



# Subject Benchmark Statement

Counselling and Psychotherapy

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## About this Statement

This document is a QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy that defines what can be expected of a graduate in the subject, in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular subject or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as a membership organisation on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

This Subject Benchmark Statement refers to bachelor's degrees with honours and master's degrees in Counselling and Psychotherapy. Other related awards are not covered by this Subject Benchmark Statement because they have their own benchmark standards.

In considering the requirements for Counselling and Psychotherapy training courses, the statements contained in this document do not favour any specific theoretical approach. Rather, the statements are widely applicable and draw attention to general principles which can be adapted for course delivery within a specific core model. Likewise, the statements are intended to support competence in generic work with a wide range of clients rather than with specific presenting conditions or interventions which may, in any case, necessitate additional post-qualifying specialist training.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
  - equality, diversity and inclusion
  - education for sustainable development
  - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes of Counselling and Psychotherapy, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

## How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are often used by higher education providers in the design and development of new courses in the relevant subject, as they provide a framework for specifying intended learning outcomes in an academic or vocational discipline. They are also used as a reference point when reviewing or revalidating degree courses. They may be used by external examiners in considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with other higher education providers. They also provide professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with the academic standards expected of students.

Subject Benchmark Statements provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with a course but are not intended to represent a national curriculum in a subject or to prescribe set approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Instead, they allow for flexibility and innovation in course design within a framework agreed by the subject community.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Counselling and Psychotherapy

- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Counselling and Psychotherapy
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Counselling and Psychotherapy graduates.

## **Relationship to legislation and regulation**

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider who awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The regulatory status of the Statement will differ with regard to the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#) and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

## **Additional sector reference points**

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement in designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. QAA has also published [Advice and Guidance](#) to support the [Quality Code](#) which will be helpful when using this Statement, for example, in [course design](#), [learning and teaching](#), [external expertise](#) and [monitoring and evaluation](#).

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

# 1 Context and purposes of a Counselling and Psychotherapy degree

## Context

1.1 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.

1.2 Courses of study 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 well-being.

1.3 Client work may occur in private practice and in a diverse range of settings, which include:

- voluntary and private agencies
- schools, colleges and universities
- prisons
- church and faith communities
- businesses
- charitable organisations
- National Health Service settings such as hospitals and general practice surgeries.

1.4 Services may offer short or long-term therapeutic relationships in work with individuals, couples, families, groups or communities. Such settings and provision should be viewed within their historical, cultural/social, economic and political context.

1.5 Client work is delivered through a wide range of different therapeutic modalities and practitioners acknowledge that there is no 'one size fits all'. Practice may take place in person within a physical space or remotely within a virtual space (for example, online, text, videocall, telephone). Remote delivery can occur synchronously or asynchronously. Each of these modes of delivery carries a distinct set of working protocols, risks, challenges and benefits. These must be considered carefully to assess the most appropriate blend of methods, dependent on the client needs and suitability, the competence of the practitioner, and the nature of the therapeutic relationship. The professional title adopted by the practitioner depends largely on the training they have received, the core theoretical modality to which they adhere, their membership bodies' protocols and the setting in which they practise. Mutual respect and appreciation for different ways of working are essential for collaborative practice across the field of mental health and well-being.

1.6 Counsellors and psychotherapists engage with the therapeutic community through supervision, membership of a professional body, continuing professional development, and research to monitor their own practice and contribute towards a growing knowledge base. Practitioners contribute towards identifying and challenging practices and policies that impede psychological well-being and inclusion. In an organisational setting and in a broader social and cultural setting, practitioners address inequality and apply their knowledge and skills to enhance relations between individuals and systems. This may involve reflecting on socio-cultural differences in privilege and advantage between the counsellor and psychotherapist and the client, and the impact of this difference on the therapeutic relationship. Therapeutic practice is conducted with respect for human dignity and inclusivity within clearly defined boundaries (including confidentiality) and is guided by rigorous publicly

stated ethical principles. Embedded in these practices and skills are the key competencies envisioned for sustainable development by UNESCO.

## **Purposes of Counselling and Psychotherapy**

1.7 Counselling and Psychotherapy educational courses train practitioners to form collaborative relationships with individuals, couples, families, groups or communities with the aim of exploring their concerns, thoughts and feelings, overcoming any obstacles, developing in awareness and acceptance and improving their mental health and well-being. Counsellors and psychotherapists are trained to draw on a body of knowledge and skills, including research evidence and their own personal and professional experiences, and use their skills and knowledge in the service of the client. The educational courses for Counselling and Psychotherapy encourage students to be both reflective and reflexive learners. Being reflective and having reflexivity are overlapping and complementary concepts. Reflective self-awareness involves the capacity to be aware of our own biases and preferences, whereas reflexive self-awareness involves considering what impact our own personal history and culture have on the way we interact with others. Counselling and Psychotherapy educational courses encourage students to be reflective in becoming aware of personal biases and preferences, including, for example, their social, political and psychological positions; and becoming reflexively self-aware in considering what impact this and their own personal history and culture has in the way they interact with others. Professional training will incorporate academic work alongside personal and skills development to support students in completing an assessed supervised placement in counselling and psychotherapy practice with clients. Such training should engender development of the UNESCO key competencies, enabling the Counselling/Psychotherapy graduate to be an independent reflective and reflexive lifelong learner committed to ongoing personal and professional development, thus enabling them to continue to enhance their practice, skills and knowledge.

1.8 Counselling and Psychotherapy training courses will vary dependent on the therapeutic modality (such as gestalt, person-centred, cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic, integrative) and mode of delivery (such as in person or remote or a combination of the two) intended as future practice for the student. However, all training will provide opportunities for engagement with the academic literature, understanding of research methods and applications, enhancement of skills relevant to working with clients, and personal and professional growth. The competent counsellor/psychotherapist graduating from this training will be able to engage in effective client work within a safe and defined contractual relationship, while maintaining their own self-care. There are different career routes within mental health, and training in counselling/psychotherapy is not intended to direct down any career route beyond that which enables the graduating practitioner to work with clients as a counsellor or psychotherapist. There is no single professional statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) for counselling and psychotherapy, but different training providers may align to different standards which may result in formal accreditation and registration with a professional standards authority. Facilities to work collaboratively with allied professions such as medicine, health sciences, nursing, social work, education and psychology helps place counselling and psychotherapy in its wider professional, educational, social, economic and political context (providers may wish to refer to the Subject Benchmark Statements for these various professions).

## **Equality, diversity and inclusion**

1.9 Therapeutic training is the starting point of a journey towards being able to work safely, effectively and appropriately as a therapist with clients. Programme providers have an ethical commitment to safeguarding students and clients through inclusive training which welcomes different perspectives, cultures and values and promotes cultural competencies. It

can take a diverse range of therapists to work with a diverse range of clients. It also takes a diverse range of trainers and educators to work with a diverse range of students/trainee counsellors. Diversity of staff can play a crucial part in the ethical commitment to safeguarding students and clients and education providers are encouraged to be moving towards having a more representative group of trainers.

