The only awarding body
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for counsellors

2026-2027

Specification
Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) HTQ

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

Qualification/learning aim number: 500/8088/X

HTQ reference number: HTQHS5071

Sector endorsement: Skills for Health

Sector subject area: 1.3 Health and Social Care

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HIGHER TECHNICAL QUALIFICATION

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Please note:

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1. Qualification Information

Purpose Statement

This two-year part-time qualification gives learners the knowledge, skills and competencies to work as a therapeutic counsellor in an agency context in both health care and non-medical settings.

This qualification has been approved by Skills England as a Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ). HTQ status confirms that the CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) meets nationally recognised, employer-defined occupational standards, and that it prepares candidates effectively for skilled employment in the counselling sector. HTQ approval signifies national recognition of the quality, relevance, and rigour of this qualification.

Successful completion of this course means that the candidates will be able to provide a therapeutic counselling service - initially within the context of an agency's service framework but later (with experience and support from the supervisor, or by completing PC-L5 or its equivalent) they may progress to independent practice.

Potential job roles include but are not limited to:

- A counsellor employed by a college
- A counsellor working in the third sector
- A counsellor employed by a charity
- A Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner in the NHS Talking Therapies services
- An 'adult' counsellor in independent practice (with additional training and support)

Please see below for progression opportunities.

Funding	This qualification is approved as a Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) by Skills England and is eligible for government-backed funding routes. **For Centres with Existing Funding Status:** Centres that hold an Advanced Learner Loan (ALL) facility or are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) in England can offer this qualification with access to relevant student finance options, subject to meeting the Department for Education (DfE) criteria. **For Centres Without Funding Status:** Centres not currently holding an ALL facility or OfS registration can still deliver the HTQ-approved qualification. Candidates will continue to benefit from the qualification's recognised quality, employer relevance, and progression opportunities. The link to the government website which provides details of funding for this qualification can be found here: DfE: funding rules, rates and formula
Qualification structure	**7 mandatory units:** Unit 1 - Working ethically, safely and professionally as a counsellor Unit 2 - Working within a counselling relationship Unit 3 - Working with client diversity in counselling work Unit 4 - Working within a user-centred approach to counselling Unit 5 - Working with self-awareness in the counselling process Unit 6 - Working within a coherent framework of counselling theory and skills Unit 7 - Working self-reflectively as a counsellor
Level	4[1]
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	420 (minimum)
Total Qualification Time (TQT)	1204
Credit value	120
Minimum Age	19 years[2]. Please see CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements.

[1] Equivalent to European Qualification Framework (EQF) level 5 and Scottish Credit Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 7.

[2] This age requirement is linked to Ofqual's system for categorising qualifications.

Entry Requirements	CPCAB Level 2 Certificate in Counselling Skills (CSK-L2) and CPCAB Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies (CST-L3)/ CPCAB Level 3 Certificate in Applied Counselling Studies (CAST-L3), or equivalent qualifications[3]. Please see: • CPCAB Candidate Entry Requirements for criteria considered important in selecting applicants for a programme leading to TC-L4. • CPCAB's Entry Requirements and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy.
Assessment	Proficient (Pass)/Not Proficient (Fail) Candidates must be Proficient in internal assessment and meet all the qualification requirements, including all placement hours, to achieve the qualification. **Internal assessment:** tutor assessment of candidate portfolio evidencing minimum assessment requirements and verified by CPCAB. See CPCAB's Minimum Assessment Requirements.
Additional Qualification Requirements	**Personal counselling –** a minimum of 10 hours face to face personal therapy during the course (to accommodate a range of theoretical approaches), **but** centre requirements must be consistent with the counselling model being offered - in practice this is usually more than 10 hours. **Client work –** a minimum of 100 hours **formally-contracted** counselling (one-to-one) with at least 5 different clients in an agency setting. Cancellations and non-attends do not count towards this total. **Clinical Supervision –** Candidates require clinical supervision for their agency client work.[4] In addition, candidates require 30-50 hours group training supervision as part of the course.
Staffing and Resources	At least **two** tutors must be involved in all aspects of internal candidate assessment. See Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience for further details of CPCAB requirements.

[3] Tutors can allow entry to the first year of TC-L4 to candidates who have not yet completed their assessment for CST-L3/CAST-L3. However, such candidates must successfully complete CST-L3/CAST-L3 prior to entry into the 2nd year of TC-L4.

