

# Using Counselling Skills

## Course plan and sample

### Course plan

The course is divided into 8 topics, each of which is likely to take you between 3 and 4 hours to complete. By the end of the course, you should:

- know what essential counselling skills are
- know how to start a helping relationship
- be able to use essential counselling skills in a helping relationship
- know how to end a helping encounter.

Each topic begins with a brief introduction and list of learning objectives, and ends with a summary. All the topics feature case studies or examples, learning activities and opportunities for reflection and self-assessment.

### Topic 1 Helping relationships and communication skills

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain what the term 'helping relationship' means
- explain the difference between 'using counselling skills' and 'counselling'
- identify some situations where you have observed other people being helped, for example in films, TV dramas or TV documentaries

- describe some of your own experiences of seeking help from other people
- identify a range of helping encounters where you might use counselling skills.

## Topic 2 Essential counselling skills

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify the essential counselling skills covered in this course
- identify the personal qualities or 'core conditions' that are a key part of using counselling skills
- explain how self awareness can help you develop the core conditions.

## Topic 3 Active listening

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- describe some techniques for showing attentiveness
- identify some non-verbal communication signals
- use observation skills to increase your understanding
- explain why it is important to listen to the whole message.

## Topic 4 Responding skills – paraphrasing, reflecting, summarising and responding to silence

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain the skills of paraphrasing, reflecting and summarising
- explain how to respond to silence
- describe how to communicate empathy.

## Topic 5 Responding skills – questioning

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- identify some of the purposes of questioning during a helping encounter
- explain how inappropriate use of questions can be a form of control
- describe the different types of question that can be used in helping activities
- explain how to use questions appropriately in a helping encounter.

## Topic 6 Managing boundaries

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- describe how to set boundaries at the start of a helping relationship
- explain how to manage the setting, time constraints, confidentiality and limits of your competence
- describe how to refer a help-seeker to other sources of help when appropriate
- explain the importance of a professional approach in dual relationships.

## Topic 7 Agreeing objectives for a helping relationship

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain the concept of a 'contract' with the help-seeker
- describe the important considerations when agreeing objectives with the person seeking help
- explain how to enable the help-seeker to clarify their agenda
- describe how to clarify options including method of working
- explain the use of SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-related).

## Topic 8 Endings and their impact

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain how to prepare for the end of a helping relationship
- describe some of the different ways that a helping relationship may end
- describe the possible impact of a helping relationship ending – on the person seeking help and on you.

# TQUK Level 2 Certificate in Counselling

## Mandatory unit – Using Counselling Skills

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Criteria
1 Know what core counselling skills are	1.1 Identify core counselling skills 1.2 Describe how core counselling skills can be used in a counselling relationship and in other helping activities
2 Know how to establish a helping relationship	2.1 Describe the boundaries that need to be taken into account when starting a new helping relationship 2.2 Describe how to agree objectives for a new helping relationship
3 Be able to use core counselling skills in a helping relationship	3.1 Demonstrate how to use core counselling skills in a helping relationship 3.2 Discuss how effective the use of core counselling skills has been in developing the helping relationship
4 Know how to conclude a helping interaction	4.1 Describe useful strategies for ending helping relationships 4.2 Describe the possible impact of a helping relationship ending

## Topic 1

# Helping relationships and communication skills

## Introduction

This topic introduces some of the key ideas that you will explore in this course. It gives you the opportunity to think about your own experiences of helping and seeking help, and to explore the wide range of helping relationships and encounters where counselling skills come into play.



You will probably need about 3 hours to complete this topic.

## Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- explain what the term 'helping relationship' means
- explain the difference between 'using counselling skills' and 'counselling'
- explain why giving advice may not be helpful
- identify a range of helping encounters where you might use counselling skills.

## What do we mean by helping relationships?

Think about the wide range of circumstances where a person might want to find someone they can talk to about a difficult situation that they are facing. Someone may have come to you recently looking for help with a problem that was similar to one of these:

- A friend is worried about an impending redundancy.
- A co-worker is anxious about a forthcoming appraisal interview.

- A parent is worried their teenager may be experimenting with drugs.
- A client of the day care service is very worried about his fuel bill.
- A student is looking for advice about their A level choices.
- A friend is coping with the death of a family member.