1.10 Counselling and Psychotherapy courses value experiential processes alongside academic outcomes and incorporate learning experiences which allow vulnerability, openness and exploration. Course content strives to be mindful of minority experience and challenge theoretical biases located in majority cultural positioning in both theory and practice. Assessments need to be authentic, accessible and directly relevant to the work of a therapist.

1.11 Counselling and Psychotherapy educators strive to be authentic and non-defensive in their teaching with an openness to questioning their own beliefs, attitudes and approaches. Counselling and Psychotherapy students are actively engaged in providing a safe learning environment which respects and embraces difference. Counselling and Psychotherapy courses strive to promote collaboration between students and educators to work as course communities towards constructing accessible curricula which meet the needs of the counselling profession.

## **Sustainability**

### **Developing sustainable development knowledge**

1.12 Counselling and psychotherapy training has as its core a view of the person within their family, social, cultural, economic and political context. Courses aim to develop sustainable development knowledge within the counselling and psychotherapy profession while placing the profession in its historical and cultural context, in terms of both origins of theory and its social and community provision. Courses invite critical review of professional infrastructures and prevailing discourses (regarding mental illness, research, recognised treatments) and their capacity to deliver public health and well-being in relation to current social, economic and political issues and limitations. This will involve a reflective and reflexive learning attitude to envision a trajectory of development for counselling and psychotherapy and its graduates that will sustain and grow holistic benefits for individuals, families, communities and the wider economic and social world.

### **Developing sustainable development competencies**

1.13 All eight of the UNESCO sustainability competencies:

- systems thinking
- anticipatory
- normative
- strategic
- collaboration
- critical thinking
- self-awareness
- integrated problem-solving ([UNESCO, 2017](#))

are considered essential for sustainability of counselling and psychotherapy. The qualified graduate/therapist within their professional and working context requires practical operation of all the competencies in the delivery of their professional services. The learning environment for counselling and psychotherapy therefore requires these competencies to be manifested and exemplified within the learning facilities and course curricula.

## **Developing learning environments to promote sustainable development**

1.14 Counselling and psychotherapy training require facilities that provide both andragogic and experiential opportunities to learn, involving digital/virtual, personal/individual, interpersonal/group and community/employer interface and practice engagement. To develop learning environments that promote sustainable development, Counselling and Psychotherapy courses aim to contextualise theoretical learning and professional provision at a practice level within the social, economic and political arena and promote the employability of their graduates. Engendering personal and social responsibility for the psychological well-being of others and themselves must be a developmental aim.

## **Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education**

1.15 The evolution of approaches to therapy provision and the rapid growth in demand for counselling and psychotherapy services across the United Kingdom has underpinned a similarly rapid growth in both voluntary and paid positions for professional therapists across community, voluntary, charitable and statutory sector services. This has also expanded opportunities for private practice and business development.

1.16 In these emerging professions, students should understand the commercial as well as practical value of their skillsets and be able to articulate and demonstrate them to potential employers and in plans for self-employment or private practice. They should also be encouraged to develop self-awareness of their own enterprising and entrepreneurial capabilities in counselling and psychotherapy, as well as the motivation and self-discipline to apply these flexibly in different ways and in changing contexts. This might include recognising themselves as being creative or resourceful; translating ideas into actions; prepared to challenge assumptions through critical investigation and research.

1.17 Developing an entrepreneurial mindset means becoming:

- self-aware of personal development and social identity
- motivated to achieve personal ambitions and goals
- self-organised, flexible and resilient
- curious towards new possibilities for creating value
- responsive to problems and opportunities by making new connections
- able to go beyond perceived limitations and achieve results
- tolerant of uncertainty, ambiguity, risk and failure
- sensitive to personal values, such as ethical, social, diversity and environmental issues.

1.18 Therefore, employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education (EEEE) supports the development of professional behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the graduate in terms of the development of a successful and ethical career in counselling and psychotherapy, whether employed or self-employed.

1.19 Behaviours can include showing personal agency and taking responsibility for own effectiveness; communicating at an advanced level with individuals and groups; showing ability to pivot and adapt to changing contexts and opportunities; thinking strategically; balancing and managing risk; working collaboratively and independently where required.

1.20 Attributes can include being reflective, reflexive, flexible and adaptable; being curious and open-minded to emerging contexts and opportunities; being imaginative and innovative; being proactive and having the confidence to take the initiative; being

determined, persistent and resilient to work with challenges; being interested in networking and making things happen and having a mindset for independent practice.

1.21 Competencies for employed or self-employed practice can include career planning; strategic thinking; advanced interpersonal communication skills; creative problem-solving and decision-making skills; project management skills; negotiation and influencing skills; understanding marketing processes; strong understanding of legal and ethical frameworks; demonstrable ability to practice professionally and ethically; financial and business management acumen; and digital literacy.

1.22 Developing digital competency and transferable skills should include using digital technology to communicate ideas creatively, innovatively and accessibly so as to enhance academic success and employability.

1.23 The development of such professional knowledge, skills and competencies in counselling and psychotherapy should be a key aspect of curriculum design and might be achieved across the duration of a training programme. Learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and authentic assessment for employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship may be explicit within dedicated modules and embedded across modules.

1.24 The engagement of external speakers or representation from the profession and alumni to enrich teaching and offer first-hand experience is recommended. Exposure to a variety of therapists and agencies will develop awareness of the working context and could enhance the competencies of graduates to deal with market forces and promote themselves ethically as a counsellor or psychotherapist upon graduation.

1.25 Assignments which, for example, ask students to consider the context of contemporary practice, evaluate their own fit with agencies, develop marketing brochures for services, and research the legal implications of private practice will help students develop evaluative and business skills and an appreciation of the marketplace.

1.26 Students might also benefit from initiatives which offer the opportunity to work independently and collaboratively with placement and service providers, employers and other external stakeholders that support the profession. This might include researching financial support and funding organisations, insurance providers, website developers with ethical digital competency, all aspects of finding a space to work from and tax and legal services.

1.27 A key focus of training for professional skills and mindset development is the availability of supervised counselling and psychotherapy practice in training provider approved organisational placements. This placement experience requirement ensures the development of industry links between academic institutions and external organisations who provide therapy. In addition to learning therapeutic skills, student placements can act as a bridge in the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and provide the opportunity to gain professional skills to enter into the realm of counselling and psychotherapy service provision with confidence and competency.

1.28 These course experiences offer students and graduates the opportunity to explore various professional career pathways in therapeutic practice, service development, education or research. In the context of workplace uncertainty and flexible working patterns and careers, the development of behaviours, attributes and competencies for EEEE help strengthen a 'can-do' confidence, characterised by a creative questioning approach and a willingness to take considered risks. Beyond employment, EEEE provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their counselling and psychotherapy careers.

## **2 Distinctive features of a Counselling and Psychotherapy degree**

2.1 Counselling and Psychotherapy courses prepare candidates to be self-reflective and reflexive, ethical practitioners committed to career-long professional development and to the maintenance of professional standards. All courses of study covered by the scope of this Subject Benchmark Statement 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. Detailed decisions about teaching, learning and assessment strategies are the preserve of individual providers.

