counselling	4.1 Establish the client's needs and expectations when agreeing to work together. 4.2 Maintain the focus on the client's agenda and needs.
5. Use counselling theory to develop self-awareness in counselling practice	5.1 Use counselling theory to understand own personality. 5.2 Use counselling theory to understand own personal history. 5.3 Use counselling theory to understand own relationships. 5.4 Evidence how self-awareness contributes to the ability to empathise with others.

6. Understand theories of counselling and mental health	6.1 Explain why theory is important in counselling work. 6.2 Describe the main theoretical approaches to counselling. 6.3 Use counselling theory to understand the client. 6.4 Explain the nature of common mental health problems. 6.5 Describe how counselling can promote positive mental health. 6.6 Explain why research findings are important in counselling work.
7. Use feedback, reflection and supervision to support counselling studies	7.1 Use feedback from others to develop understanding of counselling. 7.2 Give constructive feedback to other counselling trainees. 7.3 Describe the nature and use of clinical supervision. 7.4 Use supervisee skills to contribute to, and learn from, case discussion.

See the [CST-L3 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 ⁵	Types of evidence (2 references for each assessment criterion)
- Professional discussion and workshops - Seminars, personal development workshops and group work - Projects and presentations - Review of skills work - Review of learning - Tutorials	Documents	2 assignments⁶ 1 self-review⁷ - Learning review (throughout programme)⁸ 1 practice case presentation - Tutorial records (when written by candidate)
- Assessed simulated counselling practice - Assessed case presentations - Assessed workplace simulations - Group work - Group training supervision - Seminars and workshops - Tutorials	Tutor observation	- Minimum 1 tutor-observed counselling practice session - Feedback on practice case presentation⁹ - Tutorial records (when written by the tutor)
- Simulated counselling practice - Case presentations - Group work - Group training supervision - Seminars and workshops	Testimony	Peer feedback
MARKING SCHEME		
Internal assessment:	Candidates must achieve all seven learning outcomes of the qualification.	

⁵ Proforma and guide sheets for internal assessment can be downloaded from the [CPCAB website](#).

⁶ Suggested assignments are available on the [CPCAB website](#).

⁷ Self-review of learning, progress, and completion of the learning tasks (criteria). Template available on the [CPCAB website](#).

⁸ This is an on-going review of learning during the course (also called a “learning journal”).

⁹ For example when a tutor observes and makes records of the candidate presenting this in group training supervision

4. Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience

Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3)					
	Minimum qualification	Personal therapy + professional association membership	On-going Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Minimum practice experience	Minimum experience as a tutor
Tutor	420 hours therapeutic counselling qualification at level 4 or above. e.g. TC-L4	10 hours personal therapy And Member of a professional association for counselling or psychotherapy.	30 hours per year CPD activities.	Current supervised counselling practice And Supervision qualification or experience of supervising groups or individuals in a counselling setting.	Teaching qualification or be working towards one And 6 months teaching and assessing at level 2 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
CST-L3	18 or over	CSK-L2 or an equivalent qualification of at least 75 GLH	✓ Ability to translate intra-personal experience into language ✓ Able to benefit from self-development ✓ Emotional stability ✓ Evidence personal insight ✓ Ability to form a counselling relationship ✓ Awareness of difference and diversity ✓ Able to cope with course content ✓ Identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Be motivated towards developing as a counselling practitioner ✓ Provide references (centre option)

6. Fit for Purpose

This qualification is part of the CPCAB core progression route which 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 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies**, they are embarking on the next step of the CPCAB progression route that leads them into professional practitioner training, and beyond.

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 CST-L3 is designed to prepare learners for a career as a counsellor, or entry into a range of other linked professions (see the qualification specification for details of linked professions). The CPCAB progression route prepares learners for registration 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
 - ✓ UKCP – United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (Standards for Psychotherapeutic Counselling).
- Please note that progressing to UKCP will also require a CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Psychotherapeutic counselling (see separate mapping for more information on additional requirements).

The qualification progression route is also mapped to the requirements of the Scope of Practice and Education (SCoPEd) framework. The CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling meets the requirements of SCoPEd Column A.

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.

This qualification maps to the competencies from the following professional framework:

- ✓ BACP Counselling Skills Competence Framework (2020)

Occupational Mapping

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

- ✓ General Health Care
- ✓ Health and Social Care
- ✓ Mental Health - Adults

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.

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

The CST-L3 qualification is one step in a series of CPCAB qualifications. Once the candidate has completed this qualification they can continue training to become a counsellor by doing CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) or move into the area of life coaching by doing the Level 4 Diploma in Life Coaching (LC-L4).

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

