



The only awarding body
run *by* counsellors
for counsellors

2025 - 2026

Candidate Guide

Level 2 Award in Introduction to Counselling Skills (ICSK-L2)

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

Qualification/learning aim number: 500/7762/4

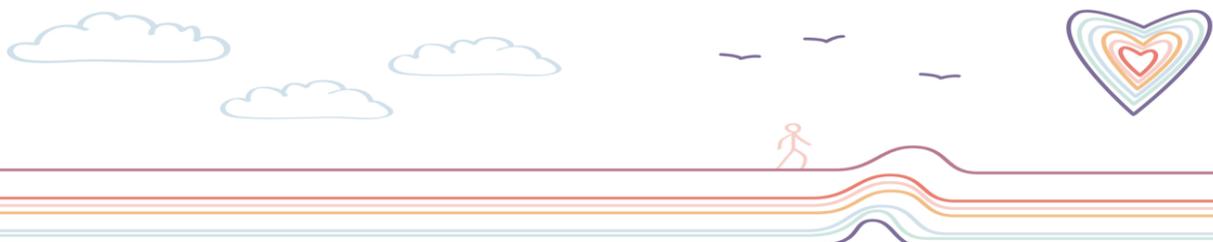
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Please note:

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 want to:

- Learn basic counselling skills (listening and responding skills) in helping roles.
- Find out more about counselling (this qualification won't teach them to be a counsellor but may help them decide whether or not they want to train as one).
- Improve professional and personal relationships.

This qualification does not lead directly to an employed role. However, it could enhance an existing role or increase the general employability of those seeking to enter the job market.

Tip:

Know your limits: this course won't train you to be a counsellor, but it is a great introduction to the world of counselling skills.

Helping work is different from counselling (which is a formally contracted relationship between a counsellor and a client). To make this difference between counselling and helping work clear, CPCAB calls the person using counselling skills the “helper” and the person being helped the “helpee”.¹

An example of helping work would be a care assistant (the helper) listening to someone they are looking after (the helpee) who is very worried about the health of a family member. The helper will help them to express their feelings and concerns. They may also guide them to a specific professional who may be able to provide them with the more specialised or in-depth help which they may need.

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.

¹ The terms ‘counsellor’ and ‘client’ are not used until CPCAB’s Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3) / Level 3 Certificate in Applied Counselling Studies (CAST-L3).

You must be internally assessed by your tutor as **Proficient** in all 7 learning outcomes in order to achieve the qualification.

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 **one** piece of evidence for each criterion. In addition, the CLR (when complete) must include references to the following three types of course work²:

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 might also include here an assignment (such as an essay), 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 skills practice sessions – you must refer to at least 1 example of being observed by your tutor. You might also include tutor feedback on group discussions. Tutorial records (when written by your tutor) can also be included in this section.
3. **Testimony** – You must include records of peer feedback on your skills practice sessions. You might also include peer feedback on group discussions.
 - See [ICSK-L2 Specification](#) for a summary of minimum assessment requirements.
 - See the CPCAB film on [How to build a student portfolio](#).

² 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.

³ Your personal development may result from insights gained from the course, other personal development work, or from personal counselling (if any).

Tip:

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

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

An example reference in your CLR might read: *Skills feedback sheet No. 6, line 29 (testimony)*

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.

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.

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 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 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. 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 Certificate in Counselling Skills (ICSK-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 three types of coursework (i.e. documents, tutor observation and testimony):

ICSK-L2		
LEARNING OUTCOME	1. Work within the limitations of the helping role	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
1.1 Explain the nature of helping work and how it differs from other supports e.g. counselling, coaching, friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show that you understand where helping work fits into a wider supportive network by comparing the help provided by other helping agencies (e.g. careers advice, CAB, GP's, therapeutic counselling). • Identify, through role-play and discussion, the difference between the roles of helper, counsellor, and friend, and the importance of clearly stated limits of ability. 	
1.2 Communicate limits of ability as a helper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness of the limits of your own ability as a helper and explore these limitations in your learning review, outlining why it's important that your helpee knows your limits of ability. • Practise communicating these limitations in skills sessions. 	
LEARNING OUTCOME	2. Establish boundaries for helping work	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
2.1 Set the boundaries of the helping interaction, including the limits of confidentiality and time available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role of boundaries in a helping relationship and what boundaries need to be in place at the beginning of a helping session. • Discuss your experience of setting and keeping to boundaries in a helping session. • Understand the meaning of confidentiality and its limits. • Practise using this criterion in skills sessions. 	
2.2 End the helping interaction appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on and understand the need to end a helping session sensitively and within the time boundaries, clarifying why this is important. • Practise concluding a helping session – e.g. use summarising skills, check how the helpee is. 	