### **Personal development**

2.2 Personal development is an integral part of the counselling and psychotherapy training design and should underpin the course and future therapeutic client work to enable the learner to:

- take responsibility for own learning
- work safely and ethically with clients
- differentiate between self and client, and develop self-awareness in relation to others
- acknowledge self as a resource
- be self-aware of personal and social identity
- identify and address implicit biases and prejudices within self and practice
- develop an accurate awareness of own competencies
- accept self, therefore enabling acceptance of the client
- recognise the importance and foster the development of a self-care strategy to avoid burnout and promote emotional robustness
- be self-organised, flexible and resilient
- commit to a lifelong process of self-awareness through reflection and reflexivity
- develop an awareness of self within a holistic, professional and societal context
- be tolerant of uncertainty, ambiguity, risk and failure
- be sensitive to personal values, such as ethical, social, diversity and environmental awareness
- develop self-awareness of their own enterprising and entrepreneurial capabilities, as well as the motivation and self-discipline to apply these flexibly in different contexts.

### **Accessibility**

2.3 The course should strive to ensure equitable access while maintaining rigorous standards and evaluating readiness to practice by:

- being accessible for all students both in person and digitally
- ensuring students have access to learning resources and technology that support their individual learning
- ensuring accessibility in respect of curriculum and content
- ensuring the environment is accessible to all students and fit for purpose, being an appropriate, safe and private space for learning and practising counselling/psychotherapy
- delivering content in accessible formats

- actively promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to learning and teaching: curriculum design must be inclusive, delivery accessible and parity must be offered in terms of learning opportunities
- including a wide range of assessment strategies
- screening placements for health and safety standards and accessibility
- remaining mindful of obstacles and barriers, such as digital poverty
- finding possible solutions for accessibility problems which may be experienced by marginalised groups, such as offering bursaries, lending laptops, and providing data.

2.4 Courses should consider making reasonable adjustments to ensure equitable access to learning. Counselling and Psychotherapy courses include ethical responsibilities for monitoring student fitness to practice in relation to client work and can identify actions needed to safeguard clients.

## Progression

2.5 Courses should consider the following in relation to progression:

- each stage of the course must be commensurate to both the appropriate academic and professional level
- alternative non-practitioner exit awards should be offered to students who do not successfully complete all course requirements (as 'non-practitioner', such exit awards would not confer practitioner status)
- courses should make progression routes explicit to students, such as opportunities for higher level study and employment within the sector, and training providers should commit to ongoing working relationships with lower and higher level courses to ensure a streamlined and efficient progression where possible
- if it is not possible to offer progression within the institution, then formalising articulation routes should be explored where possible
- seamless progression routes should be in place to allow students to progress from one award or qualification to another.

2.6 Over the course of a degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) a Counselling and Psychotherapy student will progress from one year of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each year would see the attainment of certain levels of knowledge, expertise and experience which builds towards the final achievement of meeting all the threshold-level subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in counselling and psychotherapy or an associated discipline.

2.7 Joint honours undergraduates will achieve elements of the specific and generic skills for the subject but will add others according to the subjects covered in a joint programme.

2.8 Master's degrees (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) are available for Counselling and Psychotherapy in the UK and usually comprise a one or two year full-time course or a part-time course of between two and four academic years. Students exiting earlier may be eligible for a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma of Higher Education, or an honours degree, depending upon the years of study completed to a satisfactory standard. Similarly, in a standard three-year undergraduate honours degree qualification, students may also exit

earlier with a Certificate or Diploma depending upon their achievements. Scottish bachelor's degrees with honours are typically designed to include four years of study, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education.

## **Flexibility**

2.9 Courses should consider flexibility in delivery and may be:

- offered as full-time or part-time modes of study
- offered with recognition of prior learning (RPL) entry points, where appropriate, allowing students to convert relevant university-level knowledge, skills and experience into credits to enable them to start the programme of study at the appropriate level. It should be noted that RPL could disadvantage those with no prior higher education experience or whose experience is dated when it comes to assessment. Support for these learners could include study skills packages and other mechanisms to aid their transition into higher-level learning. Clear information for learners on cost, timescales and what happens if module assessments are failed is also important
- delivered face to face or using blended or hybrid models which take adequate account of digital inclusion and sustainability; however, modes of delivery with no synchronous content are not eligible for professional recognition.

## **Partnership**

2.10 Courses work in partnership with placement providers and external stakeholders and there should be a collaborative written agreement between supervisors, course providers, placement providers and students.

2.11 Courses should be written in alignment with an appropriate professional body requirement depending on modality.

2.12 Partnerships encourage the development of enterprise behaviours, attributes and competencies, such as creativity, innovation and the generation of ideas, among its students. There is also a strong focus on working in partnership with students in relation to the curriculum and overall academic experience. The student voice is embedded at all levels, with academic staff and student support services valuing and listening to student feedback in order to enhance provision and with students knowing what has been done in response to their feedback.

## **Monitoring and review**

2.13 A major feature of academic quality assurance and enhancement at a higher education institution is having in place monitoring and regular review processes for the courses it delivers. Degree-awarding bodies routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. They will draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation is a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.14 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Higher education providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an

external perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.15 External examination currently in use across the UK higher education sector also helps to ensure consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within the UK. External examiners produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.16 Monitoring and review processes should be in place for all courses, to support and assure:

- feedback from current students, external stakeholders, such as employers and placement providers, and alumni influences curriculum design, content and delivery
- feedback from service users (Experts by Experience)
- the embedding of ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) throughout the entire curriculum
- internal moderation processes
- external examiners or assessors
- institutional internal reviews
- internal or external annual monitoring to align with professional body requirements
- structured and minuted communication within teaching teams
- feedback from external quality assurance and enhancement exercises, including, for example, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), National Student Survey (NSS), and the Postgraduate Taught and Research Student Experience Surveys (PTES and PRES).

## 3 Content, structure and delivery

### Content

3.1 Counselling and psychotherapy education may be accessed via universities, institutes of further and higher education, and alternative providers. Qualifications which equip students with the knowledge, skills and experience to practise in therapeutic settings include specialist undergraduate degrees, postgraduate diplomas, taught master's awards, and doctorates (including professional doctorates). Earlier, vocationally focused, awards that may lead into these qualifications include Level 4 and Level 5 certificates and diplomas on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) in Scotland, and the Credit and Qualifications Framework (CQFW) in Wales and Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education. This Subject Benchmark Statement may be a useful reference point to those involved in the design and delivery of these earlier awards.

3.2 The aim of counselling and psychotherapy training is to produce therapeutically skilled practitioners who are properly equipped to work alone and ethically with a diverse range of clients.

