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2026-2027

Specification

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

Sector subject area: 1.3 Health and Social Care

Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

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Contents

Page

1. Qualification Information	3
2. Qualification Summary	5
3. Minimum Assessment Requirements	6
4. Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience	7
5. Candidate Entry Requirements	7
6. Fit for Purpose	7
7. Progression Routes	8

Please note:

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1. Qualification Information

Purpose Statement

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, for example:

- Supporting those working in Tier 1 services by providing an overview of the subject for example, probation services, housing services, health and social care, public services.
- Enhancing understanding of those already working therapeutically e.g. counsellors, support workers, key workers, community workers.
- Benefiting parents, carers and the wider community by virtue of increased knowledge and awareness.
- Helping and supporting others either in a voluntary or employed capacity.

Funding	This qualification is not currently eligible for funding.
Level	2 ¹
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	30 (minimum)
Total Qualification Time (TQT)	58
Credit value	6
Minimum Age	16 years ² .
Entry Requirements	No previous training or experience required. See CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements for criteria considered important in selecting applicants for a programme leading to USM-L2. CPCAB's Entry Requirements and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy.

¹ Equivalent to level 3 on the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

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

Assessment	Proficient (Pass)/Not Proficient (Fail) Trainer assessment of candidate portfolio evidencing minimum assessment requirements. Independent verification by CPCAB. See CPCAB's Minimum Assessment Requirements.
Additional Qualification Requirements	None required.
Staffing and Resources	Only one tutor-assessor is needed 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.
Progression	CPCAB Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (if aged 18+) and/or level 2 or level 3 qualifications in health & social care and/or level 3 substance misuse. See CPCAB's Progression Route for details.
Candidate Registration Fee	£62
Centre Application for CPCAB Approval to Offer the Qualification	Centre application fee: £145 (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 (USM-L2)

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. 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.

See the [USM-L2 Trainer Guide](#) for candidate guidance to criteria and notes for trainers.

3. Minimum Assessment Requirements

Candidates must be assessed as **Proficient** in all 7 learning outcomes and all sections of the candidate portfolio⁵ must be completed to achieve the qualification.

Candidates must give **one** piece of evidence for each criterion.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT – must include all three methods of assessment		
Course activities	Assessment method	Types of evidence (1 reference for each assessment criterion)
❖ Activities and exercises ❖ Review of learning	Documents	❖ Learning review (learning record throughout programme)⁶ ❖ 1 assignment (1000-1500 words)
Not required	Tutor observation	Not required
Not required	Testimony	Not required
MARKING SCHEME		
Internal assessment:	Candidate portfolio independently verified by CPCAB	

⁵ A proforma for the candidate portfolio can be found in both the Trainer Guide and the Candidate Guide. The form can be downloaded from the [CPCAB website](#).

⁶ This is an on-going review of learning during the course (also called a 'learning journal').

4. Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience

Level 2 Award in Understanding Substance Misuse (USM-L2)		
	Minimum qualification	Minimum experience as trainer
Trainer	Training in Substance Misuse at level 2 or above. e.g. CPCAB USM workshop or equivalent or 1 years' workplace experience in the substance misuse field.	6 months experience of delivering training, group facilitation or tutoring in substance misuse or equivalent. (Equivalent will need to be specified on the trainer CV).

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 which will involve some personal disclosure and associated personal developmental activities.

6. Fit for Purpose

This qualification is knowledge-based and signposted to the Drug and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS). It is reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose.

The tutor assessment and internal moderation is independently verified by CPCAB.

Centres have to meet robust centre approval requirements before they can deliver this qualification. A two-day workshop designed to support tutors in delivering this qualification is available. All tutors are approved by CPCAB.

7. Progression Routes

Progression is available to CPCAB Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (if aged 18+) and/or level 2 or level 3 qualifications in health & social care and/or level 3 substance misuse.

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

