



Higher National Unit Specification

General information

Unit title: Counselling: Professional Standards (SCQF level 8)

Unit code: HL9J 35

Superclass: PS

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Unit purpose

This unit is designed to develop learners' knowledge and understanding of the professional standards, laws and ethics necessary to practice safely and legally as a counsellor. This is a mandatory unit of the HND in Counselling and learners should complete this unit prior to engagement in a counselling placement. The content of the unit is underpinned by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling.

Outcomes

On successful completion of the unit the learner will be able to:

- 1 Demonstrate ethical decision making in relation to therapeutic practice and legislation.
- 2 Explain the professional counselling register.
- 3 Explain the importance of ongoing, post qualification Continued Professional Development (CPD).
- 4 Apply ethical framework to own practice, values and attitudes.

Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit at SCQF level 8: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8)

Recommended entry to the unit

Entry is at the discretion of the centre.

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Core Skills

Opportunities to develop aspects of Core Skills are highlighted in the support notes for this unit specification.

There is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skill components in this unit.

Context for delivery

If this unit is delivered as part of a group award, it is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the subject area of the group award to which it contributes. This is a mandatory unit of the HND in Counselling and learners should complete this unit prior to engagement in a counselling placement. It is desirable that learners hold student membership of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) when undertaking the HND.

Equality and inclusion

This unit specification has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Further advice can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards

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Acceptable performance in this unit will be the satisfactory achievement of the standards set out in this part of the unit specification. All sections of the statement of standards are mandatory and cannot be altered without reference to SQA.

Where evidence for outcomes is assessed on a sample basis, the whole of the content listed in the knowledge and/or skills section must be taught and available for assessment. Learners should not know in advance the items on which they will be assessed and different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Demonstrate ethical decision making in relation to therapeutic practice and legislation.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Nature and purpose of the counselling ethical framework
- ◆ Values, principles and personal moral qualities as they relate to the counselling ethical framework
- ◆ Current law in relation to safe ethical practice
- ◆ Ethical decision-making using a recognised model

Outcome 2

Explain the professional counselling register.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Aims, role and responsibilities of a professional body
- ◆ Current counselling registration process
- ◆ Current counselling accreditation process

Outcome 3

Explain the importance of ongoing, post qualification Continued Professional Development (CPD).

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Definition of CPD
- ◆ Importance of CPD in the context of ethical issues and relevant codes of practice
- ◆ Implications of ongoing, post qualification CPD

Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards (cont)

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Outcome 4

Apply ethical framework to own practice, values and attitudes.

- ◆ Own practice in the context of the professional ethical framework
- ◆ Own values and attitudes in reference to ethical practice
- ◆ Importance of professional indemnity insurance

Evidence requirements for this unit

Given the individualised nature of this unit, evidence should include theoretical knowledge and personal reflection. Evidence for Outcomes 1, 2 3 and 4 may be holistically assessed. Learners will need to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and/or skills across all outcomes by showing that they can:

Learners are required to:

- ◆ explain the nature and purpose of the counselling ethical framework.
- ◆ describe the values, principles and personal moral qualities as they relate to the counselling ethical framework.
- ◆ describe current law in relation to safe ethical practice.
- ◆ demonstrate ethical decision-making using a recognised model.
- ◆ describe the role and responsibilities of a regulatory body.
- ◆ explain the current counselling registration process.
- ◆ explain the current counselling accreditation process.
- ◆ define the meaning of Continuing Professional Development.
- ◆ explain the importance of Continuing Professional Development in the context of ethical issues and relevant codes of practice.
- ◆ analyse the implications of ongoing, post qualification Continuing Professional Development.
- ◆ explain own practice in the context of the professional ethical framework.
- ◆ reflect on own values and attitudes in reference to ethical practice.
- ◆ evaluate the importance of professional indemnity insurance.



Higher National Unit Support Notes

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Unit support notes are offered as guidance and are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this unit

This specialist Unit is designed to allow learners to build up a knowledge and understanding of professional standards in counselling with the intention of demonstrating safe and ethical practice prior to engaging with clients.

Outcome 1

This outcome introduces the nature and purpose of the counselling ethical framework in relation to establishing and maintaining safe practice. The range, importance and relevance of personal and professional values, principles and personal moral qualities will be explored in the context of ethical practice. Current, relevant laws and recognised models of ethical decision making will be covered.

All registered counsellors are bound by their ethical framework as it forms the basis for professional standards and professional conduct procedures, so it is essential that we understand clearly what it requires of us.

Our values are a useful way of expressing general ethical commitments that underpin the purpose and goals of our actions.