3.3 Counselling and psychotherapy training ensures that graduates have a broad range of knowledge, contextualised by epistemic justice related to:

- philosophy of human nature, growth and development
- psychological theories
- ethics and the law
- relationship between research, evidence and practice
- approaches to assessment, psychopathology and alternative perspectives of mental health
- equality, diversity and inclusivity
- sustainability and the role of counselling and psychotherapy in the social, economic and political milieu of the modern world
- employment, enterprise and entrepreneurship
- the functioning of groups and organisations
- the practice contexts of counselling and psychotherapy, inclusive of face-to-face and remote therapy
- the varying roles of other mental health professionals, understanding of mental health systems and structures and how they connect or integrate.

3.4 Typically, courses will provide an integrated curriculum built on the five main pillars of counselling and psychotherapy:

- theory
- professional skills practice
- personal development
- professional development
- research.

### Theory

3.5 The practice of counselling and psychotherapy is underpinned by a body of knowledge which is complex and diverse. Much of this knowledge is common to all therapeutic orientations (for example that relating to philosophy and ethics, research evidence, theories of human development and growth, and learning theory). In addition,

different therapeutic orientations are rooted in their own discrete body of knowledge, while including a core set of therapeutic skills, competencies and interventions (as applicable according to therapeutic orientation).

3.6 Practitioners have an understanding of a range of therapeutic approaches, the theory that informs them, and the evidence base relating to their effectiveness, in order to help clients make appropriate choices according to their needs. A typical course of study will offer in-depth training drawing on clearly defined, diverse and inclusive models or frameworks for counselling and psychotherapy. This Statement has been written to be applicable for courses rooted in any theoretical modality. Wherever possible, generic words have been used that are applicable to any theoretical model.

### **Professional skills practice**

3.7 Professional skills practice incorporates the following:

- relationship building and maintaining
- communication and active listening
- assessment and therapeutic exploration
- contracting and maintaining boundaries
- formulation and client conceptualisation
- psychotherapeutic strategies and interventions
- reflective and reflexive practice (including in a supervisory context)
- monitoring, evaluation, and research
- professional administration for employed and self-employed practice (record-keeping, note-taking, letter and report-writing)
- the use of digital technologies as well as the use of virtual learning environments to support both the acquisition of knowledge and the delivery of therapy.

### **Personal development**

3.8 This is a key feature of the development of the trainee therapist and is incorporated throughout the training. Trainings must ensure that trainees are able to demonstrate:

- appropriate emotional competency and emotional warmth, including the capacity to explore and resolve personal issues arising from engaging in therapeutic work
- the ability to use personal and professional resources in a creative and flexible way, responding to the needs of a wide range of clients
- the ability to identify personal triggers in the work with clients and address these by seeking appropriate self-care strategies, supervision, and/or personal therapy
- the awareness of the experience of being a client, which may be developed by the trainee in a variety of ways, for example through the process of live clinical supervision, group and experiential work throughout the course and may include the trainee's own personal therapy
- an awareness of how the trainee's own experiences (past and present) can impact the therapeutic process and can be affected by factors such as age, family position, culture, disadvantage, gender, race, sexuality and social position
- an ability to make intrapersonal and interpersonal reflection an integral part of all clinical work to understand needs of self as differentiated from those of the client, and/or take responsibility for own learning, use of supervision and continued professional development recognising the need for, and engaging with, their own personal support and therapy, as appropriate
- adopting personal responsibility and being willing to engage constructively with feedback

- recognising limitations, power and strength
- developing and strengthening practical creativity, flexibility, self-motivation, autonomy and the ability to work proactively
- professional development.

## **Professional development**

3.9 Professional development incorporates the following:

- maintaining the ethical principles that underpin counselling and psychotherapy
- integrating into practice legal, professional and organisational requirements pertaining to equal opportunities, diversity and inclusion
- recognising the social, political and cultural context of their practice
- recognising potential limitations of their preferred theoretical model or models in engaging with difference
- ensuring a consistent commitment to continuing professional and personal development, including self-awareness and fitness to practice
- recognising their own professional strengths and limitations that may affect therapeutic practice, and developing appropriate self-support and self-care strategies
- recognising and coping with uncertainty, responding therapeutically while maintaining firm boundaries
- ensuring that the method of delivery and approach of therapy used is consistent with the client's needs
- recognising responsibilities to the client, employers, the counselling and psychotherapy professions, and to society at large
- being competent in the use of process and outcome measures to critically reflect on and evaluate their work as counsellors and psychotherapists
- engaging fully in supervision to regularly reflect on the interplay between client work and the self.

## **Research**

3.10 Research incorporates the following:

- critically appraising published research on counselling and psychotherapy and integrating relevant research findings into practice
- using research literature on the impact of the therapeutic alliance to enhance relationships with clients
- integrating and consistently applying a comprehensive, in-depth and research-informed body of knowledge in their practice with clients and in supervision
- drawing on the full extent of international research to engage with diversity and inclusion
- engaging in formal research to conduct projects which contribute to the developing knowledge and evidence base for their profession.

## **Teaching and learning**

3.11 Courses of study in Counselling and Psychotherapy prepare candidates to be self-reflective, evidence-based, ethical practitioners committed to career-long professional development. Such practitioners will recognise the significance of the individual existing within a social and cultural background, and the importance of co-created experiences in the therapy room. All courses of study covered by the scope of this Subject Benchmark Statement will offer an integrated curriculum of academic theory, research, professional

skills training, and personal and professional development. Courses must also incorporate an assessed and supervised counselling or psychotherapy placement. Detailed decisions about teaching, learning and assessment strategies are the preserve of individual providers.

3.12 The core methods of training in counselling and psychotherapy are:

- seminars and lectures
- skills practice development
- research training workshops
- personal and professional development activities
- supervised placement counselling and psychotherapy practice.

3.13 Learning and teaching activities within such sessions may include experiential exercises, including:

- student-focused activities encouraging active participation
- modelling of client work interactions
- group practice experience
- group projects
- peer learning
- academic and case discussion forums
- student presentations.

3.14 From this foundation of training, students develop as independent learners, researchers and practitioners.

3.15 Courses should equip students with the skills for in-person counselling and psychotherapy practice and can include remote therapeutic practice (such as online, telephone, videocall). The delivery of training should reflect the modality in which the student may be expected to practise on placement and as a graduate. This mode of delivery may need to be flexible to meet the changing demands of the sector. Online training may be appropriate for developing skills in remote therapy, whereas in-person training may be required to refine in-person therapy skills. Blended teaching could provide a balance between these methods to develop holistic practitioners able to excel across multiple modalities. Irrespective of delivery mode, all courses should incorporate core training in the use of electronic systems for accessing data, literature, resources and the use of communication systems for enhancing interaction.

3.16 Inclusive practice by a diverse range of trainers enables engagement from a diverse population of students and should be incorporated throughout all teaching and learning activities. These activities should be authentically designed to train the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively as a counsellor/psychotherapist, and the suitability of all activities should be proactively assessed to challenge any obstacles or barriers to those with different needs. Training providers should be open to exploring and addressing issues related to equality, diversity and inclusivity with the aim of raising awareness in all stakeholders, including academic and non-academic staff, students and placement providers.

3.17 Courses typically provide in-depth experience of one or more recognised therapeutic modalities. This should involve understanding the explanations of human nature from the perspective of that modality and being aware of the cultural heritage of that approach, alongside holding an applied understanding of how to use the method in practice with clients. Where the course is integrative, the provider should be able to define the components which resource the approach and to demonstrate their coherence.

