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for counsellors

2026- 2027

Candidate Guide

Level 2 Award in Understanding Substance Misuse (USM-L2)

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

Qualification/learning aim number: 500/4684/6

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 designed for learners who wish to develop their knowledge and understanding of substance misuse in order to:

- Raise awareness of substance misuse and its consequences.
- Improve the knowledge, awareness, understanding and effectiveness of those currently working in the field of substance misuse or supporting people involved in substance misuse.
- Work to prevent substance misuse.

This qualification contributes to a specialist area of counselling and the knowledge gained would be useful in a variety of settings, both professional, paraprofessional and personal.

2. Qualification Structure

This qualification is made up of 7 learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria. This structure is based on the 7 processes of the [CPCAB's Model](#).

Tip:

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

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

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 trainer what you have learnt. Keeping a portfolio of your coursework will not only provide your trainer 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 **one** piece of documentary evidence (in your CLR) for each assessment criteria: ¹

Documents – You must include the regular exploration of your learning, called the learning review, which contains your thoughts, feelings and reflections on the input, discussions, experiences and readings for the course. You begin this right at the beginning of the course. You must also include an assignment such as an essay as directed by your centre, and tutorial records.

- See [USM-L2 Specification](#) for a summary of minimum assessment requirements.
- See the CPCAB film on [How to build a student portfolio](#).

CPCAB recommends that you attach a [Criteria Assessment Sheet \(CAS\)](#) to any work you hand in to your trainer for assessment. Your trainer 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.

Tip:

Meeting criteria is important, but the overall learning experience should **not** be criteria driven. The journey is as important as the destination.

After you have completed your portfolio your trainer 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 trainer 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 trainer may have observed substantive evidence which indicates that a specific assessment criterion or learning outcome has not been met despite evidence you have submitted.

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

Please note that all the work you include in your portfolio is *assessable material*, so it may be seen not just by your trainer 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 registered 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 trainer, 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. 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 2 Award in Understanding Substance (USM-L2)

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 each of the 7 learning outcomes: ☐

USM-L2		
Learning outcomes The learner will:	Assessment criteria The learner can:	Portfolio reference
1. Know the effects of a range of drugs, including alcohol	1.1 Identify the three main drug groups and the characteristics of each. 1.2 Describe the effects of a range of substances including alcohol. 1.3 Recognise the main signs and symptoms associated with substance use/misuse.	
2. Know the harm associated with different substances and related behaviours	2.1 State the routes of administration. 2.2 Identify risks to health posed by intravenous drug use. 2.3 Describe the signs and symptoms of overdose of drugs and alcohol. 2.4 Identify the link between HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and substance use/misuse. 2.5 State how a range of drugs and alcohol use impacts on pregnancy.	
3. Be aware of diversity in relation to substance use/misuse	3.1 State what constitutes acceptable and non-acceptable drugs and their usage. 3.2 Identify social assumptions and stereotypes around substance misuse.	
4. Understand why people misuse drugs/alcohol	4.1 State possible reasons for use/misuse of drugs and alcohol. 4.2 Describe patterns of substance use/misuse.	
5. Be aware of own responses to issues in relation to substance use/misuse	5.1 Identify own attitude towards drug use and drug users. 5.2 Identify personal assumptions in relation to substance misuse.	
6. Know the social and economic effects of substance misuse	6.1 Describe the effect substance misuse could have on the community.	
7. Use study skills within the learning process	7.1 Use reflection and feedback to identify progress and learning needs.	.

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 USM-L2

Completion statement for Candidate Learning Record Level 2 Award in Understanding Substance Misuse			
Learning Outcome	Title	Contra-indications present Y/N	Trainer signature if learning outcome has been achieved
1	Know the effects of a range of drugs, including alcohol		
2	Know the harm associated with different substances and related behaviours		
3	Be aware of diversity in relation to substance use/misuse		
4	Understand why people use/misuse drugs		
5	Be aware of own responses to issues in relation to substance use/misuse		
6	Know the social and economic effects of substance misuse		
7	Use study skills within the learning process		

To be completed by core trainer:

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 trainer 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 USM-L2: ☐

Trainer name: Trainer 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 trainer: Trainer assessment	
Unit (CAST-L3 and TC-L4 only)	Criteria number	Page number	YES/NO	Trainer feedback

General comments:

Trainer name:

Date:

Appendix 4: Candidate Evaluation Form for ELSK-L2 & USM-L2

We hope you have enjoyed your training. Please complete this evaluation form to provide CPCAB with your feedback. You can include your name if you like or keep your feedback confidential.

Which qualification? Please mark appropriate box: ELSK-L2 ☐ USM-L2 ☐						
Candidate name:						
Centre name:						
Date you started:						
Date your course will finish:						
For the questions below, please mark the box that best matches your experience of the qualification.	Definitely agree	Slightly agree	Not sure	Slightly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
I found the course content was right for the qualification						
I found the assessment clear and understandable						
I found the course was long enough for me to meet all the requirements						
I found the coursework enabled me to demonstrate my knowledge, understanding and skills						
I found that the course met my individual learning needs						
This course has helped my confidence in the subject area						
I have enjoyed my study						
Any other comments about the qualification						