Personal moral qualities are internalised values that shape how we relate to others and our environment. They represent a moral energy or drive which may operate unconsciously and unexamined. This moral energy or drive is ethically more beneficial when consciously examined from time to time and used to motivate our ethical development or shape how we work towards a good society.

Relevant legislation might include, but is not restricted to:

- ◆ Data Protection Act (1998)
- ◆ Freedom of Information (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2013
- ◆ Mental Health Care and Treatment (Scotland) Act 2003
- ◆ Equality Act 2010

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Ethical decision making is the practical process through which clinicians or counsellors base their actions, behaviour and choices on informed, sound judgement. It draws on values, principles and standards of behaviour that inform professional practice. Ethical decision making involves gathering facts, determining whether a problem or dilemma truly exists, and whether or not there is an ethical, legal, moral, professional or clinical issue involved. It uses a framework of client rights and professional obligations to make decisions. It is also the process of considering divergent courses of action and their implications and consequences for the client, as well as for the clinician or counsellor. It is making choices in the light of conflicting values, principles and responsibilities, and determining how best to safeguard the interests and welfare of clients. Ethical decision making also involves consultation with peers and colleagues or with supervisors. It involves gathering evidence from research to decide how best to apply professional ethical codes, values and principles in practice.

A well-used current model is: Tim Bond's Six-Step Approach to Ethical Problem Solving (Bond, T. (2010:227-238) *Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action* (3rd edn). London: Sage.)

- 1 Produce a brief description of the problem or dilemma.
- 2 Consider who holds responsibility for resolving the problem.
- 3 Consider all the relevant ethical and legal guidance.
- 4 Identify all possible courses of action.
- 5 Select the best course of action.
- 6 Evaluate the outcome.

Other models of ethical decision making may include:

- ◆ The Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making (Luke et al., 2013a) Luke, M., Goodrich, K.M., Gilbride., D.D., (2013) Intercultural model of ethical decision making: Addressing worldview dilemmas in school counseling. *Counseling and Values* 58(2): 177–194.
- ◆ The Six-Stage ACTION Model (Duffy and Passmore, 2010) Duffy, M., Passmore, J. (2010) Ethics in coaching: An ethical decision making framework for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 5(2): 140–151.
- ◆ The IDEAL Ethical Principles (Rogers, 2013) Rogers, S.M. (2013) Exploring ethical and boundary challenges in outreach psychotherapy: A training model. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering 74(3–B(E)):no pagination specified.
- ◆ Decision-Making Model for Touch (Calmes et al., 2013) Calmes, S.A., Piazza, N.J., Laux, J.M. (2013) The use of touch in counseling: An ethical decision-making model. *Counseling and Values* 58(1): 59–68.
- ◆ Davies, N. (2015). Ethical decision making within the counselling professions. Lutterworth: BACP.

Higher National unit Support Notes (cont)

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Outcome 2

This outcome informs the learner of the current counselling registration process and accreditation process. The BACP Register of Counsellors and Psychotherapists is a public voluntary record of therapists who have met our standards for registration. These standards cover training, supervision, continuing professional development and a contractual commitment to our Ethical Framework. The BACP Register was established in 2012 and was the first psychological therapists' register to be accredited by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care. An independent body accountable to Government, the Authority was set up following the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to oversee health regulators such as the General Medical Council. It developed the accredited register scheme to quality assure registered practitioners working across a range of social care settings. The main purpose of the Register is to protect the public. It aims to reassure clients, employers and the general public that a BACP-registered practitioner adheres to high standards of proficiency, professionalism and good practice.

Outcome 3

CPD, or lifelong learning, is not just about formal training. It can take place through a wide range of activities in various contexts, and may include both personal and professional development. Professional practitioners should continually seek learning experiences to maintain, improve and broaden their competence, knowledge and skills, ensuring they can practise safely, effectively and legally within an evolving scope of practice. Each counsellor is in charge of their own learning and set their own development goals according to their needs, situation and goals.

CPD activities can include:

- ◆ Formal education lectures, seminars and courses
- ◆ E-learning CPD modules
- ◆ In-service training, work shadowing or mentoring
- ◆ Attending or presenting at conferences and workshops
- ◆ Committee work or participation in special interest groups
- ◆ Updating your knowledge through books, articles, TV, radio, internet

Continuing Professional Development is an ethical requirement and is stipulated within codes of practice. Learners should consider the safety implications if CPD was not a professional requirement to aid understanding of its purpose and importance.