3.18 There are many ways in which different established models of therapy can be taught. Creating a model that integrates diverse philosophies coherently is a complex process that needs to be accessible to students. In addition, it is essential that students develop an awareness of, and a respect for, other approaches to counselling/psychotherapy, as well as towards other recognised styles of mental health intervention. Different psychotherapeutic modalities make different demands on students and teachers/practitioners. 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.

3.19 Research is a critical skill for the practicing counsellor/psychotherapist. This may include opportunities for conducting formal empirical investigation and understanding published literature, alongside engaging in less formal explorations of ways of working with clients and personal research into the self for the purpose of development. The nature of research skills which are taught and assessed will vary with the type and level of the award. As a minimum, graduates require sufficient awareness to enable them to access continuing professional development opportunities and to evaluate research relevant to their area of activity. They should have an awareness of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed research methods relevant to the practice of counselling and psychotherapy. It is usual for students to undertake at least one small-scale study based on either primary or secondary enquiry. Such research will usually take the form of an empirical research project, systematic case study, or systematic review. These research studies could be completed independently or as part of a small research group, as the skills of independently led research and working in a research team are equally valuable.

3.20 All courses will make provision for the personal development of students. Providers should make opportunities available to students to understand how the personal development and emotional competency of the counsellor/psychotherapist affects the therapeutic relationship and process. Trainees and staff should be supported in assessing the social, cultural and family values that influence their own development, while being aware of their prejudices and biases. This may involve courses requiring trainees to have their own personal therapy but may also involve additional or alternative activities deemed to be appropriate to the course of study and therapeutic modality. All modalities should recognise the importance of personal development in training and engage in a variety of strategies for promoting such development (for example, through personal and professional development groups, reflective journals, and residential experiential work).

3.21 Training providers should support students in accessing placements appropriate to their interests and stage of development, and to liaise, as needed, with placement providers. Placements should offer opportunities for the student to practise in a manner congruent with the course philosophy. Students should be required to engage with regular supervision while working with clients on placement. Training providers should engage in the assessment and monitoring of placement providers and supervisors as suitable for trainees on placement, that supervision is of a suitable standard for that course, and decide how this will contribute to evaluating student progress. Supervision provides a significant setting for critical and reflective practice and courses should consider how they ensure that supervisors (like trainers and students) remain reflexive in relation to the lenses of privilege, power and oppression. Successful completion of a supervised counselling/psychotherapy placement is likely to be an integral part of the assessment portfolio, and this portfolio may specify a required number of hours of client work and supervision in relation to this client work (in line with professional body requirements, where applicable).

3.22 Courses should be delivered and managed by appropriately qualified and experienced training staff. Experiential work needs close containment and students undertaking therapeutic work (real or in role-play) need to be observed and given detailed

feedback. Only small group sizes can make that possible. The very nature of the training, which involves self-disclosure and exposure to sensitive and distressing material, also lends itself to small class sizes in which there is room for everyone to have a voice. Enhanced self-awareness and self-discovery are common consequences of the reflective personal and professional development work completed on Counselling and Psychotherapy courses. This experiential process can raise issues of historical or current trauma, and this must be managed carefully by teaching staff to provide appropriate care while maintaining boundaries. This leads to an inevitable increase in the amount of time required for pastoral and professional support to ensure the safety and well-being of the student and current/future clients. For all the above reasons, training providers must therefore ensure that staff:student ratios are appropriate to the learning needs of students and facilitate the development of requisite practical skills and criteria. Combined industry experience, based on that of the advisory group and consultation with the counselling and psychotherapy training community, supports that actual staff:student ratios (not FTEs) do not normally exceed an overall ratio of 1:16 for experiential classes (for example, skills practice sessions) and in all cases training providers need to have a clear rationale for the way staff:student ratios are managed.

## **Assessment**

3.23 Assessment will address both theory and skills and evaluate knowledge and competencies in relation to the learning outcomes for the course. In all professional practice training courses, considerable weight will need to be given to practitioner competencies and a satisfactory level of achievement will be a prerequisite to the conferment of the award. 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.

3.24 Typically, courses of study will provide an integrated curriculum in which theory, personal and professional skills development, research and competency acquisition are assessed through a variety of strategies. Typical assessment methods in the subject with reasonable adjustments for disabled students, if required, can include:

- essays
- written and oral examinations
- presentations
- practical tasks
- skills sessions
- literature reviews
- portfolios
- collaborative work
- peer and self-assessment
- annotated transcripts
- reports
- client formulation and/or conceptualisation and notes.

3.25 Such methods could be used in a formative or summative way. Assessments can be carried out in person face-to-face or, if necessary, using appropriate digital online secure platforms. These assessments should be inclusive and authentic to the profession of counselling/psychotherapy while maintaining the academic standards appropriate to the award. Assessment criteria should evaluate core counselling skills and knowledge, alongside more general professional skills such as risk awareness, working with others,

acting within a professional and/or ethical framework, and making appropriate judgements by determining viable solutions to a problem.

3.26 Quality assurance of assessments should be given full consideration during the design, moderation and ongoing review of the processes. This should be considered in collaboration with external examiners, critical friends, reviewers, placement providers, employers and moderators as part of the effort to share best practice and disseminate effective assessment methods across the sector.

3.27 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.

3.28 Successful completion of placements is likely to be an integral part of the assessment portfolio and graduate outcomes. Students are given opportunities as part of the curriculum to gain valuable professional and therapeutic experience. There is a strong focus on working in collaboration with placements agencies and external stakeholders, and having placement documentation in place so that placement providers, agencies and supervisors are aware of the learning outcomes, assessment and provision of reasonable adjustments.

## 4 Benchmark standards

### Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree or master's in Counselling and Psychotherapy. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

4.2 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.

4.3 The landscape in which counselling and psychotherapy practice exists is a complex and dynamic one where roles and specialisms are evolving and issues of sustainability, equality, diversity, inclusion, employment, enterprise and entrepreneurship are important considerations for practitioners. Consequently, a wide range of academic courses and practitioner training exist, which differ in duration, academic content, therapeutic modality and level of qualification.

4.4 The following benchmark standards are set at the threshold level for graduates with honours at Level 6 in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland* or Level 10 within *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland*. With a focus on practice-facing courses, these standards represent the minimum expectations in terms of what counselling and psychotherapy students on professional courses need to know, be and do, in order to practise safely, ethically and effectively in contemporary changeable contexts. Authentic and inclusive assessment of these areas is conducted by training providers and successful students should be competent in all aspects of the standard before completion of their qualification.

4.5 Throughout this document, the required standards are presented in terms of required knowledge, abilities and skills, or what graduates are required to know, be and do to practise effectively and safely in a contemporary context.