The person seeking help may see you as someone to talk to, perhaps because you are a supervisor, mentor, volunteer, teacher, co-student or neighbour. You might work in one of the helping professions, such as nursing, social work or care work. Or perhaps you are a volunteer for a helping organisation.

The help they are seeking might be found in a single encounter, a series of conversations, or in an informal or more formal relationship over time. For this course, we use **'helping relationship'** as a blanket term to describe all these possibilities. Depending on the situation, we use a range of other terms including 'helping dialogue', 'helping conversation', 'helping interaction', 'helping encounter', and 'helping activity'.

## Activity 1

(Allow 5 minutes)

Write two or three lines to describe a helping conversation you have had in the past month, where you were either the helper or the person seeking help.

This activity may have made you more aware of a situation where someone came to you for help, or you were looking for help, even if you didn't think about this as a 'helping relationship' at the time.

For anyone who finds themselves in a personal, voluntary or professional role where people come to them looking for help, the question that usually motivates them is: 'What can I do that will be most helpful?'

You will want to be helpful in a constructive way, and yet there are many puzzles and hurdles in the way of achieving this. Learning to use some basic counselling skills can help you to be more effective in how you communicate with other people to help them.

## What are counselling skills?

Communication between two people is the basis of all helping encounters. Listening and responding to what the other person is saying are communication skills that we all use in conversation. When this conversation has the purpose of 'helping', these skills are sometimes referred to as **counselling skills**.

This course will encourage you to use the communication skills of listening and responding to **empower** the person seeking help. In other words, it's about helping them feel stronger, more confident and more in control so they are able to find their own ways of coping, making choices or decisions, or taking action. This is what we mean by 'using counselling skills'.

- Listening in this context means listening in a particular way – often called 'active listening' – in order to show that you are listening and understanding what the other person is telling you. There is more about active listening in Topic 2. The skills for active listening are covered in depth in Topic 3.
- Responding in this context means making a response in a particular way to what the other person is saying. For example, this could be encouraging with a nod or 'mmm', paraphrasing, summarising or questioning. These responding skills are explored in Topics 2, 4, 5 and 6.
- Conveying the **core conditions** – what makes listening and responding particular in this context is that they are underpinned with the values of unconditional positive regard, congruence and empathy, sometimes referred to as the core conditions. These values are explained in Topic 2, and explored in discussion and activities throughout the course.

These essential counselling skills can be used in most helping encounters. Developing these skills will enable you to be a more effective helper, and for many issues, a little help can often be invaluable.

## Using counselling skills

An important aspect of using counselling skills is being aware of their limits and impact. Take care not to raise expectations or make promises to the help-seeker that you cannot keep. A course on essential counselling skills does not equip you to help someone in distress, struggling with deep-seated problems or facing major challenges in their life. Someone in this situation may need professional help – perhaps from a trained counsellor or psychotherapist. Using counselling skills is not the same as **counselling**. It is important to be aware of this to avoid putting anyone at risk. Trained and qualified counsellors have supervision.

Be realistic about what you can accomplish and your limitations. This means being honest with yourself and with the person seeking help. Recognise when there is a situation that you cannot deal with and, with sensitivity, make this clear to the other person. You will explore ways of doing this in Topic 6.

It is often possible, however, to offer help that is solid, or lasting, even though it is modest in scope. By using counselling skills you may help someone to move forward, find confidence, make a decision or take action – because they have felt listened to, understood and more in control of their situation.

We will now consider what ‘counselling’ involves and how it differs from ‘using counselling skills’.

## What is counselling?

The term ‘counselling’ means different things to different people, but in its broadest sense, counselling is a form of helping offered by a qualified therapist to enable individuals to cope better with difficult situations they are facing.

Sometimes a person can be stopped in their tracks by an event or situation that is too much to cope with. Sometimes the advice of friends and family is not what is needed; there may be embarrassment, shame or other very uncomfortable feelings in talking to them about a particular problem. It may seem that the problem cannot be solved. Or it may feel like friends or family are part of the problem. Professional counselling can be a very helpful option at such times.