Outcome 4

Learners must apply ethical framework to own practice, values and attitudes in line with the BACP ethical framework. A high level of self-awareness and personal insight must be demonstrated to illustrate the learner's ability to make clear associations between their own work and value base and that of potential clients' in line with professional, safe practice. Their assessment of safety and risk within the therapeutic relationship should illustrate the importance of professional indemnity insurance.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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Guidance on approaches to delivery of this unit

Delivery of Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 could incorporate a variety of teaching and learning methods to encourage a learner-centred, participative and practical approach, including:

- 1 Teacher/lecturer presentations and demonstration
- 2 DVD presentations
- 3 Large and small group work and discussions
- 4 Handouts
- 5 Books and articles
- 6 Visiting speakers
- 7 Supervision attendance
- 8 Individual research
- 9 Internet searches
- 10 Reflection

This unit is delivered within the ethos of an educational setting not a therapeutic environment so for safety, signposting learners to their supervisor or the institution's counselling service, would be appropriate. Learners should be introduced to the BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling.

Delivery of outcomes

The analysis of case studies and ethical dilemmas in Outcome 1 can be helpful for the learner to recognise and understand the importance of ethics in the context of supervision, boundaries and safety for self and client. Learners should develop an understanding the national register for counsellors in Outcome 2. Outcome 3 reinforces the ongoing requirement for CPD although the importance of ongoing personal develop should also be highlighted. Outcome 4 requires the learner to be able to engage in appropriate, self-reflection whereby they are able to demonstrate honest, accurate awareness with regard to the safety of their own practice.

Guidance on approaches to assessment of this unit

Evidence can be generated using different types of assessment. The following are suggestions only. There may be other methods that would be more suitable to learners.

Centres are reminded that prior verification of centre-devised assessments would help to ensure that the national standard is being met. Where learners experience a range of assessment methods, this helps them to develop different skills that should be transferable to work or further and higher education. In order to achieve the Outcomes as stated, this unit requires learners submit an holistic folio. Evidence for Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 may be holistically assessed using a single, integrated assessment. Information may be gathered in open-book conditions at appropriate points throughout the unit. Outcome 4 will be assessed by completion of a reflective account.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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Opportunities for e-assessment

E-assessment may be appropriate for some assessments in this unit. By e-assessment we mean assessment which is supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT), such as e-testing or the use of e-portfolios or social software. Centres which wish to use e-assessment must ensure that the national standard is applied to all learner evidence and that conditions of assessment as specified in the evidence requirements are met, regardless of the mode of gathering evidence. The most up-to-date guidance on the use of e-assessment to support SQA's qualifications is available at www.sqa.org.uk/e-assessment.

Opportunities for developing Core and other essential skills

In this unit, learners will probably be involved in research and investigation and self-reflection in relation to ethical counselling practice.

Learners should take responsibility for their own work in the investigation and in the review and evaluation of their counselling practice. This may allow them to develop the three components activities of *Problem Solving* — Critical Thinking, Planning and Organising and Reviewing and Evaluating. If the learner uses a computer while undertaking any part of this unit, eg for research, they will have the opportunity to develop *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* skills.

It is expected that throughout this unit there will be opportunities to develop the Core Skills of *Communication* (Reading, Writing and Oral) at SCQF level 6; *Problem Solving* (Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6, Planning and Organising at SCQF level 6, Reviewing and Evaluating at SCQF level 6; *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* (Accessing Information at SCQF level 5, Providing/Creating Information at SCQF level 5).

History of changes to unit

Version	Description of change	Date

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General information for learners

Unit title: Counselling: Professional Standards (SCQF level 8)

This section will help you decide whether this is the unit for you by explaining what the unit is about, what you should know or be able to do before you start, what you will need to do during the unit and opportunities for further learning and employment.

This unit is designed to develop your knowledge and understanding of the professional standards, laws and ethics necessary to practice safely and legally as a counsellor. The unit is underpinned by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and is mandatory within the Counselling HND. It is desirable that you hold student membership of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy when undertaking the HND.

It is expected that you will complete this unit prior to engagement in a counselling placement.

There are four outcomes to complete in the unit:

- 1 Demonstrate ethical decision making in relation to therapeutic practice and legislation.
- 2 Explain the professional counselling register.
- 3 Explain the importance of ongoing, post qualification Continued Professional Development (CPD).
- 4 Apply ethical framework to own practice, values and attitudes.

Assessment will likely be via a portfolio of evidence gathered at appropriate points during the unit and you will also be asked to produce a reflective account.

There are opportunities throughout the unit to develop your core skills in *Communication, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* and *Problem Solving*.