### Threshold level (3rd class)

#### Professional context

4.6 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

|             |  |
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| <b>Know</b> | Understand how philosophical assumptions influence different approaches to research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy and critically evaluate the implications for interdisciplinary professional group working.   |
|             | Critically evaluate and apply relevant professional codes and organisational policies for practice, including those respecting diversity and equality of opportunity.  |
|             | Be aware of the various impacts and implications of government policies and recommendations, such as those in the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines, for counselling and psychotherapy provision, research and the wider context of mental health service provision and client well-being. |

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|           | Recognise and understand the ways in which power may be expressed in relationships and reflect on how power dynamics operate and impact outcomes in groups, organisations and therapy.  |
| <b>Be</b> | Reflective of the role, contribution and challenges facing counselling and psychotherapy in contemporary society.   |
|           | Considerate, challenging and reflective of own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and upon how these impact on the therapeutic work.   |
|           | Able to recognise and act with professional responsibility towards the client, employers, trainers, the counselling and psychotherapy professions and to society at large.  |
|           | Open to diversity and embrace difference in relation to the rights and responsibilities of all clients regardless of their personal characteristics or aspects of identity, including, but not limited to, those protected in law.  |
| <b>Do</b> | Recognise and work within the social, cultural and political context of their practice and the profession.  |
|           | Build and sustain professional relationships as appropriate to the context and work collaboratively with supervisor and other multi-disciplinary professionals, where relevant, in order to support and evaluate therapeutic work with individuals, practice as a whole, and to contribute to service development at an organisational or systematic level. |
|           | Critically appraise and evaluate published research on counselling and psychotherapy and apply a comprehensive, in-depth and research-informed body of knowledge consistently in their practice.  |
|           | Actively seek to promote equality, diversity and inclusivity in practice and challenge discrimination and prejudice on a professional, organisational, and systematic level.  |
|           | Develop competencies to lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life (academic, therapeutic and digital technology).   |
|           | Develop the ability to reasonably adapt to changing environments and uncertainty.   |

## Understanding people and their experiences

4.7 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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| <b>Know</b> | Understand and engage with multifaceted models of mental distress that recognise different worldviews, theoretical frameworks, and the client's experience and viewpoint, including biomedical, psychological, social, political and cultural. |
|             | Recognise potential limitations of their chosen theoretical model or models in work with specific clients and seek to mitigate such limitations where possible.  |
|             | Recognise and respect diverse perspectives, including inter-professional and multi-agency approaches to mental health.   |
|             | Understand and evaluate the role that mental health and counselling services play in society, and critically consider how social, political, and economic forces impact on contemporary practice in counselling and psychotherapy.             |
|             | Understand and critically evaluate the concept of relationship as expressed in a range of different theoretical approaches and consider its implications for skilful client work and interprofessional working.                                |
| <b>Be</b>   | Open to and appreciative of a range of theoretical approaches to practice with a view to building and maintaining collaborative, respectful and constructive relationships with colleagues and useful working alliances with clients           |

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|           | Consciously aware of one's own bias and alert to the workings of unconscious bias in relation to social context, gender, age, ethnicity, national or ethnic origin, culture, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion and beliefs.   |
| <b>Do</b> | Draw on a range of research-informed therapeutic responses, strategies and interventions to inform practice which is sensitive to and respectful of client needs and preferences.  |
|           | Use opportunities for reflective practice, for example supervision, to recognise and demonstrate awareness of one's own conscious bias and to monitor practice for evidence of unconscious bias, so that anti-discriminatory practice within the therapeutic relationship is achieved. |
|           | Develop self-awareness of own enterprising and entrepreneurial capabilities in a therapeutic context, as well as the motivation and self-discipline to apply these flexibly in different ways and in changing contexts.  |
|           | Demonstrate initiative, autonomy and responsibility.   |

## The therapist

4.8 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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| <b>Know</b> | Recognise their own personal and professional strengths and limitations that may affect therapeutic practice.   |
|             | Recognise their own self-care needs and develop appropriate self-support and self-care strategies.  |
|             | Recognise when it is appropriate to make referrals onward.  |
| <b>Be</b>   | Able to engage with the role of supervision as an essential aspect of practice to support the therapeutic work and development of the practitioner.         |
|             | Able to apply self-supervision skills to consider and challenge own values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and how these impact on the therapeutic work. |
| <b>Do</b>   | Ensure a consistent commitment to continuing professional and personal development, including self-awareness and fitness to practice.                       |
|             | Recognise the need for, and engage with, their own personal support and/or therapy as appropriate.  |
|             | Make use of supervision to develop their understanding about practice and to enhance and protect their well-being.  |

## Ethical/legal

4.9 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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|-------------|--|
| <b>Know</b> | <p>Understand the main ethical and legal contexts within which counselling or psychotherapy practice will happen. This means knowing about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>principles of law as they relate to practice, such as general data protection or child protection legislation and be conversant with regional variations, devolved arrangements and relevant international legislation as may be relevant if working online</li> <li>ethical frameworks or codes of practice and guidance for good practice issued by professional associations and understand professional requirements, such as those for supervision, which are set out by relevant bodies.</li> <li>agency policies and procedures, where relevant</li> <li>changes in legislation, having an awareness of key sources of information to ensure ongoing practice is informed by the most recent ethical and legislative guidance</li> </ul> |
|-------------|--|

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|           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the implications of needing to breach confidentiality, being clear about what information must be shared and to whom.</li> </ul>  |
|           | Understand the implications of at least one model of ethical decision-making relevant to counselling and psychotherapy.  |
| <b>Be</b> | Committed to working ethically, aligning practice to principles of justice, integrity, trustworthiness, beneficence, non-maleficence and self-care.  |
| <b>Do</b> | Work within a named ethical code, acting in a considered way which reflects the principles of that stated code.  |
|           | Critically analyse, question, and consider the implications of ethical dilemmas arising in practice, working with a supervisor or other appropriate professionals as necessary.  |
|           | Deliver the counselling/psychotherapy services with due regard to the safety of client and therapist and the appropriateness of the practice setting.  |
|           | Apply diligence in record-keeping of practice, whereby records play an essential role in the quality and safety of therapeutic practice.<br>Manage records in accordance with legislation, statutory requirements, professional information governance standards and the lawful rights of clients.<br>Manage records appropriately, including keeping accurate records of relevant information (electronically or on paper); storing records securely; timely and purposeful sharing of information and securely destroying records.   |
|           | Manage and appropriately respond to the practical, ethical and legal demands of online therapeutic provision and all forms of technologically mediated communication.<br>Work within ethical and legal constraints, contracting around matters of confidentiality and data protection related to a variety of working environments, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limits to confidentiality, including when working remotely</li> <li>being able to inform the client of how to achieve safety in relation to data protection, platforms, equipment and their physical environment</li> <li>knowledge of contemporary digital platforms, digital accessibility and technology appropriate for use in the profession and the related limitations of security in relation to working remotely</li> <li>negotiating careful agreement concerning any recording of sessions by either practitioner or client and being able to communicate the implications of any such recording being made</li> <li>discussing data security and privacy in relation to working remotely and the client's circumstances and possible vulnerabilities</li> <li>maintaining integrity in the remote therapeutic relationship when technology fails.</li> </ul> |
|           | Apply intuitive decision-making and develop creative and innovative ways to address problems and ethical dilemmas with integrity and compassion.   |