[4] CPCAB recommends that the candidate's agency provides appropriate clinical supervision to meet the requirements of their chosen ethical framework or professional membership association. For example, BACP Supervision Guidelines for trainees require a minimum of 1½ hours individual supervision per month (or the equivalent if in group supervision) or 1 hour of supervision for every 8 hours of client work.

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)	Centres are required to have robust IQA (internal moderation and verification) processes that are verified by CPCAB. See CPCAB IQA Policy
Progression	• Level 5 Diploma in Psychotherapeutic Counselling (PC-L5) • Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills & Theory (CBT-L5) • Level 5 Diploma in Counselling Children and Young People (CYP-L5) • Level 6 Certificate in Therapeutic Counselling Supervision (TCSU-L6) [5] • Open University Foundation Degree in Counselling [6] • Credit transfer to university study such as Open University [7] See CPCAB's Progression Route for details. Candidates who complete the CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) also benefit from its status as a Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ). This national recognition confirms the qualification meets employer-defined occupational standards, enhancing its value in the labour market. The HTQ designation supports candidates' employability by demonstrating their readiness for skilled roles in counselling and related professional settings. Additionally, the HTQ status facilitates progression opportunities into higher education pathways, including Level 5 counselling qualifications, degree-level study, or advanced professional development. Overall, the HTQ approval strengthens both career and academic routes for candidates, aligning their achievements with national skills priorities and funding frameworks.
Candidate Registration Fee	£388 Year 1 £388 Year 2 Candidates **need to be** registered for each separate year of the qualification.
Centre Application for CPCAB Approval to Offer the Qualification	Centre application fee: £419 (one-off fee).[8] Centres are expected to design their own training programmes.[9] Sample schemes of work are available from CPCAB on request.
Online Delivery Options	This qualification is eligible for fully in-person, or blended delivery. Up to 25% of the GLH of this qualification can be delivered online. Please see how to run CPCAB's qualifications online for more information.

5 To progress from TC-L4 to TCSU-L6, candidates must have substantial practitioner experience; the recommended amount is 450 hours.

6 To access the OU Foundation Degree candidates must have completed the CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4). CPCAB level 5 qualifications contribute 30 credits towards the achievement of the Foundation Degree. For further details see CPCAB Website

7 Contact the Open University or your chosen HE institution directly to discuss credit transfer options.

8 In order for your application to be processed the application fee will need to accompany your application. This is non-refundable. Payment can be made by cheque payable to CPCAB or via Bacs payment. Please contact finance@cpcab.co.uk for more information.

9 All centre designed courses must be approved by CPCAB before candidates can be registered. Although the delivery of courses may differ from centre to centre, all delivery must enable the candidates to achieve the learning outcomes of the qualification.

2. Qualification Summary
Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria (TC-L4)

Learning outcomes *(skills, knowledge, understanding)* The learner will/will be able to:	Assessment criteria *(to assess learning outcome)* The learner can:
Unit 1	Working ethically, safely and professionally as a counsellor
1. Work within an ethical and legal framework	1.1 Work within an ethical framework for counselling. 1.2 Demonstrate professional standards of conduct. 1.3 Be able to maintain confidentiality in counselling work. 1.4 Comply with relevant legal requirements for counselling. 1.5 Explain the issues relating to the duty of care with regard to the legislation on safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults.
2. Work within a counselling service organisation	2.1 Work within the ethical, legal and procedural framework in which a given agency operates. 2.2 Use teamwork skills to work with others. 2.3 Use professional skills to work with others. 2.4 Use client assessment to inform the counselling work
3. Use supervision to work within own limits of proficiency	3.1 Monitor limits of proficiency and fitness to practise. 3.2 Make suicidal risk assessments and work with emergency situations. 3.3 Support referral where appropriate. 3.4 Monitor own effectiveness and identify issues that require personal work.

