



Subject Benchmark Statement: Counselling and Psychotherapy

The Basics

This document is a summary of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy. It is specifically designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the main Statement for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Subject Benchmark Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); the requirements of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); and enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.



Why study a degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy?

Counsellors and psychotherapists work towards the alleviation of any form of psychological distress and support clients in developing self-awareness, personal insight, skills and confidence to manage their lives in a way that is more effective for them.

Courses in Counselling and Psychotherapy therefore prepare students to be knowledgeable, self-reflective and reflexive practitioners, with a commitment to career-long professional development and to the maintenance of professional standards. Students strive to develop their self-awareness, skills, knowledge and competencies to work safely, ethically and effectively with clients, while also maintaining their own wellbeing.

All courses will offer an integrated curriculum of theory, professional skills practice, personal development, professional development and research. All professional Counselling and Psychotherapy courses will encompass a supervised placement, enabling students to engage with clients.



What are the main teaching and learning approaches in counselling and psychotherapy?

Teaching, learning and assessment styles in the discipline will provide an integrated curriculum built on the five main pillars of counselling and psychotherapy: theory, professional skills practice, personal development, professional development, and research. Courses typically provide in-depth experience of one or more recognised therapeutic modalities. Providers will modify the style, emphasis and composition of the training experience in accordance with the specific needs of the modality and with reference to the requirements of the relevant professional body. The core methods of training in the discipline are seminars and lectures, skills practice development, research training workshops, personal and professional development activities, as well a supervised counselling or psychotherapy placement. Learning and teaching activities within such sessions may include experiential exercises such as modelling of client work interactions and group practice experience.



How are students assessed?

The assessment of Counselling and Psychotherapy courses includes a mix of methods that are accessible to all students.

Where individual students may be disadvantaged by particular assessment methods, adjustments to those assessments are considered while ensuring fairness across the full cohort. The procedures used for assessment cover the subject knowledge, abilities and skills developed through the degree course.

Assessment will address both theory and skills and evaluate knowledge and competencies in relation to the learning outcomes for the course. The implication is that the candidate is ready to engage in counselling/psychotherapy practice as a fully qualified practitioner immediately after the qualification is awarded. Methods of assessment reflect the independent learning and teaching methods employed and ensure that the student's work is evaluated from a variety of perspectives. Typical assessment methods in the discipline can include essays, written/oral examinations, presentations, practical tasks, skills sessions, literature reviews, portfolios, collaborative work, peer and self-assessment, annotated transcripts, reports, as well as client formulation and/or conceptualisation and notes.

Assessment should be used formatively to assess suitability for practice on placement during the course of the programme, in addition to being used summatively to confer the final degree. Students must be assessed in terms of skills, knowledge and personal resilience before being approved to work with real clients on placement.



Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy are outlined on **pages 19–27** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd. Study at master's level requires higher level skills, with students expected to achieve according to the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS. The Statement was developed by a group of subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 29** of the Statement.

Read the full Subject Benchmark Statement

The [full Subject Benchmark Statement](#) is available on the QAA website.



Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
Tel: 01452 557000 Web: www.qaa.ac.uk