## Boundaries and contracting

4.10 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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| <b>Know</b> | Understand what constitutes safe, responsive, therapeutic boundaries in all relationships, including those with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clients</li> <li>• supervisors</li> <li>• tutors</li> <li>• colleagues</li> <li>• employers.</li> </ul> Consider how to recognise boundary breaches, in order to maintain clear professional boundaries to support safe and effective practice.  |
|             | The concept of contracting as part of an ethical and professional process and understand the purpose and key components of a therapeutic contract.   |
|             | Recognise and understand the complexities of working therapeutically with boundaries and ensure that boundaries are maintained in an appropriately responsive manner while also ensuring safety and appropriate ethical practice.  |
|             | Understand the implications of employment legislation, policy and guidance in relation to therapeutic service provision within voluntary, community, statutory and private sectors.  |
|             | Understand the complexities and potential risks when working with sexual issues and sexual dynamics and use this understanding to ensure the safe maintenance of appropriate boundaries and to avoid sexual boundary violations.   |
| <b>Be</b>   | Aware of the potential challenges which may arise within the therapeutic work.   |
|             | Confident in responding therapeutically to changes and challenges in the therapeutic relationship, while maintaining clear boundaries.   |
| <b>Do</b>   | Set and maintain appropriate professional boundaries throughout the therapy process and after the end of therapy.  |
|             | Work with and make therapeutic use of the constraints and benefits of the therapeutic contract.  |
|             | Establish and maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries in online relationships with clients or patients by ensuring that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reasonable care is taken to separate and maintain a distinction between personal and professional presence on social media where this could result in harmful dual relationships with clients or patients</li> <li>• any public, online communication is carried out in a manner consistent with own ethical framework or code of practice.</li> </ul> |
|             | Establish and maintain a secure frame for the therapeutic work.  |
|             | Negotiate an appropriate therapeutic contract using all available information.   |
|             | Recognise and work with breaks and holidays and how these may affect the therapeutic relationship and process, making appropriate arrangements for clients to seek support in case of emergency.   |
|             | Understand the need for and have made professional arrangements in the event of the counsellor/psychotherapist's sudden or unplanned break or ending and communicate the arrangements to the client or patient.  |
|             | Adapt appropriately to manage different contracted time-frames, including open-ended and time-limited therapy.   |
|             | Manage contact with external agencies and professionals, as appropriate to the interest of the client.   |
|             | Adopt an enquiring, critical awareness and future oriented approach to professional challenges, along with awareness of social and therapeutic responsibility.   |

## Assessment

4.11 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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| <b>Know</b> | <p>Understand the concepts and processes of client assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• define and describe the concept of client assessment</li> <li>• understand different political, philosophical and theoretical perspectives on use of assessment tools and outcome measures and critically appraise their implications for practice in contemporary contexts based on research in the field</li> <li>• critically discuss the contexts in which client assessment happens, considering ethical and legal frameworks as well as agency policy and procedures</li> <li>• demonstrate a working knowledge of at least one approach to assessment compatible with one's own core theoretical model, discussing how this approach may influence the focus and agreed process of the therapeutic work with the client</li> <li>• understand the risks and challenges experienced by individual clients in terms of their suitability for technologically mediated therapy</li> <li>• understand the risk and protective factors in relation to client safety, deliberate self-harm and suicide potential</li> <li>• understand differences between suicidal ideation (thoughts of suicide) and suicidal intent (an intention to act on thoughts) in determining levels of risk</li> <li>• demonstrate a working knowledge of legislative, policy or procedural expectations in how best to respond to a client presenting at immediate risk.</li> </ul> |
|             | <p>Recognise that specific knowledge and skills are required, and additional training may be needed, to work with particular client groups and diverse client populations, especially where there are additional considerations relating to client competence, capacity, understanding, awareness and decision making.</p>   |
|             | <p>Recognise own competencies in relation to working with specific client groups, approaches, techniques, methods, and modes of delivery (including remote, technically mediated and in-person therapies).</p>   |
| <b>Be</b>   | <p>Critically aware of the diverse therapeutic perspectives around notions of assessment and formulation/conceptualisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand arguments for and against these as formal processes in therapy</li> <li>• critically reflect about how these perspectives may influence therapy provision and client experience</li> <li>• able to articulate a coherent personal approach to counselling which addresses how client presentations are assessed and worked with</li> <li>• aware of the limitations of one's own training and experience in relation to evaluating the complexity of client work and the possible risks arising in the work</li> <li>• knowledgeable about networks of support and referral for clients.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Do</b>   | <p>Understand and be able to discuss the client's concerns with them and articulate the way in which counselling/psychotherapy can address these difficulties.</p> <p>Determine whether each individual client has competence and capacity to engage with and make use of the therapeutic approach offered, including in the context in which therapy is to be delivered.</p> <p>Provide a clear explanation of the stated therapeutic approach, including the rationale for each participant's contribution.</p>  |

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|  | Actively seek to work within one's own competencies in relation to working with specific client groups, approaches, techniques, methods, and modes of delivery (including remote, technically mediated, and in-person therapies).   |
|  | Competently conduct an episode of therapy which is consistent with a stated therapeutic approach and includes an assessment of the client's needs, goals, identification of risk and the design of a coherent plan for the work based on that assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• undertake a comprehensive evaluation of client needs and goals for therapy</li> <li>• develop a conceptualisation or formulation about what may be happening for the client, based on initial and evolving work together and drawing on relevant theory</li> <li>• identify and evaluate presenting risks for the client</li> <li>• devise and agree a contract and a plan for working together, including what, how and when that work will happen and setting review points in order to re-evaluate and establish when work is completed.</li> </ul> |
|  | Apply appropriate strategies and interventions (as appropriate to the modality) in work with specific client populations and client experiences.  |
|  | Make informed decisions about referral to appropriate agencies.   |

### The therapeutic relationship

4.12 The graduate will have the relevant professional knowledge, abilities and skills to:

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| <b>Know</b> | Understand the concept of the therapeutic relationship from the perspective of a variety of theoretical approaches.   |
|             | Demonstrate understanding of a range of therapeutic approaches, the theory that informs them, and the evidence base relating to their effectiveness, in order to help clients, make appropriate choices or voice therapeutic preference in the therapeutic relationship according to their needs. |
|             | Understand the theoretical dynamics of power, oppression and privilege and how these may affect the therapeutic relationship.   |
| <b>Be</b>   | Respectful of difference, for example embracing sexual diversity, respecting, accepting and honouring the client's sexual orientation and choices.  |
|             | Open to ensuring a safe space for the honest discussion of clients' experience as relevant to them, to support the development and maintenance of healthy self-identities without the imposition of the therapist's own values, view and expectations.  |
|             | Competent to work therapeutically and non-defensively with challenging situations, taking own limitations into account in the repair of empathic failures and relational ruptures.  |
| <b>Do</b>   | Monitor own bias through the use of self-supervision, supervision and personal therapy.   |
|             | Identify, reflect on and work openly and non-defensively with socio-cultural and identity differences between client and counsellor and their impact on the therapeutic relationship.   |
|             | Recognise and work with component aspects of the therapeutic alliance such as client motivation, commitment to the therapeutic process and contractual arrangements.  |
|             | Recognise and take steps to mitigate the implicit power imbalance in the counselling/psychotherapy relationship.  |
|             | Recognise own conscious and unconscious bias and demonstrate anti-discriminatory practice within the therapeutic relationship in relation to diversity and the rights and responsibilities of all clients, regardless of their social context,  |