Unit 2	Working within a counselling relationship
1. Establish and sustain the boundaries of the counselling relationship	1.1 Explore the role of the counsellor in different settings and services. 1.2 Establish the boundaries of the counselling relationship within specific agency settings. 1.3 Sustain the boundaries of the counsellor role. 1.4 Manage breaks and endings appropriately.
2. Establish and develop the therapeutic relationship	2.1 Explain the nature and significance of the therapeutic relationship. 2.2 Establish and develop the therapeutic relationship. 2.3 Reflect on the nature and quality of the therapeutic relationship throughout the counselling work. 2.4 Use the therapeutic relationship to inform and enhance the therapeutic process. 2.5 Recognise and respond to difficulties and conflicts in the therapeutic relationship.
Unit 3	Working with client diversity in counselling work
1. Understand and work with diversity	1.1 Explore diversity issues between self and client during the counselling relationship. 1.2 Evaluate how an understanding of diversity can enhance empathy. 1.3 Demonstrate sensitivity to diversity issues with individual clients.
2. Challenge own issues, fears and prejudices	2.1 Explore and challenge own beliefs and values. 2.2 Explore and challenge own issues, fears and prejudices concerning working with client diversity.
3. Understand how diversity issues affect client access to counselling	3.1 Reflect on diversity issues which impact on clients accessing counselling within agency settings. 3.2 Reflect on issues relating to working with a third-party present.

Unit 4	Working within a user-centred approach to counselling
1. Work within a user-centred agreement for the counselling work	1.1 Enable clients to explore their attitudes to and expectations of counselling within specific agency settings. 1.2 Negotiate a shared agreement for the counselling work. 1.3 Regularly review the working agreement with clients. 1.4 Reflect on the different ways of offering counselling
2. Maintain a user-centred focus throughout the counselling work	2.1 Enable the client to identify, prioritise and focus on their agenda. 2.2 Use regular reviews and clinical supervision to maintain the focus on the client's agenda throughout the counselling work. 2.3 Enable clients to explore their unspoken agendas.
Unit 5	**Working with self-awareness in the counselling process**
1. Use counselling theory to understand own self	1.1 Explore the nature and structure of own self. 1.2 Explore own recent and formative personal history. 1.3 Explore own patterns of relating.
2. Work on personal issues that resonate with client work	2.1 Work on own emotional difficulties and internal conflicts that could impact on client work. 2.2 Work on own recent and past life events that could impact on client work. 2.3 Work on own relationship difficulties that could impact on client work.
3. Use self-awareness to enhance counselling work	3.1 Reflect on the importance of self-awareness in counselling work. 3.2 Use awareness of self during counselling sessions to enhance the therapeutic process. 3.3 Use clinical supervision to develop awareness of own implicit processes.

Unit 6	Working within a coherent framework of counselling theory and skills
1. Use a coherent framework of theory and skills to inform and enhance counselling work	1.1 Use theory of the self, personal history and relationships in client work. 1.2 Use theory of therapeutic change to inform client work. 1.3 Use research findings to enhance understanding of client work. 1.4 Use counselling skills and techniques associated with own theoretical approach.
2. Understand and work with client problems at different service levels	2.1 Understand and work with common life problems and obstacles to well-being. 2.2 Understand and work with common mental health problems. 2.3 Use clinical supervision to identify clients with severe mental health problems and support the referral process. 2.4 Reflect on different approaches to understanding mental health.
Unit 7	**Working self-reflectively as a counsellor**
1. Manage own development as a counsellor	1.1 Evaluate own progress, identify needs and plan learning. 1.2 Assist other counselling trainees to identify their progress and learning needs.
2. Reflect on and evaluate own counselling work within agency settings	2.1 Reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of own counselling work in agency settings. 2.2 Prepare for and use clinical supervision effectively. 2.3 Investigate the use of evaluative tools in counselling work.

See the TC-L4 Tutor Guide for candidate guidance to criteria and notes for tutors.

3. Minimum Assessment Requirements

To achieve the qualification, candidates must be internally assessed as **Proficient** in all 7 units of the qualification.

Candidates must give **two** pieces of evidence for each criterion. In addition, the Candidate Learning Record (CLR), when complete, must include references to all three assessment methods (documents, tutor observation and testimony) for **each** of the 7 units.

