



Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) Practitioner Training

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

Course Prospectus 2025-2027

1. NHS England CAT Practitioner Training
2. Aims of CAT training
3. The 'CAT' practitioner graduate
4. Entry Requirements
5. Selection
6. Your learning
7. An overview of the course components
Training day dates, seminar groups, supervised clinical work, personal therapy
8. Course completion & evaluation
Completion, assessment, accreditation of prior learning, trainee advisors, timescale
9. What sort of managerial support is required?
10. Codes of practice
11. Course contact details and core training teams
12. Where can I find out more about CAT?

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 is to support the expansion of psychological therapies for severe mental health problems. This training is for NHS staff working with adults (including older people) with 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)”.

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>).

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 the 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.

Cognitive Analytic Therapy has 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

¹ <https://www.acat.me.uk/page/home>

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>.

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).

For this course, applicants will 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/brain-sciences/sites/brain_sciences/files/pd-map.pdf. N.B. CAT training will not focus on these competences.

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/brain-sciences/sites/brain_sciences/files/cat-map.pdf. CAT training will focus on developing the CAT-specific therapeutic competences and trainees would need to ensure that they show competence in these at the completion of CAT training through the training assessment process.

5. Selection

Short-listed applicants will be invited to interview with experienced CAT trainers. A set number of questions are asked of all, 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. 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. 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 preparation for the training.

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 10 training days per year 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 for 16 hours per year. Each group will have some input from a seminar group leader, who facilitates a mixture of problem-based learning, discussion, and guided reading. The aim is to encourage trainees to take an active approach to their learning needs, 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 and will approve arrangements. Seminar groups can take place online.

Clinical practice

In line with standard CAT Practitioner training practice, trainees are expected to complete 8 supervised cases, usually seeing 2 cases concurrently. At least one of those 8 cases should be a 24 session CAT, and where clinical need allows it, at least one of the 8 cases should be a 16 session case. It is also theoretically possible for one case to be an 8 session case although given the populations of most trainees, we do not anticipate this often occurring. If trainees have been unable to do an 8 or 16 session CAT due to clinical need for longer cases, and have completed six 24 session cases, those six can be put forward for accreditation; however, the course preference is for trainees to get the breadth of experience that a range of session durations affords.

Supervision

Supervision will take place on a weekly basis, usually for one and a half hours in groups of three trainees. An average of 15 minutes per client per week will be allocated in supervision, 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 need to start seeing clients shortly after the start of the course and to carry two clients concurrently throughout the training.

Supervisors need to be ACAT accredited supervisors. You may be able to access CAT supervision in your workplace 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 other cohort members. Supervision is ideally in person but a proportion can be conducted remotely if there is no alternative. ACAT advise 75% is in person, ideally with a minimum of 50% in person. For NHS England funded trainees, the cost of any external supervision required is included in the course fees.

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.

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. 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.

The first year case study requires submission of an audio recording of one session with accompanying analysis and reflection as part of the assessment. This will be scored on the Competence in CAT (CCAT) Measure and a satisfactory rating must be achieved. Two fails on the same assessment will normally constitute course failure. The course will advise you of submission arrangements but you will need to check your employer's data security policies around taping and submission of the recording for marking. The course have established data security procedures to protect both patients and therapists. The second year case study requires recording an entire therapy with passages of transcribed material reflected upon in the case study write up.

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 demanding, 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. Any missed sessions must be made up through completion of 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 NHSE 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. Tutors and mentors are available.

Timescale

CAT Practitioner Training is a formal two-year course in which the academic training days, seminars and clinical supervision groups run over a 2 calendar year period. All teaching is delivered in this period. For many trainees, the supervised clinical practice requirements to see 8 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 in 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' services will need to cover 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. Applicants should be aware of and confirm, along with their sponsoring manager, that they and their service have time realistically allocated to complete all components of the training. NHS England also expect services to allow graduates of training they fund to have two days per week in their jobs to deliver therapy in the modality in which they trained 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.

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

South-East site: Hosted by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

- Robert Marx (Consultant Clinical Psychologist and CAT psychotherapist -) Programmes Director
- Hilary Beard (Consultant Psychotherapist) - Course Director
- Jane Cawdron (Nurse Therapist and CAT Psychotherapist) - Course Director
- Niki Larsen-Johnson and Lara Alvarez-Torres - Training course administrators

Contact the training via: spft.cat@nhs.net.

12. Where can I learn more about CAT?

The main ACAT website, <https://acat.org.uk/> contains various information about CAT. A brief introductory book is "Cognitive Analytic Therapy: Distinctive Features" (Claire Corbridge et al., Routledge 2017). The main CAT textbook is "Introducing Cognitive Analytic Therapy" (Second Edition), by Anthony Ryle and Ian Kerr (Wiley, 2020). A useful, and very creative, self-help book on CAT is "Change for the Better", by Elizabeth Wilde McCormick; (5th edition 2017: Sage).