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|  | gender, age, ethnicity, national or ethnic origin, culture, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion and beliefs.  |
|  | Establish and sustain a therapeutic alliance which respects clients' goals and preferences for a way of working together.   |
|  | Recognise and work therapeutically with difficulties and ruptures in the therapeutic relationship.  |
|  | Regularly review and work therapeutically with the client's perceptions and experiences of the therapist and therapy itself.  |
|  | Practise in a way that is transparent, inclusive and non-discriminatory, including in advertising and marketing services, in line with professional body guidance and working within relevant legal frameworks. |

## Generic skills

4.13 In addition, graduates at honours degree should be able to:

- perform assigned tasks as part of a team, participating in discussion
- bring together information and materials from different sources
- identify problems and questions
- undertake the analysis of factual information
- recognise strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of others
- produce a synthesis of the state of knowledge on a particular subject or topic with guidance, undertake tasks independently
- reflect on their own progress and make use of feedback provided
- express themselves effectively both orally and in writing
- present knowledge or an argument in a way that is comprehensible to others
- use relevant IT to collate, analyse, select and present information (digital literacy)
- make effective presentations
- think critically and show critical awareness and evaluation of theoretical concepts and therapeutic modalities and research methods
- demonstrate an ability to comprehend when presented with new ideas or information
- demonstrate skills in recognising and describing material
- demonstrate classification skills in describing, categorising and collating data
- understand the importance of health and safety and of equality, diversity and inclusiveness in the work environment
- appreciate and engage in contemporary debates relating to global sustainability, employability and global perspectives, including decolonisation and anti-racism
- appreciate the need to act in a sustainable manner.

## Typical level (2:2 or 2:1)

4.14 Criteria for achievement above threshold level at 2:2 and 2:1 will be in line with the higher education provider's common or generic marking schemes for undergraduate courses.

## Excellent level (1st class)

4.15 Criteria for excellent (1st class) achievement will be in line with the higher education provider's common or generic marking schemes for undergraduate courses.

## Benchmark standard for master's degrees

### Generic skills

4.16 Postgraduate degrees are awarded to students who demonstrate understanding of knowledge in counselling and psychotherapy as outlined in the undergraduate threshold, much of which is at the forefront of the academic field of study and professional practice. Study at master's level requires additional critical and conceptual understanding that enables students to:

- understand how knowledge is advanced through research
- identify boundaries of knowledge
- create new insights in the field of study
  - develop higher level skills through self-directed academic and professional development. At this level, award holders must demonstrate a knowledge base that extends to a systematic understanding and critical awareness of topics which are informed by research at the forefront of the discipline of counselling/psychotherapy.

4.17 The following additional statements describe the threshold level of competence for holders of a master's degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy. Award holders will be capable of:

- critical discussion and analysis of complex concepts and work is carried out independently and with some originality
- critical awareness of the history of ideas, the cultural context, philosophical basis, social and political theories that inform and influence the development of counselling and psychotherapy, and underpin a personal approach to practice
- conceptualising and/or formulating ways of working with clients with chronic and enduring mental health issues
- a critical understanding of the language and discourses around diagnosis, psychopathology and mental disorders
- communicating about the harm caused by discriminatory practices and aim to reduce insensitivity to power differentials within therapeutic service provision, training and supervisory contexts
- a critical understanding and awareness of how 'unconscious' or 'out of awareness' processes in both the client and therapist may shape perceptions, experiences and the therapeutic process and work therapeutically with ruptures or difficulties within the therapeutic relationship that may arise
- integrating relevant theory and research in the areas of diversity and equality into clinical practice
- utilising audit and evaluation methodologies to contribute to improving the process and outcomes of therapy
- successfully developing, planning, implementing and evaluating a substantial empirical research study, in response to a relevant research question. This might be a qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods research study or systematic review, which will contribute knowledge to the field of study in counselling and psychotherapy informed by wide current understandings of the discipline
- reflexivity, self-awareness and the therapeutic use of self to work at depth in the therapeutic relationship and the therapeutic process
- facilitating and/or containing the intense emotions that may emerge within a highly charged therapeutic encounter.

## 5 List of references and further resources

The following is a list of links to organisations that hold accredited registers approved by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA).

[Association of Child Psychotherapists](#)

[Association of Christian Counsellors](#)

[British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy](#)

[British Psychoanalytic Council](#)

[COSCA \(Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland\)](#)

[Human Givens Institute](#)

[National Counselling Society](#)

[National Hypnotherapy Society](#)

[UK Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners](#)

[UK Council for Psychotherapy](#)

## **6 Membership of the Advisory Groups for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy**

### **Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2022)**

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Dr Peter Pearce (Chair)    | Metanoia Institute                                  |
| Kirsten Amis               | Glasgow Clyde College                               |
| Lucy Anacleto              | Arden University Limited                            |
| Dr Paula Brogan            | Ulster University                                   |
| Professor Divine Charura   | York St John University                             |
| Dr Fevronia Christodoulidi | University of East London                           |
| Georgia Clarke             | QAA Coordinator                                     |
| Natasha Grigorov           | Metanoia Institute                                  |
| Susan Fleming              | Staffordshire University                            |
| Dr Faisal Mahmood          | Newman University Birmingham                        |
| Professor John Nuttall     | United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy            |
| Jovana Perzic              | United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy            |
| Professor Andrew Reeves    | University of Chester                               |
| Professor Danny Saunders   | QAA Officer   |
| Professor Fay Short        | Bangor University                                   |
| Dr Clare Symons            | British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy |
| Dr Mhairi Thurston         | Abertay University                                  |
| Andrea Williams            | University of Wales Trinity Saint David             |

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### **Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2013)**

Details provided below are as published in the original Subject Benchmark Statement.

|  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Professor Sue Wheeler (Chair)          | University of Leicester         |
| Dr Alan Dunnett                        | York St John University         |
| Dr Alistair Ross                       | University of Oxford            |
| Dr Dennis Greenwood                    | University of Brighton          |
| Dr Philippa Whittick                   | UKCP Vice-Chair                 |
| Dr Sally Aldridge                      | BACP                            |
| Dr Sheila Spong                        | University of Wales, Newport    |
| Jan Grove                              | Newman University College       |
| Jean McMinn                            | Queen's University Belfast      |
| Pam Howard                             | UPCA and University of Brighton |
| Peter Pearce                           | Metanoia Institute              |
| Rebecca Grace                          | BACP                            |
| Seamus Prior                           | University of Edinburgh         |
| Sebastian Randall                      | Colchester Institute            |
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