INTERNAL ASSESSMENT – must include all three methods of assessment		
Course activities	**Assessment method** [10]	**Types of evidence** (2 references for each assessment criterion)
• Agency work experience • Professional discussion and workshops • Seminars, personal development workshops and group work • Projects and presentations • Review of understanding, skills and client work • Review of learning • Tutorials	**Documents**	• Learning review [11] • 2 self-reviews [12] • 2 case studies [13] • 2 assignments: a) On the service level framework (client-need and outcomes) b) On the theoretical framework (application of understanding to self and client work) • Client record: 100+ hrs (one-to-one) min 5 different clients • Clinical supervision record [14] • Therapy record: 10+ hours [15] • Tutorial records (when written by the candidate)
• Assessed counselling practice • Assessed case presentations • Assessed workplace simulation • Group work • Tutorials • Group Training Supervision	**Tutor observation**	• Four tutor-observed counselling practice sessions (2 via audio or video) • 2 case presentations • Workplace simulations • Tutorial records (when written by the tutor)
• Agency work-place experience • Counselling practice • Group work • Case presentations • Group training supervision • Seminars and workshops	**Testimony**	• 1 supervisor report • 1 agency report and/or feedback • Peer feedback
MARKING SCHEME		
Internal assessment:	Candidates must achieve all the learning outcomes of all seven mandatory units to be assessed as Proficient.	

[10] Proforma and guide sheets for internal assessment can be downloaded from the CPCAB Website.
[11] This is an on-going review of learning during the course (also called a "learning journal").
[12] Self -review of learning, progress, and completion of the learning tasks (criteria). Templates available on the CPCAB website.
[13] The case study and case presentation may be linked.
[14] CPCAB recommends that the candidate's agency provides appropriate clinical supervision to meet the requirements of their chosen ethical framework or professional membership association. For example, BACP Supervision Guidelines for trainees require a minimum of 1½ hours individual supervision per month (or the equivalent if in group supervision) or 1 hour of supervision for every 8 hours of client work.
[15] The therapy requirement should be consistent with the centre's own theoretical model/approach. In practice this means that many centres will require more than the minimum of 10 hours.

4. Tutor-Assessor Qualifications and Experience

Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4)					
	Minimum qualification	Personal therapy + professional association membership	On-going Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Minimum practice experience	Minimum experience as tutor
Core tutor *two required if teaching separately	420 hours therapeutic counselling qualification at level 4 or above e.g. TC-L4	10 hours of personal therapy And Member of a professional association for counselling or psychotherapy	30 hours per year CPD activities	Current practitioner with 2 years' supervised counselling practice or minimum 450 counselling hours And Supervision qualification or 1 year experience of providing supervision to groups or individuals in a counselling setting	Teaching qualification And 2 years teaching and assessing at level 2 and 3 or above
Additional tutor(s) *relevant if co-tutoring with core tutor	420 hours therapeutic counselling qualification at level 4 or above e.g. TC-L4	10 hours of personal therapy And Member of a professional association for counselling or psychotherapy	30 hours per year CPD activities	Current supervised counselling practice with a minimum of 6 months post-qualifying practice experience.	Teaching qualification or be working towards one And 1 year teaching and assessing at level 2 and 3 or above

5. Candidate Entry Requirements

This qualification is not suitable for those who are currently in a state of severe emotional difficulty and/or severe psychological distress. Centres need to ensure that all potential candidates are made aware of the nature of the course, and in particular that the course involves experiential elements that will involve some personal disclosure and associated personal developmental activities.

Title	Age	Entry requirements	Criteria considered important for selecting candidates
TC-L4	19 or over	CSK-L2 and CST-L3/CAST-L3[16]or equivalent qualifications	✓ Identify reasons for training beyond just personal development ✓ Provide references ✓ Academically and emotionally able to cope with this level of training ✓ Ability to work with difference and diversity ✓ Possess personal qualities of imagination, intuition, openness and ability to benefit from self-development ✓ Ability to form a therapeutic relationship ✓ Self-awareness, insight, honesty and integrity ✓ Emotional stability and the absence of personality disturbance ✓ Ability to challenge and be challenged ✓ Ability to respond sensitively and empathically to others ✓ Capability to begin working with clients within an agency setting ✓ Are intending (and actively seeking) to begin work with clients during year 1 of the programme

We recommend that tutors carry out a face to face individual interview to ascertain a candidate's suitability for this level of training.

6. Fit for Purpose

This qualification leads to being a qualified counsellor and fulfils the requirements of a range of professional association registers. It also maps to a range of competency frameworks, and occupational standards. This section is intended to help learners make informed choices about the qualifications they wish to study and how they will enable learners to reach their personal and professional goals.

As a learner continues their journey with the **CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling**, they are embarking on professional practitioner training which leads to qualified counsellor status and enables them

[16] Tutors can admit candidates to TC-L4 even if they have not yet completed their assessment for CST-L3 provided they achieve this before entry to year 2. Special arrangements can occasionally be made to allow entry of suitably qualified trainees into year 2 of TC-L4 – please contact the CPCAB head office for further guidance.

to register with professional associations for counsellors, gain insurance, and work in the field of counselling.