Here Ruth explains why she decided to seek out a counsellor:

It wasn't possible to go to my family because I'd felt for a very long time that they didn't ... they didn't understand me at all. And a lot of the difficulties I found myself in seemed to stem from ... relationship problems with them. I'd been in a mess for quite a long time, and my friends were always ... sort of bailing me out emotionally, so I felt that I was a burden to them. I needed to do it for myself.

## Activity 2

(Allow 5 minutes)

Take a couple of minutes to make notes on what you understand by the word 'counselling', based on your own experience and what you have heard or read.

Now compare your ideas with the definition of counselling and psychotherapy given by The British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP). This is one of the professional bodies in the UK that sets and maintains standards for these professions:

Counselling [and psychotherapy] are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing.

BACP, 2010

Professional counsellors may work with people during periods of personal development, or in times of crisis or distress. They provide time, attention and a suitable environment to enable the person being helped to explore an issue from different perspectives.

Here are some of the skills that professional counsellors use:

- giving a person their full attention, actively listening and being mindful of what the person seeking help is communicating, both verbally and non-verbally
- creating and maintaining a warm and genuine relationship, in which the person feels accepted and listened to, without judgement

- making clear any ambiguous or generalised statements
- summarising what a person says in order to show understanding
- highlighting points that need special attention and exploring these themes so the person seeking help can identify and explore some options for action.

All of these skills can also be used in helping encounters, and you will begin to develop some of them in more depth in this course.

### Activity 3

(Allow 3 minutes)

Imagine you went to talk to someone who used these counselling skills about a problem or situation you were facing. Which skills would you find most helpful and why?

Compare your responses with some examples from other students:

'Knowing someone is listening and interested can make you feel better – instead of going round and round a problem in your head.'

'My partner criticises me all the time. I would like to talk things over with someone who didn't judge me – who was just kind and accepting.'

'Well, sometimes if you're really wound up about something it's hard to think straight, to see where to go, you get sort of stuck, so if someone can sum it all up for you, it helps you stand back and get a clearer view.'

The key difference between 'counselling' and using counselling skills in other helping relationships is that counselling has a therapeutic (restoring or healing) purpose and the relationship has clear boundaries:

- the person seeking help understands that they are entering into a professional therapeutic counselling relationship
- it is practised by a qualified counsellor who has been through formal training in counselling theories and practice
- the counsellor is required to follow a professional code of ethics and code of practice, which includes managing confidentiality and being responsible for the consequences of their practice.

## What counselling skills do not involve

Counselling skills are used to empower the person seeking help. This means listening and responding to the other person in a particular way and avoiding some of the things we might naturally do from time to time in everyday conversation.

### Activity 4

(Allow 15 minutes)

Think about the list below. Most of us are likely to do some of the things on the list from time to time. Which might you find yourself doing as a friend, parent, partner or co-worker?

- Imposing your own views on the individual about what they should do or feel – in other words, giving advice.
- Making decisions for the individual.
- Judging, arguing, interrogating or moralising.
- Raising expectations or making promises you cannot keep.
- Allowing or encouraging the person seeking help to become dependent on you.

You may have noted that it is often difficult to avoid doing some of these things in a family or social relationship, or with co-workers. It's easy to say 'If I were you...' when a friend asks for help.

As a parent, you may at times argue about or judge your child's behaviour. Arguing, interrogating or moralising is often part of the banter between workmates or close friends. There are many ways in which family or friends need to depend on each other (though there is a difference between being dependable or reliable and allowing someone to become dependent on you for help). In the workplace, it could save time and effort to make decisions for a junior colleague.

In some situations, then, these are the right things to do. But in a helping encounter, they are not likely to make the help-seeker feel better or more in control.

## Is it wise to give advice?

It is important to be careful about giving advice in a helping relationship.

When something goes wrong in an individual's life, a friend or relative may say things intended to comfort, with advice or opinions such as: 'You mustn't blame yourself for what happened' or 'You're better off without him – there are plenty more fish in the sea' or 'You're too good for her' or 'Put it all behind you and move on'.

Before giving any type of advice it's sensible to think about your relationship with the person you're advising, e.g. a close friend or family member. We'll be looking more closely at boundaries in Topic 6, but for now bear in mind that any advice you give needs to be appropriate and that, in some situations, it may not be helpful to give advice at all.

