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for counsellors

2023 - 2024

External Assessment Guide

Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (CSK-L2)

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

Qualification/learning aim number: 500/7938/4

Counselling & Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

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Please note that:

- This document can be downloaded from the [CPCAB Website](#) along with [tutor support materials](#).
- Tutor resources to support your teaching are also available: [shop](#), [videos](#), [YouTube](#)

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1. Introduction

This guide is provided to help our recognised centres understand the external assessment (EA) arrangements for CSK-L2 (Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills). While this guidance is directed at centre staff, including tutors, exam departments and centre managers, it will also be available for public viewing on our website. In the interests of transparency and consistency of information, CPCAB believe it is important that this guide is also available to candidates. If you are unsure about any of the guidance, please contact us on either exams@cpcab.co.uk or supportlevel2-3@cpcab.co.uk

Candidates must have completed at least two-thirds of the course before undertaking the external assessment.

For this external assessment candidates complete a **Reflective Review Paper**. This is completed independently by the candidate at home, over a set 1-week period. Candidates are asked to answer a set of questions based on the Learning Outcomes of the qualification and to reflect on their understanding of counselling skills at this level. The purpose of this is to measure a candidate's knowledge and reflective skills.

2. Mock External Assessment

The Mock external assessment is modelled on the format of the formal external assessment and is designed to provide candidates with an opportunity to become accustomed to the process. This includes providing a chance to experience the structure of the assessment, see the format of the paper and identify if there are any potential issues with the facilitation process. The Mock assessment also supports tutors in preparing candidates in time for their selected external assessment window. Centres will be sent a mock external assessment paper and accompanying guidance when registering new groups. Please contact exams@cpcab.co.uk if mock papers are not received in time.

3. Structure of the External Assessment

The paper contains **5 questions**, with each question split into parts a & b. Each question is worth 2 marks (1 mark for part a, and 1 mark for part b). To be found Proficient, candidates need to achieve **6 out of 10** marks. Candidates may be marked in increments within each question, meaning a candidate may score half or quarter marks.

The overall word count must not exceed **1000 words**. It is suggested that candidates split the word count equally over each question, therefore approximately 100 words per part. There is no 10% leeway above this word count and only the first 1000 words will be assessed and marked. Any text which exceeds the word count will not be assessed.

Footnotes, appendices, references, or bibliographies are not required and will not be assessed or included in the word count. Headings, names, and the questions themselves are also not included in the candidates' word count.

It is important that candidates write their overall word count in the box on the front of the paper before submitting it to their tutor. Papers which do not state a word count may not be assessed.

4. Content and Depth

The aim of the external assessment is that candidates demonstrate the knowledge they have gained throughout the qualification to date and that they show their ability to reflect on their application of skills at level 2 depth. Papers are designed to allow candidates to show their knowledge and to give them the opportunity to do their best in external assessment.

Candidates should pay careful attention to the descriptor terms used in questions, e.g., state, describe, reflect on, and ensure their responses are in line with what is being asked of them.

Candidates may be asked to give examples from counselling skills sessions that they have participated in during class sessions. These examples do not need to be verbatim or contain direct quotes.

Candidates do not need to include quotations or referenced material from any texts in their paper; quotes will not be marked and we encourage candidates to explain concepts in their own words. For example, where candidates are asked to refer to a theoretical model, we do not require them to reproduce sections of text from books, the internet, or materials provided by the centre. They should explain models using correct terminology but explain the details of the model in their own words.

Candidates are not permitted to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate content and put this forward for assessment as their own work. To do so is candidate malpractice.

5. Centre Facilitation

The external assessment must be facilitated within the published window, which specifies the dates of the opening and closing of the external assessment period; this is provided on the [CPCAB website](#). There is no timed invigilation involved.