CPCAB qualifications are designed to build upon each other, ensuring that the required skills and knowledge are developed alongside the personal growth of the learner. This qualification is based on current research and adheres to the CPCAB's model for practitioner development, ensuring that training meets the highest professional standards.

Learners will receive live teaching either in-person or in an online classroom, which will include real-time interaction with peers and tutor(s). They will practice what they are learning, receive feedback on their use of counselling skills, and gain insights about themselves through their engagement with others. This live human connection is considered essential when training in an area such as counselling.

Counselling and Psychotherapy Career Progression

The TC-L4 is designed to provide learners with the skills, knowledge and personal awareness required for a career as a counsellor. The TC-L4 enables learners to register with the following counselling professional association registers, which are accredited by the Professional Standards Authority (PSA):

- ✓ BACP – British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
- ✓ NCPS – National Counselling and Psychotherapy Society
- ✓ ACC – Association of Christians in Counselling and Linked Professions
- ✓ COSCA – Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland
- ✓ UKCP – United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy – SET's for Psychotherapeutic Counselling. Please note that progressing to UKCP will also require a CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Psychotherapeutic Counselling (PC-L5) (see separate mapping for more information on additional centre requirements).

This qualification is mapped to the requirements of the Scope of Practice and Education (SCoPEd) framework.

- ✓ The CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling meets the requirements of SCoPEd Column A. The mapping document which provides a comprehensive overview of how SCoPEd competences in Column A map to the Assessment Criteria of CPCAB Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling (TC-L4) can be found here.

Where this qualification is offered by a centre approved to deliver the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP**) Approved Practitioner Qualification (APQ)** version of the TC-L4, learners can be further assured that the qualification is quality checked annually by the BACP, and tutors and candidates work within the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions. Learners studying this version will also have the opportunity to sit the BACP Certificate of Proficiency (CoP) facilitated at their centre and will receive a qualification certificate showing dual logos of the CPCAB and the BACP.

This qualification has been given **Recognised Professional Qualification** status by the National Counselling & Psychotherapy Society (NCPS) and, subject to the Society's terms and conditions, is a route onto a national register of counsellors which is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority. Learners studying this qualification will receive a qualification certificate showing dual logos of the CPCAB and NCPS.

The qualification is also mapped to the BACP Core Curriculum and the QAA benchmark standards for counselling and psychotherapy.

This qualification fully maps to the essential competencies from the following framework:

- ✓ BACP OPT Core training curriculum

This qualification, in combination with the CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Psychotherapeutic Counselling (PC-L5), maps to the essential competencies for:

- ✓ UKCP Adults SET's for Psychotherapeutic Counselling (see separate mapping for more information on additional centre requirements).

Occupational Mapping

This qualification is mapped to a range of the competencies within the following suites of National Occupational Standards (NOS), developed and maintained by the Sector Skills Council – Skills for Health:

- ✓ General Health Care
- ✓ Health and Social Care
- ✓ Mental Health - Adults

This qualification fully maps to the approved occupational standard 'Counsellor' in the Skills England occupational maps which is recognised as a Higher Technical Occupation within the Health & Science Pathway. The TC-L4 is recognised as a Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ).