Here are some key points to consider which will help you to understand some underlying principles of advice-giving:

- Advice-giving is one-way communication. Telling someone what to do doesn't empower them to work through the issue and find their own solution. The person seeking help doesn't take an active part in the process.
- Advice is often based on how the advisor sees the problem, not how the help-seeker sees it.
- Someone seeking help may not want advice. They may prefer to be listened to and understood, and to have a voice.
- People need confirmation that their own experiences and feelings are valid. The advice given may not do this.
- The advice may be inappropriate or wrong.
- The help-seeker may not take responsibility for what happens as a result, because it wasn't their idea.
- Treating the help-seeker as an equal is an important principle in using counselling skills. If the helper plays the 'expert' by giving advice, the relationship is not an equal one. It may leave the help-seeker feeling inadequate or childlike.

It is natural that someone seeking help may ask for advice when they are struggling to cope – or perhaps trying to avoid facing up to a situation or a decision. Asking for advice can seem much easier than undertaking a process of self-examination. The helper needs to be sensitive and respectful when faced with a request for advice, and gently guide the individual to take a more active part in the conversation. For example:

Help-seeker: And so with all this going on, I really don't think I can cope with another huge decision right now. What would you do if you were me?

Helper: You've told me there are lots of things happening in your life, and now you're facing another big choice. Perhaps we could talk about how you feel about the decision, and what you think your options are.

No one can completely understand how another person is feeling, because individuals are unique and we each bring our unique history and experience to every situation. By listening and showing understanding, rather than giving advice, you enable the person seeking help to gain insight and greater self-reliance.

The risk in imposing your own views is that the person seeking help starts to become dependent on your advice, as in Maxine's experience below.

Maxine: Someone at work confided in me that she was going through a bad patch both at home and at work. I was her supervisor and tried to help her as far as I could. She was adamant that she didn't want to see the staff counsellor ... But whenever we had a conversation, she kept asking my advice, and she began coming to look for me. The rest of the staff started to hum 'Me and my shadow' every time she appeared! It got to the point where I was doing my best to avoid her. I blame myself, really; she was very needy and I responded in the wrong way by trying to give her advice, and made her more needy. I didn't mean to, but it sort of happened and then I didn't know how to get out of it, I felt I would be letting her down.

Maxine's experience is not uncommon. Offering advice seems a natural thing to do but be aware that it may create one of the puzzles that we referred to earlier – it can unintentionally increase dependence rather than helping the other person to feel more confident and in control of their situation.

When you are learning counselling skills, it can be difficult at times to concentrate on the process of communicating in a way that does not impose your own views. It also depends on the context. Giving advice may be appropriate at some point in some helping conversations. For example, it might be appropriate for a college tutor or teacher to give a student advice related to the student's education, but it wouldn't be appropriate for them to give advice about the student's family or personal life.

So, be aware that when you are helping someone, giving advice is often not the most helpful thing to do. If you can focus on what is right for the help-seeker, it will make you a more effective helper:

We need to accept that people with problems will commonly ask those they trust for advice. Sometimes a person will ask for advice by saying something like, 'What would you do?' or 'I don't know what to do. What do you think I should do?' When faced with questions like these, we suggest that you respond directly and make it clear that it is more important for the person concerned to do what is right for them rather than to do what might fit for you.

Geldard and Geldard (2003) p.20

## Activity 5

(Allow 10 minutes)

Think back to the last time you either gave or were given advice in a conversation, and weigh up your experience against the statements below. (If you were the helper, you may need to answer 'don't know' in some cases.)

Mark the statements ✓, X or ?

✓ = true

X = false

? = don't know

- 1 The helper told the help-seeker what to do. The person seeking help did not take an active part.
- 2 The advice was only based on the advisor's view of the problem.
- 3 The person seeking help wanted to be listened to; they did not want advice.
- 4 The advice was not based on the help-seeker's own experiences and feelings.

- 5 The advice was inappropriate or wrong.
  - 6 The helper played the 'expert', rather than treating the help-seeker as an equal.
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This activity may have sharpened your awareness of how and when you give advice, or how you feel about being on the receiving end. Sometimes advice is entirely appropriate, but in a helping encounter, where the primary aim is to give the help-seeker a voice and treat them as an equal, it may not be helpful.

