



Higher National Unit Specification

General information

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

Unit code: HL9L 36

Superclass: PS

Publication date: September 2017

Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority

Version: 2

Unit purpose

This unit is designed to enable learners to develop their knowledge and understanding of the research process in counselling. Learners are required to evaluate and critically analyse counselling research whilst demonstrating an awareness of the purpose and importance of design choice. The content of this Unit is underpinned by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling.

Outcomes

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

- 1 Explain the purpose of research in counselling.
- 2 Evaluate qualitative and quantitative methodology in counselling research.
- 3 Critically analyse published, relevant research.
- 4 Demonstrate required competences in small scale research.

Credit points and level

1 Higher National Unit credit at SCQF level 9: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 9)

Recommended entry to the unit

Entry is at the discretion of the centre.

Higher National Unit Specification: General information (cont)

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Core Skills

Achievement of this Unit gives automatic certification of the following Core Skills component:

Complete Core Skill	None
Core Skill component	Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6

There are also opportunities to develop aspects of Core Skills which are highlighted in the support notes of this unit specification.

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 Unit mandatory in the framework for the HND Counselling.

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/assessment arrangements](http://www.sqa.org.uk/assessment%20arrangements).

Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

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

Explain the purpose of research in counselling.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Rationale behind use of research in counselling
- ◆ Relationship between input or outcome based hypotheses
- ◆ Importance of consistent and effective application of a body of knowledge, informed by contemporary research, during the course of the therapeutic process

Outcome 2

Evaluate qualitative and quantitative methodology in counselling research.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Qualitative methodologies
- ◆ Quantitative methodologies
- ◆ Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methodologies
- ◆ Impact of bias on findings
- ◆ Ethical considerations

Outcome 3

Critically analyse published, relevant research.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Selecting current, peer reviewed published research paper
- ◆ Recognised academic structure of a research paper
- ◆ Choice of methodology in relation to research aims

Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards

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Outcome 4

Demonstrate required competences in small scale research.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Appropriate areas for a small scale research project
- ◆ Rationale for the chosen methodology, timescales, participants, ethical considerations, application of findings

Evidence requirements for this unit

- ◆ Evidence must be provided to cover of all aspects of the knowledge and skills sections for Outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- ◆ The learner should choose an appropriate qualitative or quantitative published research report for Outcome 3
- ◆ Reference must be made throughout to current peer reviewed, published literature as appropriate to the unit level.

Learners will need to provide evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and/or skills across all outcomes by showing that they can:

Outcome 1

- ◆ explain the purpose of research in developing counselling practice.
- ◆ analyse the impact of research on counselling practice.
- ◆ describe the commonly used research processes utilised in counselling practice.
- ◆ describe the process of systematic review.
- ◆ explain the ways in which input and output-based hypotheses can be used in counselling practice.
- ◆ explain the importance of consistent and effective application of a body of knowledge, informed by contemporary research, during the course of the therapeutic process.

Outcome 2

- ◆ explain the key features of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.
- ◆ explain how qualitative methodologies can be used effectively in counselling practice.
- ◆ explain how quantitative methodologies can be used effectively.
- ◆ evaluate relevance of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in counselling research.
- ◆ describe the potential impact of bias on findings.
- ◆ reflect on potential ethical considerations when planning research.

Higher National Unit Specification: Statement of standards (cont)

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

Outcome 3

- ◆ explain how the findings from one piece of research has contributed to professional knowledge.
- ◆ critically analyse the influence of the chosen research on widespread practice.
- ◆ evaluate the impact of ethical considerations on research design.
- ◆ analyse a variety of research methods used.
- ◆ evaluate the choice of methodology in relation to research aims
- ◆ explain the concept of bias and assess its impact on findings.

Outcome 4

- ◆ identify an appropriate area for a small scale research project.
- ◆ explain the rationale for the chosen methodology, timescales, participants, ethical considerations and application of findings.

This unit is assessed holistically by a single instrument of assessment covering all outcomes. This could take the form of a report which should cover the evidence requirements of all outcomes.



Higher National Unit Support Notes

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

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 research underpinning counselling practice and the importance of this research being current, evidence-based and ethical.

Outcome 1 introduces and outlines the purpose behind conducting counselling research

- (a) What we mean by research; evidence based practice; research questions.
- (b) How research findings develop and expand therapeutic practice.
- (c) How counselling may be if research did not take place.
- (d) Research process.
- (e) Input based hypotheses; researching theories and methods of counselling.
- (f) Outcome based hypotheses; researching what works, measuring outcomes.
- (g) How research is implemented within counselling practice.

