

General Competency Framework

Purpose of this document

This document sets out our competency framework for psychotherapy training within the British Psychotherapy Foundation (bpf). It is intended to support trainees (who may otherwise be referred to as a student) throughout their training, including:

- trainee development
- formative and summative assessment
- supervisory discussions
- progression reviews
- reflective learning
- identification of support needs

The framework should be read in conjunction with our [Analytical and Ethical Stance of a bpf Trainee](#).

The framework draws on:

- the [University College London \(UCL\) Psychodynamic Competence Framework](#)
- [British Psychoanalytic Council \(BPC\) Training Standards](#)
- psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapy literature concerning clinical competence, reflective practice and professional development

The framework is intended to support developmental learning rather than operate as a rigid checklist. Competencies develop over time and may emerge unevenly across different areas of practice. Individual training models will have extra competencies that will emerge within each training.

The Four Pillars of Psychotherapy Training

bpf psychotherapy training depends upon four interrelated pillars of development. Progression through training requires sufficient engagement and development across all four pillars.

Pillar	Description
Academic Progress	Development of theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, clinical formulation and reflective academic engagement
Clinical Progress	Development of clinical competence through supervised practice

Personal Therapy	Development of self-awareness, reflective capacity and understanding of unconscious processes through personal psychotherapy/analysis. Trainees undertaking qualifying trainings MUST be in therapy throughout their training. Any breaks in therapy must be brought to the training committee and any requests for a change in training analyst must be discussed with the training committee. Please see the Training Analysis policy.
Professional Behaviours	Development of ethical, reliable and professional conduct appropriate to psychotherapeutic practice

These pillars are understood to be interconnected. Difficulties in one area may affect functioning in another. For example, clinical difficulties may relate to personal emotional pressures, or professional reliability may affect the therapeutic frame.

Examples of Evidence Across the Four Pillars

Pillar	Examples of Evidence
Academic Progress	Seminar participation; written assignments; clinical papers; psychoanalytic/psychodynamic formulations; integration of theory into clinical discussions; engagement with reading; evidence of reflective thinking
Clinical Progress	Supervisor reports; clinical assessments; ability to establish and maintain therapeutic frame; evidence of psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic thinking; management of endings and boundaries; capacity to reflect on transference and countertransference; capacity to adopt a neutral and analytic stance
Personal Therapy	Consistent attendance in therapy/analysis; increased self-reflective capacity; greater awareness of emotional responses and interpersonal patterns; capacity to think about personal contributions to clinical dynamics; capacity and willingness to work through difficult relational issues within the analysis; interest in one's own emotional reactions; emotional honesty within oneself; an interest in the internal world
Professional Behaviours	Attendance and punctuality; professional communication with staff and patients; ethical conduct; responsiveness to feedback; ability to provide helpful and constructive feedback; safeguarding awareness; excellent record keeping; reliability; respectful participation in the learning community; ability to think collaboratively and flexibly with colleagues and staff; transparency and honesty in communication of any changes in any element of the training such as changes in training analysis

Competency Framework

1. Therapeutic Relationship and Alliance

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Ability to establish a therapeutic alliance	Patient experiences trainee as engaged, thoughtful and emotionally present
Ability to maintain an empathic stance	Trainee demonstrates curiosity about the patient's experience without premature judgement or reassurance
Ability to create emotional safety	Patient appears able to bring difficult or emotionally charged material
Ability to tolerate emotional intensity	Trainee remains thoughtful rather than reactive when faced with distress, anger, withdrawal or dependency
Ability to maintain therapeutic boundaries	Sessions begin and end appropriately; trainee maintains reliability and consistency
Ability to work with endings and separations	Trainee can think about breaks, absences and endings with the patient rather than avoiding them
Ability to maintain appropriate levels of neutrality	Trainee understands the rationale for not engaging in social conversation, self-disclosure, critical or reassuring responses; remains neutral, non-judgemental; does not bring personal political viewpoints or identities into the relationship

2. Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic Understanding

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Ability to recognise unconscious communication	Trainee notices themes, contradictions, enactments and emotional shifts
Ability to think about defence mechanisms	Trainee identifies possible avoidance, intellectualisation, denial or projection without becoming critical
Ability to recognise transference dynamics	Trainee considers how past relational experiences may be repeated within the therapy