Let's now look at some of the many situations in which you might use counselling skills to help people.

## Different kinds of helping encounter

Figure 1.1 shows a range of helping activities. This is known as the TACTICS model. It's one way of looking at what we mean by 'helping', but there are many other diagrams and models of helping that you may come across.

In each of these activities, using counselling skills could be part of the process. At the heart of all these helping interactions, the goal is 'enabling self-reliance' – in other words, empowering the help-seeker to feel better, more confident and in control.

**T**aking action

**A**dvice

**C**hanging system

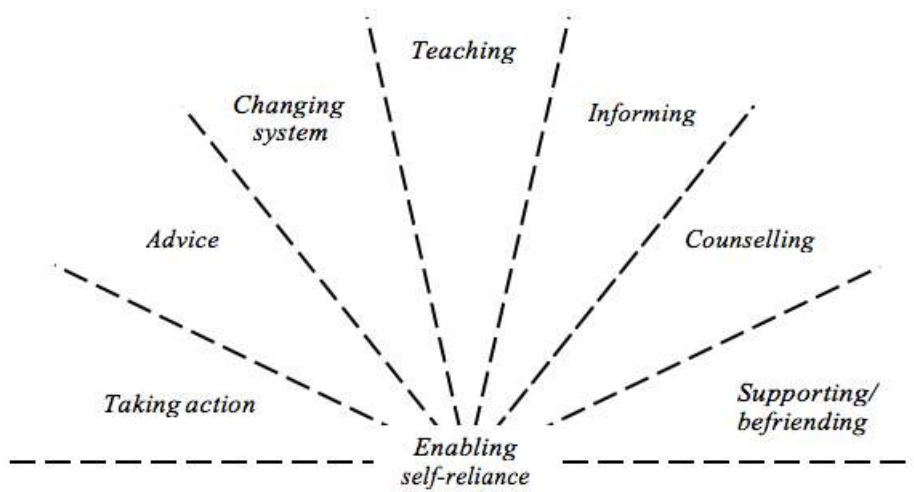
**T**eaching

**I**nforming

**C**ounselling

**S**upporting/befriending

Figure 1.1 The TACTICS model



Here are some examples of each type of activity:

Table 1.1 TACTICS examples

Taking action	I drove a neighbour to hospital because he didn't want to leave his car parked overnight.
Advice	I explained to a colleague the best way to travel across London to get to her job interview.
Changing system	I reorganised the washing up rota to fit in better with housemates' work shifts.
Teaching	I showed an apprentice how to change a flat battery.
Informing	I told a grieving relative about two bereavement support groups in her area.
Counselling	My client this morning was a person with a phobia (deep fear) of spiders, referred by her GP.
Supporting/befriending	My colleague is unhappy about a proposed move that would mean losing her job – I had coffee with her so she could talk about it.

Let's explore how some of these helping encounters could have involved the use of counselling skills.



In 'Taking action', for example, the helper may have listened carefully to her neighbour and found his anxiety was not really about his car but about staying overnight in hospital for tests, and what the results of the tests might be. She might have decided to take him to hospital herself to give him moral support.

In the 'Changing system' example, if the washing up organiser first listened to other housemates' views on why the rota was not working and asked questions to find out what would make it work better, the new rota should work better and be easier for everyone to keep to.

## Activity 6

(Allow 30 minutes)

Draw up a large chart like the one below on a sheet of A4 paper. For each type of helping activity, give an example from your own experience where you were the helper and an example where you were seeking help. (There will inevitably be some blanks – for example, you will not have offered professional counselling to other people.)

Helping activity	My own experience of helping	My own experience of seeking help
Taking action		
Advice		
Changing system		
Teaching		
Informing		
Counselling		
Supporting/befriending		

In your examples of helping someone else, did you use any of the skills described in this topic? If you were seeking help, did the other person use counselling skills to help you? Look back over the topic and take a few minutes to make notes.

This activity should help broaden your understanding of the wide range of 'helping encounters' that you've been involved in. It may also have increased your awareness of helping situations where counselling skills were, or could be, used.