It is vital that the Reflective Review is **all the candidates own work**. Any forms of plagiarism will result in a paper being declared void. Tutors have a vital role in confirming the authenticity of submitted work and should carefully read the section below for guidance on how to check a paper for authenticity and confirm this prior to submission

CPCAB issue the Reflective Review question papers and a blank Tutor Group Facilitation Form by secure email to centres on the first morning of the external assessment window. In this email centres will be notified of the date and time that the window closes.

The centre must not edit or modify the Reflective Review question paper before sending to candidates and must keep the paper confidential until they issue it to all candidates in a group at the same time (it is suggested that this is in their usual course delivery time during that week).

The Reflective Review paper should be securely shared with registered candidates via email or through the centre's preferred file sharing service. If the paper is shared via a secure 'cloud' service, where groups of candidates have shared access, the document should be restricted to "read only" and candidates should be instructed to download the document and save their own copy offline. This prevents candidates unintentionally sharing their work with others.

Candidates then have 1-week precisely to complete the paper given to them by their centre and must return it to the centre at the same time the following week. **Candidates MUST ONLY have access to the paper for a single week (7-days).**

Example schedule of issue:

	➡	➡	➡	➡	➡
ACTION	CPCAB emails papers to the centre	Centre issues papers to candidates	Candidates return papers to centre	Tutor conducts authenticity checks, and checks the paper for candidate signature and word count	Centre returns signed papers to CPCAB
WHEN	Monday (AM) week 1	e.g. Tuesday evening week 1 (in usual class time)	e.g. Tuesday evening week 2 (the following week in class time)	Between the Tuesday evening and the time it is submitted to CPCAB	Before the published close of the window (the end of week 2)

When issuing the external assessment materials the following statement should be read to the group or sent to each candidate. The centre must ensure this guidance is read and fully understood by tutors and candidates before the EA period commences.

"You have exactly 1 week to complete this paper at home. Make sure you fill in your details on the authenticity cover sheet and sign/e-sign and date Box 1.

The paper has 5 questions, separated into part a and b. You must not exceed the word count of 1000 words, and it is advised that you split the word count evenly over the questions. It should take approximately 1-2 hours to complete.

This is an opportunity to demonstrate what you have learnt on your course, and you should read the questions carefully and answer as fully as you can within the word count. You may expand the text areas as you type.

This is an 'open book' assessment so you may use books and online resources as research, but must not copy any text into your answers. You must not discuss the content of the paper or your answers with other candidates or your tutor. Your answers must be entirely your own work.

You will need to submit your completed and signed paper back to your tutor 1-week from now."

When the papers are returned to the centre by the candidates the tutor also needs to complete, sign and return the Tutor Group Facilitation Form. This form confirms that the correct timeframes and processes have been followed. If this form is not completed it will result in papers not being assessed. Please make sure that all sections of the Reflective Review papers are completed prior to submission. This includes candidate names and numbers, candidate and tutor e-signatures to confirm authenticity and the word count.

Centres must submit all completed papers and the completed Tutor Group Facilitation Form to CPCAB's Exams Department by the published deadline. **Any paper received after the published deadline will not be assessed.** See the section below on the requirements for submitting documents to CPCAB for further guidance.

Centres have a responsibility to perform a series of checks prior to submission to CPCAB to ensure that:

- The correct papers and guidance are issued to candidates
- All candidate details are correctly completed
- Authenticity checks have been carried out correctly
- The paper is in the correct format
- The paper has been signed and dated by the candidate
- The paper has been checked, signed and dated by the tutor
- The correct papers and completed Tutor Group Facilitation Form are submitted before the close of the assessment window

6. Checking Authenticity

For this style of external assessment there is no requirement for tutors or the centre to invigilate a timed examination. Instead, **centres and tutors hold primary responsibility for ensuring that authenticity checks are carried out** and confirm that the candidate has completed the work themselves without any external input.

Reflective Review papers contain an Authenticity Cover Sheet which must be e-signed by candidates and tutors upon completion and prior to submitting the papers.

