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for counsellors

2026 - 2027

CPCAB Entry Requirements and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy



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1. Introduction

CPCAB as an Awarding Organisation sets out entry requirements for each of its regulated qualifications. Awarding Organisations are not obliged by their regulators to offer Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). However, where RPL is permitted they must publish their RPL policy and comply with it (as required in *General Conditions of Recognition E10*).

2. Definitions of Entry Requirements and RPL

Entry requirements refer to any prior qualifications or equivalent learning or experience which a learner is **required to have attained before** undertaking a qualification. They are clearly set out in the qualification specification (as required in *General Conditions of Recognition E3.2b*).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the process by which a learner's relevant prior formal or non-formal learning or experience is formally evaluated in order to determine whether it satisfies **any part of** a qualification and therefore allows for **an amendment to, or exemption from**, some aspect of the qualification requirements.

3. Scope

3.1 Entry Requirements

Centres are required to consider prior qualifications or equivalent learning and experience to determine whether or not a learner has met the qualification entry requirements, particularly when they are applying for entry to a qualification from a non-CPCAB route (see table, [Appendix 1](#)). It is in a potential learner's best interests for the centre to make a considered judgement about their eligibility to start a new qualification. Centres should bear in mind that permitting learners to study a qualification without sufficient prior learning can impact on their learning experience, affect group dynamics, and impede their future ability to secure employment, or gain membership of a professional association.

In the table in Appendix 1 where we refer to **Guided Learning Hours (GLH)**, this relates to GLH that are delivered through **live face-to-face and synchronous online learning**. Distance (asynchronous) learning is not considered an appropriate replacement for GLH in core counselling training. CPCAB and the professional associations in counselling champion the importance of live human connection with tutors and peers throughout counselling training.

Guidance on assessing whether the entry requirements have been met is provided on form CR2 available on the [CPCAB website](#). Centres are expected to apply CPCAB's entry requirements to all learner admission decisions. Where centres are unsure, we are available to offer support, but CPCAB cannot make decisions on behalf of a centre about individual learner eligibility.

3.2 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

There is normally no direct role for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within CPCAB qualifications, as all qualification learning outcomes, assessment criteria and associated assessment requirements are

mandatory, regardless of a learner's prior qualifications, training or experience, or the point at which they join the course.

One exception is the two-year Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) where learners may undertake the second year of their training at a different centre due to exceptional circumstances. In this event the centre offering Year 2 can apply the principles of RPL for the work covered in Year 1. Please note this is not an automatic entitlement. It is a centre decision based on individual circumstances, normally subject to an interview and satisfactory references.¹

Guidance on important considerations for a TC-L4 year-2 RPL decision is provided on form CR2 available on the [CPCAB website](#). Where centres are unsure, we are available to offer support, but CPCAB cannot make decisions on behalf of a centre about individual learner eligibility.

4. Guidance to Centres on Entry Requirements and RPL

Candidate admissions are a centre responsibility, and CPCAB's role is limited to publishing our entry requirements and providing clear guidance:

- Qualification specifications include the qualification-specific requirements summarised in [Appendix 1](#).
- Guidance is also given as part of centre recognition.
- Guidance and a template for record keeping is provided on form [CR2](#).
- Updated guidance is also given at standardisation training days or via CPCAB's Update newsletters as required.

Entry guidance for all qualifications:

Potential candidates must possess a level of literacy and numeracy sufficient for the programme concerned and be aware of the time and other resources required for the course. Applicants need to know that the qualification is **not** suitable for those who are currently in a state of severe emotional difficulty and/or severe psychological distress, for example those:

- Currently experiencing – *without* ongoing and appropriate professional support – a recent, major life crisis such as marital breakdown or a close bereavement.
- Currently experiencing moderate to severe mental health problems without appropriate professional support, or where this has the potential to impact on their ability to maintain counselling/coaching/supervision relationships appropriately.
- Currently involved in substance misuse.

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 development activities.

5. Entry Requirements and RPL record keeping

Centres are required to keep records of entry decisions and RPL, which are checked periodically as part of regular external verification visits. CPCAB provides a template for this (form CR2), which is available on the [CPCAB website](#).

¹ Please contact CPCAB for advice regarding any other circumstances if you consider RPL might be appropriate.

Where a centre considers a prospective candidate does not meet the entry requirements, CPCAB recommends that a clear record is retained of the reasons for non-admission, and that the decision is clearly conveyed to the individual.

This policy is reviewed annually by CPCAB as part of its regular documentation update.