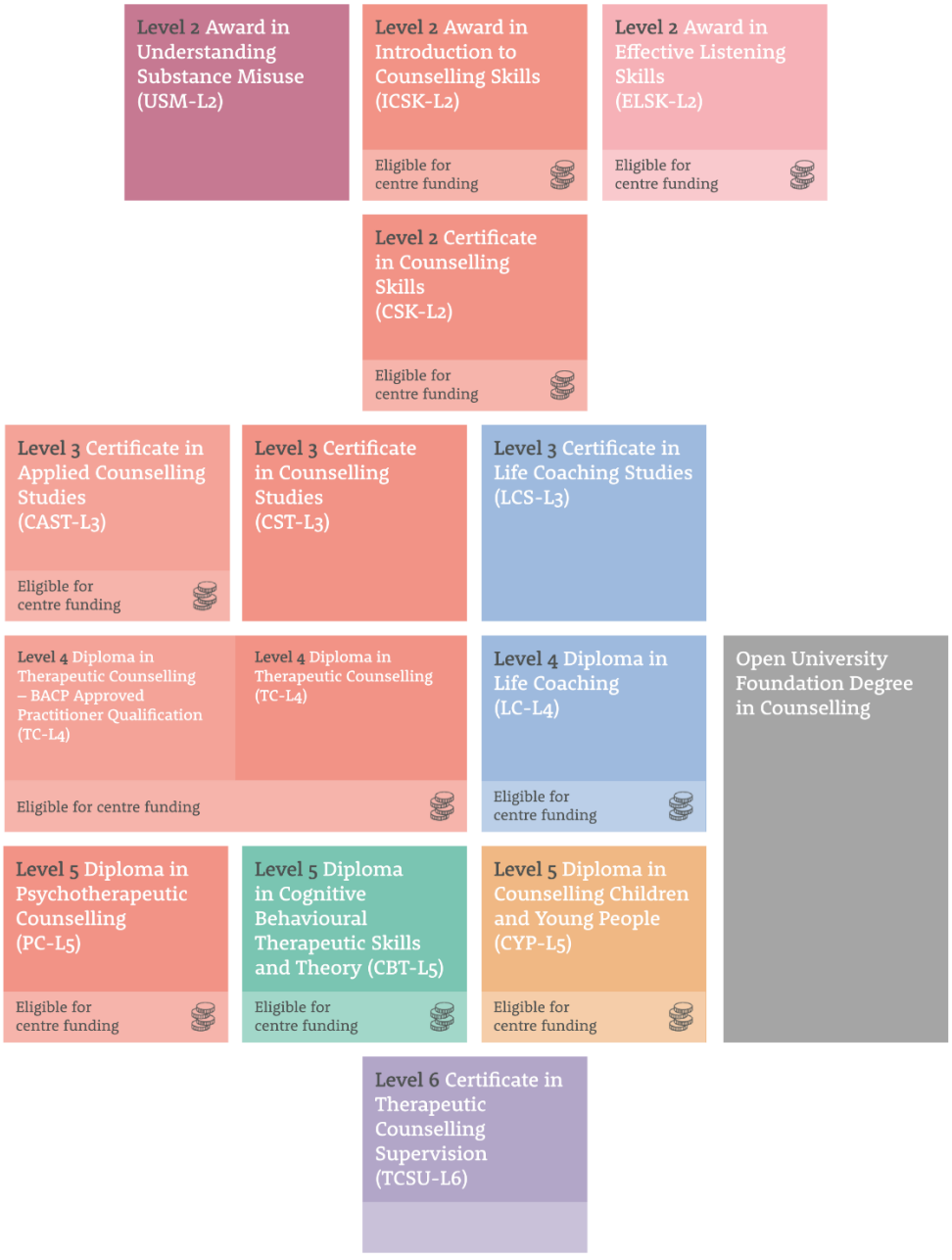
This qualification also provides a range of competencies for allied and linked professions for those who are completing this training to improve employability and progression in a range of other occupations. The skills and knowledge gained in this qualification contribute towards employability in a range of occupational standards represented in the Skills England occupational maps.

This alignment ensures that this qualification is not only comprehensive but also up-to-date with the latest practices in counselling, psychotherapy and other linked professions.

The assessment strategy maintains a focus on practitioner skills and qualities as well as on written evidence. The combination of tutor assessment and separate external verification by CPCAB values both objective independent scrutiny and the relational knowledge of the candidate and their work. The qualification is reviewed annually to ensure it remains fit-for-purpose.

Centres have to meet robust centre approval requirements before they can deliver this qualification. All tutors are approved and standardised by CPCAB, and centres are visited twice a year by a CPCAB external verifier.

7. Progression Routes

TC-L4 is part of a suite of CPCAB qualifications. Candidates who have completed this qualification may progress to CPCAB Level 5 Diploma in Psychotherapeutic Counselling (PC-L5) or Level 5 Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutic Skills and Theory (CBT-L5), Level 5 Diploma in Counselling Children and Young People (CYP-L5) or the Open University Foundation Degree in Counselling. Following the necessary counselling experience, they can also progress to CPCAB Level 6 Certificate in Therapeutic Counselling Supervision (TCSU-L6). This qualification is also accepted for credit transfer at HE institutions such as the Open University.

For details of all CPCAB qualifications please see below or click here: [Qualifications - CPCAB] for further information.