Candidate signatures confirm they have not:

- Received external help in the composition of their answers for the external assessment
- Copied/plagiarised materials or ideas (from texts/internet/peers/tutor/external points of authority) that are not their own when forming their answers

- Used any AI tools to generate content for this assessment
- Sought or gained an advantage from other candidates/tutors/centre staff/external points of authority
- Shared their answers with any other candidate

It is vital that the wording of their answers is their own, and not that of texts, internet, peers, tutors, or other external points of authority. However, they are allowed to use their course resources, texts, the internet etc, to research if required. If plagiarism is identified in candidate work, then the paper(s) involved will be declared void.

Tutor signatures confirm that:

- They have not provided feedback, suggestions, or any form of assessment of the candidate's answers for external assessment
- They have reviewed the submission to check that it does not duplicate that of other candidates
- The submission is written (based on their professional experience of the candidate) in their recognised style of composition and level of work
- The submission does not contain obvious evidence of work plagiarised from texts or the internet
- The submission, to the best of the tutor's knowledge, has not been generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- To the best of their understanding the paper represents the candidate's own authentic work

It is important that the tutor understands their role in ensuring the authenticity of any candidate submissions sent to CPCAB. The presence of the registered tutor's signature on the Authenticity Cover Sheet is a crucial factor in CPCAB upholding the integrity of the assessment process. By signing the authenticity statement the tutor, who has been involved in the candidate's teaching and assessment, is confirming that they have had view of the Reflective Review paper and believe that the writing style is that of the student and that it is their own work. In rare instances where the registered tutor is unavailable to authenticate candidate work, centres must contact exams@cpcab.co.uk to discuss and agree an appropriate contingency plan.

The tutor must e-sign the authenticity statement on the cover sheet and provide the date that this check was completed. CPCAB are unable to assess submissions received without both the candidate and registered tutor e-signatures. Where tutors and/or candidates do not have an e-signature, we can accept their name typed into the signature box.

If a tutor becomes aware of any authenticity issues with a candidate's work, e.g., that it has been copied or that a candidate has allowed another to copy their work, they are obliged to report this to their centre, following the centre's own plagiarism procedure.

Please do not submit papers to CPCAB if you are unable to confidently assure us of their authenticity.

7. E-Signatures

Where CPCAB require forms to contain an e-signature this can take several formats:

- An individual can use a touch screen, or mouse to sign a blank document and then save this as a small image on their computers to be used when required. This can be cut and pasted onto the e-signature line of CPCAB forms and dragged to an appropriate size.
- An individual can hand-sign a sheet of paper and then scan or take a photo of this signature and save it as a small image on their computers to be used when required. This can be cut and pasted onto the e-signature line of CPCAB forms and dragged to an appropriate size.
- An individual can type in their name to the box on the form. This is acceptable provided it is not completed by anyone other than the person named. If centres accept this type of e-signature from a candidate, they should check they have received the document from a known email address or have another way of confirming the typed signature has been made by the candidate. Where CPCAB accepts tutor e-signatures of this kind we will expect to see the document arrive via a known email address or correspondence source.

8. Submission Process of Reflective Review Papers

The whole group's papers need to be returned to CPCAB in one batch. This can be done via email to exams@cpcab.co.uk or using the platform WeTransfer. CPCAB request that Reflective Review Papers are not password protected and that they are submitted as an **accessible word-processed document**.

CPCAB are unable to accept Reflective Review papers in PDF format; this is because in most cases it is not possible to verify the word count or carry out plagiarism checks if required. CPCAB also ask that hard copies of the Reflective Reviews are not posted. Hard copies of papers, unless agreed in advance with CPCAB in the form of a Reasonable Adjustment, are not able to be assessed.

