

Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) Agenda

Legal Highs Training — Learning Objectives, Agenda & Capability Framework Alignment

A 3 hour online course exploring current NPS trends, chemical families, common substances including synthetic cannabinoids and mephedrone, health and psychiatric implications, and evidence-based harm minimisation and interventions

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Company: TD Consultancy

Delivery: Online — 3 hours

Edition: 2026

Aims & Objectives of the Course

- Explore current trends and prevalence of NPS use in the UK, including post-Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 patterns
- Gain a working template for understanding the broad spectrum of NPS and the main chemical families — cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids, dissociatives, psychedelics, opioids and depressants
- Know where to source up-to-date information to identify new substances and develop a professional response using online tools and early warning systems
- Achieve a deeper level of knowledge about common NPS such as synthetic cannabinoids and mephedrone, including health and psychiatric implications
- Explain how NPS are used and the effects upon the body and nervous system
- Apply evidence-based interventions and treatment tools to work with NPS-using clients and integrate this into current care planning
- Understand and apply effective harm minimisation strategies and techniques for this client group
- Increase confidence and competence in working with NPS-using clients across a range of professional settings

Session Agenda

NPS: Trends, Chemical Families, Pharmacology, Health Implications & Harm Minimisation

10:00am Start — Welcome & Course Overview

10:10am Current UK situation — NPS trends, prevalence and the impact of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016

10:30am NPS chemical families — cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids, dissociatives, psychedelics, opioids and depressants

10:55am Identifying new substances — online tools, early warning systems and information sources

11:10am Common NPS in focus — synthetic cannabinoids (Spice) and mephedrone (mcat)

11:15am Break (15 minutes)

- 11:30am** How NPS work — effects on the body and nervous system, potency and unpredictability
- 11:55am** Health & psychiatric implications — acute toxicity, dependency, psychosis and co-occurring needs
- 12:20pm** Harm minimisation — strategies, techniques and practical approaches for NPS users
- 12:40pm** Interventions & care planning — applying evidence-based tools with NPS-using clients
- 1:00pm** Close & Q&A

Capability Framework Alignment

This course aligns with the Capability Framework for the Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Workforce (NHS England/OHID, 2024), which underpins the 10-Year Strategic Plan for the Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Workforce 2024–2034.

Capability Domain (NHS England / OHID, 2024)	Framework Section
Knowledge of the nature, prevalence and current trends in novel psychoactive substance (NPS) use in the UK, including the impact of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 on availability and use patterns	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of the main NPS chemical families — cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids, dissociatives, novel psychedelics, synthetic opioids and depressants — and the specific risks associated with each group	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of commonly used NPS including synthetic cannabinoids (Spice/Mamba) and mephedrone (mcat), and their effects on physiology, neurology and mental health	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Ability to use online tools, early warning systems and professional networks to identify new or emerging substances and develop an informed professional response	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Knowledge of the health and psychiatric risks associated with NPS use, including acute toxicity, unpredictable potency, dependency, psychosis and co-occurring mental health needs	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Application of Knowledge</i>
Ability to provide evidence-based harm minimisation information and advice to NPS users across a range of professional settings, including community, criminal justice, housing and health	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Harm Reduction, Treatment and Recovery</i>
Ability to apply evidence-based psychosocial interventions and treatment tools in work with NPS-using clients and integrate these into person-centred care planning	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Harm Reduction, Treatment and Recovery</i>
Ability to carry out person-centred assessments that address NPS use alongside co-occurring psychological, social, physical and safeguarding needs	<i>Drug and Alcohol Worker: Engagement, Assessment and Care Planning</i>
Recovery-oriented approach — supporting NPS-using clients to build motivation, reduce risk and develop recovery capital	<i>Underpinning Principle: All Roles</i>
Challenging stigma — recognising how stigma around NPS use, particularly in homeless and criminal justice settings, can be a barrier to engagement and support	<i>Underpinning Principle: All Roles</i>

Underpinning Principles Embedded in This Course

Trauma-informed care • Recovery-oriented approach • Evidence-based practice • Person-centred working • Forming a working alliance • Therapeutic optimism • Challenging stigma • Co-occurring needs and multidisciplinary working

Note: National Occupational Standards (DANOS/NOS) are retained within the National Occupational Standards library but are no longer the primary workforce development reference for the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery sector. This course uses the NHS England / OHID Capability Framework (2024) as its primary alignment standard.