Here is a short extract from a helping conversation between a debt advice worker and a client.

Client: Well, I can't pay my bills, and I don't know what to do.

Advisor: OK ...

Client: You see I'm behind with my rent. I didn't meet last month's payment on the washing machine and I just had an enormous electricity bill ...

Advisor: An enormous bill ...

Client: Yeah, much more than usual. You see my father's sick and has been staying with us. He feels the cold and I've had the heating on much longer than normal.

Notice that the helper uses brief responses to show the help-seeker that she is listening and to encourage him to continue his train of thought. A less experienced helper might be tempted to respond with something like, 'OK, I'm sure I can help you with that ...' which sounds like taking control, or 'Oh dear, how did you let that happen?' which sounds like a judgement, suggesting the helper thinks it shouldn't have happened.

Through sensitive listening and responding, the advice worker encourages the client to quite quickly paint a picture of the situation that has led to the debt. This in turn will enable the advisor to explore with the client the most appropriate options for his particular situation, in order to sort out the debt.

In the next three topics, you will explore further the skills of listening and responding that you have been introduced to here.

## Self check

(Allow 30 minutes)

Now that you're nearing the end of Topic 1, you should be able to answer these questions:

- 1 What is the difference between using counselling skills in a helping relationship and formal counselling?
- 2 Give three reasons why giving advice may not be helpful to someone seeking help.
- 3 Describe four different examples of helping encounters in your work or personal life where counselling skills would be useful.

You will find feedback in the Topic 1 course area.

## Summary

Topic 1 has introduced the idea of the helping relationship and asked you to consider your own experience of helping or seeking help. You have looked at the difference between using basic counselling skills in an everyday helping encounter and counselling – a specialised form of help offered by a qualified counsellor or therapist. We have discussed why giving advice or imposing your own views may encourage dependence rather than enabling the help-seeker to feel stronger and more self-reliant. Finally, you have explored the many kinds of helping activities in which counselling skills can be useful as part of the helping process.

Now that you have completed this topic, you should be able to:

- explain what the term 'helping relationship' means
- explain the difference between 'using counselling skills' and 'counselling'
- explain why giving advice may not be helpful
- identify a range of helping encounters where you might use counselling skills.

## Key terms

**Counselling:** a form of helping offered by a trained and qualified therapist to enable individuals to cope with difficult situations they are facing.

**Counselling skills:** the skills of listening and responding sensitively to someone seeking help; these skills can be used in a range of helping encounters.

**Empower:** enable someone to feel stronger, more confident, more in control and able to cope.

**Helping relationship:** the relationship between someone seeking help and someone offering help, either in a single encounter, a series of conversations, or in an informal or more formal relationship over time.

## References

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, *What is counselling and psychotherapy?* [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk) [Accessed 24/03/2016].

Geldard, K and Geldard, D (2003) *Counselling Skills in Everyday Life*, Palgrave Macmillan.

## Going further

'Chapter 9: Counselling contexts and connections' in Sanders, P (2011) *First steps in counselling* (4th edition), PCCS Books, Ross on Wye [www.pccs-book.co.uk](http://www.pccs-book.co.uk)

In this chapter, Pete Sanders discusses the use of counselling skills in a range of helping occupations and professions as well as in everyday life. This includes the use of counselling skills in complementary medicine, general practice, psychiatry, nursing, educational settings and teaching, social work, business and management, community settings, for volunteers, and for each of us as 'citizens' when we're involved in 'basic helping in a counselling way'.

## What next?

We hope this sample has helped you to decide whether this course is right for you.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us using the details below.

### **If you are ready to enrol, you have various options:**

- **enrol online** – for many courses you can enrol online through our website. Just choose your course, click ‘enrol now’ and then checkout
- **enrol by telephone** – just call our course advice team free on 0800 389 2839 and we can take your details over the telephone
- **pay in full** – you can pay in full with a credit or debit card
- **pay in instalments** – if spreading the cost would be useful, we can arrange that for you. Just call our course advice team to organise this.

## Contact us

There are many ways to get in touch if you have any more questions.

**Freephone:** 0800 389 2839

**Email us:** [info@nec.ac.uk](mailto:info@nec.ac.uk)

**Website:** [www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk)

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