Additional points:

- When the Reflective Review Papers and Cover Sheets are emailed to exams@cpcab.co.uk please include in the email subject heading the qualification title and group number i.e.: CSK-L2 Group 123. Only one group should be included in each email.
- Individual candidate Reflective Review Papers need to be saved with the title including either the candidate's name or candidate number i.e.: 'Review paper Joe Bloggs' or 'Review paper 123456' as this eases the identification of candidate papers.
- The word count and both candidate and tutor signatures must be completed on the cover sheet.

CPCAB are unable to put forward for assessment:

- Papers that are received after the external assessment window has closed.
- Where CPCAB cannot confirm that authenticity checks have been carried out, i.e., through presence of dated tutor and candidate signatures and correct completion of the Tutor Group Facilitation Form
- Any papers that are submitted in the incorrect format (e.g., PDF)
- Where candidates have been issued an incorrect paper by the centre (e.g., a paper from a previous window)
- Where centres have returned an incorrect paper to CPCAB
- Papers that have not been dated correctly

If a candidate is absent from the external assessment, then they can be entered to sit at the next available window; there is no fee applied to this request. Please contact exams@cpcab.co.uk to ensure that they are entered. This needs to be done at least 14 days before the external assessment window.

9. Reasonable Adjustments

CPCAB are committed to offering reasonable adjustments to any external assessment arrangements which may place disabled candidates and candidates with additional learning needs at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to other candidates. Reasonable adjustments for the external assessment should reflect candidates' normal way of working within the centre. More information is available in CPCAB's [Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy](#).

Please ensure that you inform us about any candidates requiring Reasonable Adjustments at least eight weeks prior to the date for the external assessment. Centres can make a reasonable adjustment application using the [CR3](#) form available on the CPCAB website.

10. External Assessment Results

CPCAB release External Assessment results within set time frames. The external assessment dates and the results release dates are available on the CPCAB [website](#).

Results will be released according to the published schedule and will be available to view on the CPCAB portal. Please note that CPCAB do not provide results directly to candidates. If you do not have access to the CPCAB portal it is recommended that you contact your centre exams department for these results.

11. Feedback Appointments, Re-sits, and Appeals

Feedback Appointments

Tutors can request a feedback appointment to discuss any Not Proficient candidate's results with one of the Counselling Qualifications Professionals (CQPs) from CPCAB. This request can be made via the CPCAB portal. There is no charge for this service, and it is available for four weeks from the date the results were released. You can also discuss whether an appeal would be warranted.

Re-sits

Should a candidate be assessed as Not Proficient in the External Assessment they can re-sit the assessment at the next available window, for which a fee is applicable. Centres can book re-sits directly via our Portal. CPCAB recommends that any Not Proficient candidates are fully supported to prepare them for the next assessment. Candidates should not be entered for a re-sit if they are not likely to achieve proficiency in their internal assessment.

Second Re-sits

Candidates are not automatically entitled to a second re-sit, i.e. a third attempt. They can be entered for a second re-sit if the candidate has been assessed as Proficient in the internal assessment and if the re-sit is supported by the tutor(s). A candidate may have a maximum of three attempts in the external assessment.

Appeals

An appeal against an External Assessment Not Proficient result should first be discussed with a Counselling Qualifications Professional (CQP) from CPCAB. If it is considered that an appeal is warranted and has the full support of the tutor, an appeal can be requested in writing by the centre by completing form [CR12](#) and emailing this to exams@cpcab.co.uk. Please see the [Appeals Policy](#) for further information. Appeals initiate a re-marking of the assessment by a new assessor and (if necessary) a new moderator. There is a fee for this service. If the appeal is successful, the fee will be refunded.

13. External Assessment Support

Our friendly and experienced team are on hand to support you through the external assessment facilitation process. If you have any subject specific queries regarding the external assessment, please contact our team of Counselling Qualification Professionals at supportlevel2-3@cpcab.co.uk

If you would like any support with the facilitation of the external assessment or help with any of the assessment material or documentation, please contact exams@cpcab.co.uk.