CPCAB 2026

Qualification-Specific Guidance on Entry Requirements

Title	Age	Entry requirements	Criteria considered important for selecting candidates
ELSK-L2	14+	None	None but see entry guidance disclaimer, above
USM-L2	16+	None	None but see entry guidance disclaimer, above
ICSK-L2	16+	None	None but see entry guidance disclaimer, above
CSK-L2	18+	None	✓ Able to cope with course content ✓ Ability to translate intra-personal experience into language ✓ Able to benefit from self-development ✓ Be motivated towards developing as a helper ✓ Emotional stability ✓ Identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Awareness of difference and diversity ✓ Provide references (centre option)
CST-L3/ CAST-L3	18+	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)
LCS-L3	19+	Level 2 qualification in a life coaching or equivalent in a complementary or related subject	✓ Ability to translate intra-personal experience into language ✓ Able to benefit from self-development ✓ Emotional stability ✓ Evidence personal insight ✓ Ability to form a collaborative 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 life coaching practitioner ✓ Provide references (centre option)

TC-L4	19+	CPCAB <i>Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills</i> (CSK-L2) and CPCAB <i>Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies</i> (CST-L3)/<i>Level 3 Certificate in Applied Counselling Studies</i> (CAST-L3), or equivalent qualifications². <i>All candidates must have secured a placement in order to progress to Year 2 of the diploma</i> <i>BACP APQ year 2 candidates must have completed a TC-L4 BACP APQ year 1.</i>	✓ Identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Possess personal qualities of imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development ✓ Ability to form a therapeutic relationship ✓ Self-awareness, insight, honesty and the ability to make links ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged ✓ Ability to respond sensitively and empathically to others ✓ Capability to begin working with clients within an agency setting ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview ✓ Are intending (and actively seeking) to begin work with clients during year 1 of the programme
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² Tutors can allow entry to the first year of TC-L4 to candidates who have not yet completed their assessment for CST-L3/CAST-L3. However, such candidates must successfully complete CST-L3/CAST-L3 prior to entry into the 2nd year of TC-L4.

LC-L4	19+	CPCAB Level 3 Certificate in Life Coaching Studies (LCS-L3) or an equivalent qualification.	✓ Ability to identify reasons beyond just personal development ✓ Academically & emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Able to benefit from self-development ✓ Emotional stability ✓ Evidence personal insight ✓ Ability to form a working alliance ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Have self-awareness, insight, honesty and integrity ✓ Identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged ✓ Be motivated towards developing as a life coaching practitioner ✓ Professional qualities required for autonomous life coaching practice ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview
PC-L5	19+	TC-L4 or an equivalent level 4 or above qualification of at least 300 GLH, aligned with SCoEd Column A competences Plus appropriate pre-TC-L4 training	✓ Ability to identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Possess personal qualities of imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development ✓ Ability to form a therapeutic relationship ✓ Have self-awareness, insight, honesty and the ability to make links ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged ✓ Ability to respond sensitively and empathically to others ✓ Professional qualities required for autonomous practice ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview

CBT-L5	19+	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	✓ 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 the ability to make links ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Able to challenge and be challenged ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview
CYP-L5	19+	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	✓ Ability to identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Possess personal qualities of imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development ✓ Ability to form a therapeutic relationship with a child or young person ✓ Have self-awareness, insight, honesty and the ability to make links ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged ✓ Ability to respond sensitively and empathically to children and young people ✓ Ability to work professionally as part of a team ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview

TCSU-L6	19+	TC-L4, PC-L5, CBT-L5, CYP-L5- or equivalent qualifications Plus recommended minimum of 450 supervised client hours ³	✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training. ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity. ✓ Possess personal qualities of imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development. ✓ Possess the qualities appropriate for a supervision relationship. ✓ Have self-awareness, insight, honesty and the ability to make links. ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance. ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged. ✓ Ability to respond sensitively and empathically to others. ✓ Ability to model professional attitudes and behaviour. ✓ Provide references ✓ Interview
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Guidance Notes for Evaluating Prior Learning and Experience

Prior learning and experience can consist of (1) certificated achievement (qualifications) (2) non-certificated training and (3) workplace experience OR a combination of any of these categories.

Certificated training means courses that have led to achievement of recognised qualifications that have been awarded by a national awarding organisation or recognised training organisation.

1. Non-certificated training from an appropriate training organisation. Evidence could include **Error! Bookmark not defined.**a certificate of attendance/confirmation letter from the provider with details of the training. In both of the above categories it is important to determine the nature, level and duration of the training.

2. Understanding and skills gained through workplace experience. Experience alone without training is not usually sufficient but evidence could include details of:

- Names and details of agencies/workplace;
- Number of client hours and number of supervision hours;
- Level(s) of client-work;
- Testimonial(s) from an appropriately qualified individual;
- Case-study/written assignment/other evidence of practice.

Centres may also wish to include additional pre-course assessment procedures e.g. face-to-face interview to gauge the level of the applicant's knowledge and experience and/or attendance in a pre-

³ This is in line with typical counsellor accreditation requirements.

course assessment group. Interviews for qualifications from level 4+ are strongly recommended by CPCAB. Centres must take account of equalities legislation and accessibility of courses.