LEARNING OUTCOME:	3. Communicate empathic understanding	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
3.1 Differentiate between empathy and sympathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read about and discuss the meaning of empathy. • In group skills sessions work towards experiencing empathic understanding as a helper and as a helpee. • Reflect on these experiences and their impact upon you. 	
3.2 Apply initial counselling skills to communicate empathic understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to let the helpee know that you are listening and understanding them. • Use body language and responding skills to communicate empathic understanding in a practice session. • Reflect on these experiences and their impact upon you. 	
3.3 Demonstrate sensitivity to individual needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss why it is important to treat each person as an individual and explore the risks of making assumptions. 	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	4. Focus on the helpee’s agenda	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
4.1 Identify the helpee’s needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn a range of skills that will allow you to find out what the helpee needs. • Practise this criterion in skills sessions. 	
4.2 Describe why it is important to identify and stay focused on what is most important to the helpee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the importance of focusing on the helpee’s agenda. • Understand the importance of not putting your own agenda first. • Practise this criterion in skills sessions. 	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	5. Understand the importance of self-awareness in helping work	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
5.1 Explain the importance of developing self-awareness in helping work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on personal thoughts and feelings following each lesson. Explore feelings and emotions you find difficult or challenging, both in your personal life and in a helping situation. • Record your understanding of why learning about yourself is important in helping work. 	
5.2 Describe how own personality impacts on helping work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record something you have learned on the course about yourself/your personality. • Apply what you have learnt about yourself in subsequent skills sessions and/or helping work. • Evidence this criterion by writing about your personal development and reflecting on how this might be important in your role as helper. 	

LEARNING OUTCOME:	6. Use listening and responding skills	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
6.1 Describe the significance of non-verbal communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the importance of non-verbal communication and focus on how much of communication is carried out without words. • Demonstrate appropriate minimal encouragers in skills practice. 	
6.2 Describe and demonstrate open and attentive posture in helping work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice SOLERB in skills sessions: Sit straight, open posture, lean forward, Eye contact, Relax, Breathe. • Review how an open and attentive posture might impact on a helpee in a helping session. 	
6.3 Describe and demonstrate the listening and responding skills of paraphrasing, reflecting and summarising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn and practice a range of responding skills. • Practice engaging in conversations where you do not give advice, talk about self, ask questions, console or “rescue”. • Practise this criterion in group discussions and skills sessions. 	
6.4 Describe the difference between open and closed questions and use these appropriately in helping work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the difference between open and closed questions and when to use them appropriately in helping sessions. • Write a list of closed questions and their “open” counterparts. • Practice using open questions in skills practice. 	
LEARNING OUTCOME:	7. Use review and feedback to develop initial counselling skills	
Assessment criteria	Candidate guidance to criteria	Portfolio reference
7.1 Use reflection and feedback to identify personal progress and learning needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the criteria, the learning experience and feedback from others in skills sessions and group discussion. • Identify what you have learnt and what you still need to learn. 	
7.2 Provide feedback to other learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the meaning of useful feedback. • Understand why feedback needs to be specific and objective. • Practise this criterion as an observer in skills sessions. 	

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 ICSK-L2

Completion statement for Candidate Learning Record Level 2 Award in Introduction to Counselling Skills (ICSK-L2)			
Learning outcome		Contra-indications present Y/N	Tutor signature if learning outcome has been achieved
1	Work within the limitations of the helping role		
2	Establish boundaries for helping work		
3	Communicate empathic understanding		
4	Focus on the helpee's agenda		
5	Understand the importance of self-awareness in helping work		
6	Use listening and responding skills		
7	Use review and feedback to develop initial counselling skills		

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 ICSK-L2:

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: