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Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) Practitioner Training

For NHS secondary care staff working with people with Complex Relational Problems

Course Prospectus

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1. NHS England CAT Practitioner Training

The course aims to provide training in Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) to Practitioner Level. It is funded by NHS England and supports the expansion of psychological therapies for severe mental health problems in adult community services. It was initially specific for staff in community services working with adults (including older people) with complex relational problems and adverse childhood experience, who would be likely to meet criteria for a diagnosis of “Borderline Personality Disorder” or “Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD)”. Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) can support funded places be allocated to staff in other services.

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) Practitioner training enables core mental health professionals to learn the theory and methods of CAT as an individual therapy applied to adult mental health, as well as introduction to CAT in groups and consultation settings. The course takes a minimum of two years to complete and is assessed, leading to accreditation as a CAT Practitioner and eligibility for full membership of Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy (ACAT)¹. The course provides mental health professionals with competence as a psychological therapist in the full use of CAT with individuals and, with appropriate supervision, contextual CAT and CAT in client groups. The course is equivalent to any ACAT accredited CAT Practitioner and can count as the first half of the route to UKCP accreditation as a CAT Psychotherapist.

Although CAT uses a formulatory model of describing clients’ problems in terms of their life experience and coping strategies, the CAT practitioner course equips professionals to work with clients with more complex relational problems and adverse childhood experience. Although CAT is a transdiagnostic method which does not rely on medical diagnostic categories, these clients would be likely to meet criteria for diagnoses of Borderline Personality Disorder² or Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder³ and would fall within the scope of NICE guidance: (<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg78/evidence/bpd-full-guideline-242147197>).

Three course centres were approved to recruit trainees from 2023 and the first cohorts began training in October 2023: Catalyse to cover North West, Midlands, and towards Yorkshire and the Humber; Cumbria, Newcastle, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust for the North East; and Sussex Partnership in the South East covering Sussex, London, Suffolk and Norfolk (with a secondary SE course centre in Brighton delivering the 2024 cohort). A fourth course for South West was approved to recruit trainees from 2024 and took their first cohort in Spring 2025. Trainees can now access training NHS England funded CAT training across the whole of England.

A Partnership Board for NHS England funded courses meets regularly comprising of course directors, an ACAT Trustee and NHS England Regional Psychology Leads and National Leads when appropriate

2. Aims of CAT Training

The training aims to provide an understanding of the integrated theory of CAT as it applies to human development including the impact on development of difficult life experiences. It also aims to provide trainees with skills to deliver the collaborative, structured therapy of CAT within public services and trainees’ core professions.

¹ <https://acat.org.uk/>

² Diagnostic & Statistical Manual (DSMIV & V) American Psychiatric Association

³ International Classification of Diseases, Eleventh Revision (ICD-11), World Health Organization (WHO) 2019/2021
<https://icd.who.int/browse11>.

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Cognitive Analytic therapy is an integrated theory, and the training starts from this position of integration, rather than teaching different theories, which are integrated at the end. It is recognised that trainees may wish to deepen their knowledge of specific elements by in-depth reading or further independent training. This can only enhance individual learning, as well as contribute to the collective input by trainees to the course.

The training seeks to apply the key CAT principles of collaboration and to work within trainees' 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Vygotsky) in the enfolding learning process between trainer and trainee. Through a structured but collaborative process the training aims to maximise each trainee's capacity to learn within psychotherapy. This requires the active participation of both trainee and trainer in the learning process, with the aim of enabling the trainee to reach a point, where they can feel confident in their capacity to direct their own learning.

All CAT training aims to conduct itself with an awareness of the importance of respect for difference in society, whether this is in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, ethnic, religious or cultural difference. This is not simply because it is a moral imperative to address the complex issues of equal opportunities but because welcoming difference enriches our lives and relationships and because so much of the distress of our clients is caused or exacerbated by issues of exclusion, discrimination and unequal access to opportunity. All trainees will be expected to approach their learning, as well as their fellow trainees, course contributors and clients from this perspective.

3. The CAT practitioner 'graduate'

Successful study on the course will equip you as a trainee with a range of CAT skills, including assessment skills, therapeutic skills using the CAT model and its tools. Although you work with clients with complex needs for which CAT is particularly helpful, the training is designed in such a way to equip you with the ability to flexibly use CAT with clients with a range of presenting difficulties, and in the wider context within which they are seen.

The course aims to provide you with a broad understanding of the theoretical and therapeutic contributions and challenges provided by other therapeutic approaches, and with a growing ability to engage in communication and debate of these issues. You will be taught the basic tenets and value of evidence-based practice, evaluation/audit and research literacy.

You will be given an opportunity within a collaborative framework to develop your capacity for self-reflection as an individual and a therapist, which should contribute to an increased ability to handle uncertainty and conflict. This will include an enhanced understanding of personal motivations and 'procedures' that may draw you as an individual to therapeutic work, and the impact this and possible personal agendas and positive qualities could have on the therapeutic relationship.

The aim is for you to have developed a sound sense of yourself as a professional CAT therapist by the end of the training. This will include the demonstration of a collaborative stance and of an ability to operate within a person's 'zone of proximal development', of self-reflective practice and the maintenance of a critical faculty. It will also involve being able to take personal responsibility for the ethical practice of CAT, for the practical and sustainable management of a CAT workload and for individual Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

4. Entry Requirements

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they are academically capable of undertaking postgraduate study, having either a first degree or equivalent qualification, or other assessed evidence of equivalent academic capability.

You will already have (and will be asked to demonstrate) relevant experience of working with people in a mental health setting within psychotherapeutic boundaries and a qualification in an NHS recognised mental health core profession (mental health nursing, clinical psychology, counselling psychology, forensic psychology, psychiatry, occupational therapy, social work, psychological therapy, art / drama / music therapy, or counselling - [ScoPEd](#) B Practitioner).

For this course, applicants will usually have a minimum of twelve months experience of working with clients who meet criteria for a diagnosis of 'personality disorder', including the difficulties described by 'borderline' or 'emotionally unstable' personality disorder'. Through this experience applicants will be expected to have acquired the "core competences for work with individuals with personality disorder" outlined in column one of the Roth and Pilling Competence framework (UCL Centre for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness); <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/competency-maps/pd-map.html>. N.B. CAT training will not focus on these competences. For staff working in other services it is likely that they will be working with clients with similar challenging life experiences and are looking to CAT training to support their work as therapists.

Applicants must have personal qualities that make them suitable for practising psychological therapy and have sufficient emotional competence to deal with the psychological aspects of the work. These qualities will normally include a lively and enquiring mind, an ability to listen and respond with compassion and respect and without prejudice, evidence of self-reflection, self-awareness and a commitment to self-development. Applicants should demonstrate awareness and sensitivity to issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, disability, ethnic and cultural difference.

Applicants for NHS commissioned CAT training must have experience of a minimum of one year of practice of psychological therapy/interventions, or counselling (at least half a day per week), plus a minimum of one year of recognised training in psychological therapy/interventions or counselling. The experience would ideally have been gained in the NHS and as this training is funded by the NHS, there needs to be a commitment for graduates of this training to continue to apply their skills in the NHS.

Through this experience all applicants would be expected to demonstrate that they have acquired or are working towards the core generic therapeutic competences <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/clinical-psychology/competency-maps/cat-map.html>. CAT training will focus on these competences from a CAT model perspective and applicants would need to ensure that they gain competence at the completion of CAT training, as this will be assessed.

5. Selection

Short-listed applicants will be invited to interview conducted by the course trainers who are experienced CAT therapists and supervisors. A set number of questions are asked with scope to expand on areas of strength and/or potential limitations. The interview provides an opportune time for applicants to ensure they have all information needed to make a decision about participating in the course. Applicants are informed as soon as possible if they are offered a place and given feedback if not. The letter offering a place also provides provisional information for

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preparation for the training. This would be a good time to flag any learning needs or adjustments that might be required or any disabilities that might need special accommodation.

6. Your learning

Training in psychotherapy is an active and demanding process, as it involves the personality and personal resources of each trainee, as well as academic learning and clinical application. It can feel exposing at times, as your practice and thinking are explored, often in a group setting. You must expect to set aside a minimum of an hour and a half each week for reading on top of the core requirements of the course. Deadlines will be expected to be met, with extensions given only in exceptional circumstances.

7. An overview of the course components

Training days

These will consist of a combination of preliminary reading, lecture format presentations, group discussions, experiential learning, video material, skills practice and case discussions as appropriate. They will be led by the course core trainers with some visiting speakers. The training days are delivered in person. The themes covered by the course over the two years include CAT's model of the self, core CAT concepts, skills and tools, the therapeutic relationship, transference and counter-transference, personal and professional development (boundaries, limits, roles and endings), the theoretical integration of CAT theory, the CAT model of complex presentations, and specialist techniques and applications of CAT.

Seminar groups

The aim of the seminar groups is to support and extend the work of the training days and to hold the continuity of the course content. They will consist of small groups of trainees meeting across the year. Each group will have some input from a seminar group leader, who facilitates a mixture of problem-based learning, discussion, and guided reading. However, the aim is to encourage trainees to take an active approach to their learning, to apply theory to practice and to identify gaps in knowledge which their own activity can meet. The course trainers will provide the reading material and guidelines to assist study. Seminar groups can take place on line.

Clinical practice

For CAT Practitioner training you would usually be expected to complete eight CAT therapies under the supervision of an ACAT accredited supervisor. The work should include a range of problems and clients/service users, including working in the latter part of the training with clients with more complex difficulties. Although you need to develop the skill to confidently practice 16 session CAT you should (where possible) also gain experience in variations of the time limit of 8 sessions and 24 sessions. The recommendation for accreditation is six 16 session cases, one 24 session case and one 8 session CAT. ACAT accreditation guidance is as follows:

For submission for accreditation the following applies: A minimum 8 cases; minimum 128 hours (excluding follow-up sessions); with a minimum of 6 cases which have 16 or more sessions. All 3 key tools (RL, SDR, GL) must be used in each of the submitted cases, other than 8 session CATs when a SDR and 'hybrid' (reformulation /goodbye) letter shared at the end of therapy is a recommended alternative.

For NHS England funded trainees on an approved CAT Practitioner course where the course is specifically for trainees working with clients with severe and complex mental health problems associated with a diagnosis of 'personality disorder' an alternative case mix is accepted for accreditation. For this client group 24 session CAT is

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the recommended and evidence-based intervention, so a higher number of your training cases are likely to be 24 sessions in length (rather than the 16 session model for other difficulties). Consequently, for this course, due to the service context, the ACAT hours requirement remains 128 hours but 6 cases would be accepted as meeting this hours requirement if they were 24 session CATs – hence 6 cases x 24 sessions would be acceptable for ACAT accreditation.

However, we recommend that trainees do not ideally do 6 x 24 session cases but that they also learn the 16 session 'standard' original CAT model which is for clients with less complex difficulties who would usually be offered 16 session CAT. This supports the learning needed to work at different session lengths and allows trainees to work more responsively after qualifying. In line with standard CAT Practitioner training practice, we would therefore prefer that trainees do 8 cases with at least one of those being a 24 session CAT, and where clinical need allows it, at least one being a 16 session case. If you complete 24 session CATs there is scope to do an 8 session CAT if this is applicable for your case load.

In summary, if trainees have been unable to do an 8 or 16 session CAT due to a clinical need for longer cases and have completed six 24 session cases, those six can be put forward for accreditation; however, we do not want trainees to start their cases with the expectation that this is what they will do. Rather, we would like trainees to get the breadth of experience that a range of session durations affords across 8 cases.

Supervision will take place on a weekly basis, usually for one and a half hours in groups of three trainees. Time will be allocated with an average minimum of 15 minutes weekly per client, but with flexibility in the allocation according to client and trainee need. There must be a minimum of 40 supervision groups per year, and you are expected to attend regularly. You will be expected to remain in supervision until the completion of all clinical work, which will normally take a minimum of two years. In order to reach this goal you are likely to need to start seeing clients shortly after the start of the course and to carry two clients concurrently throughout the course. Clinical case work can overrun especially if there are gaps between cases, therapy drop outs and other clinical issues. It's important to be aware of this because of the need to extend supervision.

Supervisors need to be ACAT accredited supervisors. For NHS England funded trainees the cost of supervision for two years is included in the course fees. You may be able to access CAT supervision in your work place or from a supervisor working outside your service who may supervise your work with your clients or with theirs. The course can agree with you the most suitable options. This will be the most suitable in terms of geography, time and to form a group with cohort members. Supervision is ideally in person but a proportion can be conducted remotely, usually in the second year. ACAT advise 75% is in person, ideally with a minimum of 50% in person.

Supervisors will be asked to provide feedback on your development and use of supervision at regular intervals, this takes place twice each year using the clinical appraisal form. This will be based on a collaborative discussion, where you will jointly identify developmental aims and targets, and where you will also have the opportunity to comment on your experience of the supervision and to make suggestions for changes.

If supervision is paid for as it cannot be provided in house by an ACAT accredited supervisor, funding is usually for two years. You would monitor use of the funds with your supervisor but would need to identify funding if supervision extended beyond the two years. For NHS England funded trainees, the host NHS Trust would be asked to provide financial support for supervision extending beyond the two years.

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NB Additional clinical practice for NHS England funded trainees

The course requirement is to be seeing two clients as CAT Training cases at any one time, and this allows you to see 8 clients over two years. You will be attending supervision weekly, seminars (approximately eight a year) and training days (approximately 10 days a year). NHS England funded trainees may be released from their main role for this training for up to two days a week. Trainees may see more than two clients for CAT in this time but these are likely to be in addition to the training cases needed to meet the course requirements. They would enhance your learning.

Personal 'Training' Therapy

Within the field of psychotherapy training, each individual involved also makes a commitment to personal development in order to better understand their own reciprocal roles and procedures so that these are not enacted unhelpfully with clients or on the course. Personal therapy is considered an essential part of the process of becoming a CAT practitioner in order to empathically understand the challenges of receiving a CAT therapy as well as delivering it. Trainees are therefore required to undertake at minimum a 16 session, weekly CAT plus follow up during the course. You are strongly encouraged to undertake it, or at a minimum to have set it up, before the end of the first year of the course. Most trainees find it an invaluable experience, which invariably deepens the understanding of the process and application of CAT.

A list of ACAT accredited CAT therapists is available on the ACAT website and some courses provide additional lists of therapists willing to offer training therapies but are not otherwise listed as private therapists. The confidentiality of the personal therapy will be respected and this aspect of the training is not assessed.

For the personal therapy you choose your own ACAT accredited therapist and the course needs only know that the therapy was completed. Consequently, the contract is between you and the therapist. There is variation in the fees therapists charge and the course can only give an estimate. Based on hourly rates of £80 to £90 per session for a 16 session CAT with follow-up the therapy fee will range from £1360-£1530. NHS England trainees have allocated funding for the personal therapy up to £80 per session. This can be paid directly to your therapist once you have organised your therapy. Any shortfall between the funding provided by the training programme and the total cost of your therapy would be your responsibility to meet.

8. Course assessment and completion

Assessment

Successful completion of the course will comprise of regular 85% attendance at all aspects of the course so include satisfactory attendance at training days and seminars; satisfactory supervisor clinical appraisals; pass marks for two case studies (one at the end of each year) and for two essays about the application of CAT concepts in trainees' clinical work of up to 4,000 words each.

Please note that for NHS England courses, both the first year and second year case studies require you to record the therapy. The first year case study requires submission of an audio recording of one session with accompanying analysis and reflection as part of the assessment. The second year case study requires inclusion of transcribed sections from across the therapy but not submission of the recordings. Trainees will receive feedback and although trainees need to pass each case study, our aim is that trainees will experience the feedback on practice as part of a developmental process rather than just an evaluative one.

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The year one session recording will be scored on the Competence in CAT (CCAT) Measure. Trainees need to reach satisfactory scores on generic therapeutic competences on CCAT at the end of year 1 and be progressing towards satisfactory scores on CAT competences. The course will advise you of submission arrangements but you will need to check your employer's data security policies around recording and submission of the session recording for marking. The course will have a data security policy that explains how they will look after this which will be available to you in the course handbook.

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

Unlike traditional CAT training this NHS CAT curriculum does not recognise prior cases where you may have completed a CAT therapy with a client and been supervised by an ACAT accredited supervisor as contributing to the qualification.

Completion

CAT practitioner courses are designed for adult learners and it is recognised it is not easy to include the demands of training in the context of a busy working and home life. Post qualification training is a demanding schedule, requiring considerable commitment and effort. The course holds to its responsibilities and is clear in its expectations of trainees. This approach aims to help trainees to meet the requirements.

It is important that trainees commit to attending all aspects of the course. Each trainee offers a unique contribution to the learning of the group as a whole and this is missed in the case of non-attendance. If you miss more than 15% of the course this must be made up through for example, completion of related material, missed days in a future cohort or a self-study module. Where the attendance requirement is not met this will lead to course failure unless there are strong extenuating circumstances.

Sometimes exceptional circumstances beyond the trainee's control arise which mean that course components cannot be completed on time, in which case an adapted plan and timetable for meeting the course requirements is put together between the trainee, clinical supervisor and course tutor and director. Any extension arrangements must be formally approved by the course director.

People may need to interrupt their studies and the course will aim to accommodate that, which means that people may join or leave the course year group at stages in the training, for reasons such as maternity leave or relocation. Rejoining the course when the trainee is ready following an interruption will be accommodated where possible, Trainees may transfer between courses/ education providers with the agreement of the Course Director and the respective NHS England Regional Leads.

Trainee Support

Training in CAT can be an active, demanding process and trainees often go through a period of personal change during the course. It is important for trainees to be aware and open to this process and to ensure there is enough reflective space within their week to digest these experiences. During the formal two years course trainers will oversee your learning and there are systems in place to assist you and help resolve any difficulties which arise during training. Depending on the training site, these may include tutors, trainee advisors, BAME mentors and Experts by Experience mentors.

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Timescale

CAT Practitioner Training is a formal two-year course in which the academic training days, seminars and clinical supervision groups run over a two calendar year period. All teaching is delivered in this period. For many trainees the supervised clinical practice requirements to see eight clients for CAT can take more than two years. This reflects a variety of factors including access to suitable training cases, client drop-outs and work place issues. Trainees are encouraged to plan as effectively as possible to increase the likelihood that they can complete close to two years, by for example ensuring that any necessary arrangements to set up service contracts occur ahead of the course start date, identifying suitable training cases for the start of the course and identifying suitable clients consistently throughout the two years. NHS England provide supervision fees for two years and trainees may need to consider the cost of additional supervision if there is a need to extend this. We aim to support trainees to complete the course.

9. What Managerial Support is needed?

All applicants require full support for the course from their current manager, from whom we ask for a reference. Applicants should be aware of and confirm, along with their sponsoring manager, that they and their service are able to commit to all components of the training, including up to two days per week to deliver CAT therapy during and after completion of training.

It is extremely helpful to have a working agreement with your manager on undertaking the course, to ensure all parties are clear about the requirements to complete the course. This also applies if you move posts while training. The agreement relates in particular to the time available to attend training days and supervision; and support to access appropriate training cases in a timely way. We supply a suggested working agreement for managers and you will be required to supply a signed copy before starting the course.

10. Codes of practice

The training course will adhere to ACAT's Codes of Practice for Trainers, Supervisors and Practitioners. There is a clear complaints procedure.

11. Course contact details and core training teams

The courses are principally located within NHS regions. Apply using the application form to the course within your region. The South East course alternates the delivery between London and Brighton. There may be situations when trainees on the borders between two courses, for example in the East of England may be offered a place on a course outside their region (e.g. Catalyse course) due to ease of travel and capacity in any given year. The partnership board will work collaboratively to manage these situations to ensure that there is access to CAT training in a timely way.

Submit the application form to the course in your region, see accompanying map of NHS Regions:

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/HEE%20REGIONAL%20Map.pdf>

Areas 1-4: North -East site (please note areas 2-4 may also be covered by the North-West site)

Areas 5-18: North-West site

Areas 19-35: South-East site

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Areas 36-42: South West site

Details of course start dates and the application process are through NHS Regional leads and course centres:

For the NE site, contact csptraining@cntw.nhs.uk

For the NW site, contact info@catalyse.uk.com or <https://catalyse.uk.com/training/practitioner-training/>

For the SE site, contact spft.cat@nhs.net.

For the SW site, contact: cft.cat-sw@nhs.net

12. Where can I learn more about CAT?

There is a public listing of introductory reading about CAT at <https://www.acat.org.uk/cat-explained/reading-about-cat> There are two brief introductory books: *Cognitive Analytic Therapy: Distinctive Features* by Claire Corbridge et al., Routledge (2017) and *A Beginner's Guide to Cognitive Analytic Therapy: Practitioner and Service User Perspective* by Sarah Craven-Staines and Jayne Finch (2024). The most recent core text is the CAT Handbook published by Oxford University Press <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/56216?login=false> A number of courses provide access to the Handbook, some NHS Trusts have purchased access for their staff and it is also available to all ACAT members.

There is a more extensive but public listing of the evidence base at <https://www.acat.org.uk/resources/cats-evidence-base>. There is a bibliography of the CAT literature that you can access as an ACAT member and ACAT Friend in the Member only resources section at <https://www.acat.org.uk/membership/member-only-resources>. There is an accessible although slightly old summary of CAT by psychiatry trainees which is freely available too - <https://epg.pubpub.org/pub/cat/release/5>. All the International CAT (ICATA) journals are open access at their website at <https://www.internationalcat.org/journals> if you see any papers there that appeal. A useful, and very creative, self-help book on CAT is *Change for the Better*, by Elizabeth Wilde McCormick; (5th edition 2017: Sage).