Outcome 2 introduces qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In this outcome the following should be covered:

- (a) Qualitative studies; interviews, questionnaires, surveys, narrative case studies, participant observation, documentary research, cooperative inquiry groups, personal experience methodologies.
- (b) Interpreting findings; grounded theory, computer analysis.
- (c) Quantitative data including experiments, measurements, eg rating scales, inferential statistics, Standard deviation.
- (d) Heuristic studies.
- (e) Evaluation of each in respect of impacting upon counselling knowledge.
- (f) Bias: researcher bias, procedural bias, selection bias, reporting bias.
- (g) Ethical considerations: trustworthiness, managing risks, relationships with research participants, research integrity, research governance.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

Outcome 3 is designed to allow learners to relate theory into practice. A variety of published research should be available with the learner making the choice regarding which to work with. The learner is to choose one current, peer reviewed published research paper. The following should be covered:

- (a) The contribution the findings had on professional knowledge base should be evaluated.
- (b) The influence that chosen research has had (or is having) on widespread practice should be critically analysed.
- (c) The ethical considerations should be evaluated.
- (d) The relationship between the chosen methodology and the research aims should be evaluated.

Outcome 4 is designed to enable learners to develop the competences needed to undertake a small-scale research project

- (a) The learner will propose a small scale research project.
- (b) Explain the rationale for the chosen methodology, timescales, participants, ethical considerations, application of findings.
- (c) Recognise the potential impact the findings may have on therapeutic practice.

Recommended texts:

Cooper, M. (2008) *Essential Research Findings*, London: Sage Publications

Dallos, R. And Vetere, A. (2005) *Researching Psychotherapy and Counselling*, Berkshire: Open University Press

McLeod, J. (2003) *Doing Counselling Research*, London: Sage Publications

Recommended journals:

Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, Publisher: Routledge

European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling, Publisher: Routledge

Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy,

Psychodynamic Practice, Publisher: Routledge

Guidance on approaches to delivery of this unit

This unit requires teaching of research methods by the lecturer and access to current published counselling research. Lectures and group discussions should be supported by relevant periodicals, professional journals and research papers.

Higher National Unit Support Notes (cont)

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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.

This unit should be holistically assessed by a single instrument of assessment covering the unit outcomes. This will take the form of one open book report of 2,500 to 3,000 words. The assessment should test critical and evaluative skills.

- ◆ The report must contain evidence of all aspects of the knowledge and skills sections for Outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- ◆ The learner should choose an appropriate qualitative or quantitative published research report for Outcome 3
- ◆ Reference must be made throughout to current literature as appropriate to the uUnit level

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

This unit has the Critical Thinking component of Problem Solving embedded in it. This means that when learners achieve the unit, their Core Skills profile will also be updated to show they have achieved Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6.

There are also opportunities throughout this Unit to develop the Core Skills of *Communication* (Reading, Writing and Oral) at SCQF level 6, *Numeracy* (Using Number and Using Graphical Information) at SCQF level 6 and *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* (Accessing/Providing/Creating Information) at SCQF level 6.

History of changes to unit

Version	Description of change	Date
2	Core skill component Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6 embedded	20/09/17

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General information for learners

Unit title: Counselling: Research Skills (SCQF level 9)

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.

On completion of this unit, you will have developed your knowledge and understanding of the research process in counselling. You will be required to evaluate and critically analyse counselling research whilst demonstrating an awareness of the purpose and importance of design choice. The content of this unit is underpinned by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling.

As a brief overview, this is what the unit is about:

- ◆ Outcome 1 introduces and outlines the purpose behind conducting counselling research.
- ◆ Outcome 2 introduces qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
- ◆ Outcome 3 is designed to allow you to relate theory into practice. A variety of published research will be available. You choose one current, peer reviewed published research paper to evaluate.
- ◆ Outcome 4 is designed for you to develop the competences needed to undertake a small-scale research project.

This unit is assessed by one, holistic report which includes all outcomes. This will take the form of one open-book report of 2,500 to 3,000 words.

This unit has the Critical Thinking component of Problem Solving embedded in it. This means that when you achieve the unit, your Core Skills profile will also be updated to show you have achieved Critical Thinking at SCQF level 6.

There are opportunities throughout this unit to develop the Core Skills of *Communication* (Reading, Writing and Oral) at SCQF level 6, *Numeracy* (Using Number and Using Graphical Information) at SCQF level 6 and *Information and Communication Technology (ICT)* (Accessing/Providing/Creating Information) at SCQF level 6 at SCQF level 6.

This is a mandatory unit for the HND Counselling and a core component of BACP requirements for individual registration.