Ability to reflect on countertransference	Trainee can think about their own emotional responses and what these may communicate
Ability to formulate psychoanalytically/psychodynamically	Trainee links current difficulties to developmental and relational patterns
Ability to hold multiple perspectives	Trainee avoids simplistic or overly certain explanations

3. Clinical Technique

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Ability to listen analytically	Trainee listens for underlying meaning, emotional tone and relational patterns
Ability to use clarification appropriately	Trainee helps patient elaborate or think further about experiences
Ability to make tentative interpretations	Interpretations are exploratory rather than intrusive or dogmatic
Ability to judge timing of interventions	Trainee considers when silence, clarification or interpretation may be most helpful
Ability to work with affect	Trainee helps patient stay emotionally connected to important material
Ability to maintain the therapeutic frame	Attention is given to boundaries, consistency, confidentiality and setting

4. Reflective Capacity and Use of Self

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Capacity for self-reflection	Trainee can think openly about mistakes, uncertainty and emotional responses
Ability to use supervision thoughtfully	Supervision is used reflectively rather than defensively
Ability to tolerate uncertainty	Trainee avoids rushing to certainty or problem-solving
Awareness of personal impact on the work	Trainee reflects on how their own assumptions or anxieties may affect the therapy
Capacity to think under emotional pressure	Trainee remains psychologically minded during difficult sessions
Openness to feedback	Trainee demonstrates willingness to hear and consider feedback

5. Academic and Theoretical Development

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Understanding of psychoanalytic theory	Ability to discuss key psychoanalytic and psychodynamic concepts
Ability to integrate theory and practice	Clinical work is linked meaningfully to theoretical understanding
Critical engagement with literature	Trainee demonstrates thoughtful engagement rather than rote learning
Development of clinical formulation skills	Written and verbal formulations show coherence and depth
Ability to think developmentally	Trainee considers attachment, developmental history and relational experiences
Reflective academic writing	Assignments demonstrate reflective and clinically informed thinking

6. Professional and Ethical Practice

Competency	Examples of what this may look like
Professional reliability	Attendance, punctuality and communication are consistent
Ethical awareness	Trainee recognises confidentiality, consent and safeguarding responsibilities
Appropriate record keeping	Clinical notes are clear, respectful and timely
Respectful conduct	Trainee interacts respectfully with patients, peers, staff and supervisors
Awareness of diversity and difference	Trainee demonstrates curiosity and sensitivity regarding culture, identity and difference
Ability to manage professional concerns appropriately	Trainee raises concerns safely and appropriately when needed

Relationship Between Competencies and the Four Pillars

Competency Area	Academic Progress	Clinical Progress	Personal Therapy	Professional Behaviours
Therapeutic relationship	Understanding of attachment and alliance theory	Development of therapeutic alliance	Increased awareness of relational patterns	Respectful communication and reliability
Psychoanalytic/psychodynamic understanding	Theoretical knowledge	Use of formulation and interpretation	Awareness of unconscious processes	Ethical clinical thinking
Clinical technique	Integration of theory into practice	Management of sessions and interventions	Reflection on emotional responses	Maintenance of boundaries
Reflective capacity	Reflective assignments	Use of supervision	Development of self-awareness	Openness to feedback
Professional practice	Knowledge of ethics and safeguarding	Safe clinical work	Reflection on professional identity	Reliability and accountability

Developmental Nature of Competence

Psychodynamic competence develops gradually over time and is influenced by:

- clinical exposure
- supervision
- personal therapy
- academic learning
- emotional development
- reflective capacity

Trainees may demonstrate stronger development in some areas than others at different stages of training. The purpose of assessment is therefore not solely to judge performance, but to support ongoing professional and personal development.

Internal resources

Staff and Students may wish to refer to our [Student Policies and Regulations](#).

External resources

- [University College London \(UCL\) Psychodynamic Competence Framework](#)
- [British Psychoanalytic Council \(BPC\) Training Standards](#)

Version	Date	Description of Amendments	Author
V1	01.07.2026		CEO