Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Sherwood Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd t/a Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute, June 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Sherwood Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd t/a Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute (the Institute) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The Institute continues to deliver professional, undergraduate and master's programmes in counselling and psychotherapy validated by Staffordshire University (the University). There have been no significant changes since the 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)). Total student numbers have risen slightly from 220 to 249 at the time of the monitoring visit due to a slight increase in the number of students enrolled on the master's programmes.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Institute has made acceptable progress and completed actions from each of the recommendations and affirmations arising from the review visit in June 2017. It has reviewed its approach to working in partnership with students (paragraph 4) and induction and training programmes for student representatives have been developed (paragraph 5). The Institute has recently produced an information publishing policy setting out specific roles and responsibilities (paragraph 6). The Institute has consolidated the actions affirmed by the HER (AP) to secure academic standards and improve the educational provision offered to students. Students confirm that there has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of assessment feedback (paragraph 7). The Institute has taken successful steps in restructuring the governance arrangements, strengthening the deliberative oversight of the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 8). Moreover, the Institute has continued to maintain, embed and further develop the features of good practice noted in the HER (AP) (paragraphs 9-11). These make positive contributions to the Institute's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision.

4 The Institute thoroughly reviewed, but decided not to change, the current student partnership arrangements. Staff and students explained that students have the opportunity, individually and collectively, to provide feedback at all deliberative levels. This is through representation on the Combined Programme Committee (CPC), and by surveys after each programme workshop. The arrangements for representation are currently adequate, and students at a meeting with the review team reported that their collective and individual voice is heard.

5 The student representative induction and training programme will be implemented at the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year. Although it is clearly described in the

programme handbook, some student representatives, particularly from the undergraduate programme, said that a more detailed booklet would be helpful. This has been discussed at the CPC and, after more consultation, will be further developed before September 2018.

6   The recently drafted information publishing policy defines specific roles and responsibilities. This formalised approach replaces previous informal checks although it is too early to see any impact. Staff also discussed the steps being taken, as part of their overall approach to internal information management and communication, to ensure that all staff and students understand the importance of using Institute email addresses.

7   The Institute has focused on improving the timeliness of assessment feedback during the last year through both staff development and close monitoring of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Students confirmed that there had been a significant improvement in the timeliness of feedback and that both the quality and timing are effective in supporting them to improve.

8   The Institute reviewed its governance arrangements to strengthen deliberative oversight of the quality of learning opportunities prior to the 2017 review visit. A decision-making flowchart has been produced along with revised and updated terms of reference for key committees. Staff reported that the appointment of a business manager has enabled improvements to be made in administrative systems and support for both staff and students. The inclusion of both the Business Manager and Head of Training as part of the senior management team had enabled effective oversight of both strategic and operational matters.

9   Individualised staff training and development is a feature of good practice which supports tutors and has continued through regular programme team and all staff meetings and training events. In the last year, in addition to a range of compliance-related training, there has been a focus on staff development on assessment and feedback. The use of peer and self-assessment, and the comprehensive approach to student support involving both academic and support staff, have continued. During the visit, the team heard from students and the representative of the awarding body about how both these aspects continue to be highly effective in supporting their learning.

10   The Institute's strategic aim to develop research through the Research Showcase has also been maintained. Students confirm that they found the event inspiring and useful in supporting them to develop their own research projects. Research activity has been extended through the development of a joint bid with researchers from two universities to the Economic and Social Research Council.

11   The good practice of bringing together placement providers at an annual Placement Fair has continued. The event serves a dual purpose in enabling the Institute to update information and guidance to providers while providing the opportunity for students to meet a range of potential placement organisations. Students held mixed views as to how useful the fair was in terms of finding placements, although staff reported that they were aware of the need to manage expectations and confirmed that the event is supplemented by in-programme support, including a placement preparation workshop.

12   The Institute's robust admissions policy aligns with the principles of fair admission, and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The language requirements are determined by the awarding body and are set out in the programme specifications and an annually updated frequently-asked questions sheet which is sent to enquirers and available on the website. The application form requires applicants to declare if English is not their first language and evidence of qualifications is checked at interview. All prospective students are invited to attend an information day and students confirmed that this was valuable in helping them to understand what to expect in studying psychotherapy and

counselling. The Institute's selection process is rigorous in testing academic potential, work and life experience, personal qualities and disclosure and barring requirements. All applicants meeting these requirements are invited to interview with the relevant programme leader before places are offered. The Institute takes account of qualitative and quantitative information in monitoring and enhancing the provision. Individual student feedback forms completed after each workshop provide programme staff with qualitative feedback that is used to inform future delivery and development. Monthly Programme Leader meetings and termly Combined Programme Committees provide a forum for discussion of common and emerging issues. At institutional level, the University's annual monitoring process has been adopted. This requires the Institute formally to respond to external examiners' comments, National Student Survey (NSS) results, and progression and completion data. Senior managers have responsibility for monitoring and maintaining overarching strategic oversight of student and programme performance. The Institute has developed a diagram setting out the relationship between, and responsibilities of, its internal committees.

13   Retention and progression rates are actively monitored and used to inform developments; and have improved in the last two years. For the BSc cohort enrolling in 2016-17, the retention and pass rate is currently 91 per cent. The Institute recognises that the demands of the dual award and the need to complete a minimum number of clinical placement hours can impact upon progression in the BSc. In 2015 and 2016, this led to a significant number of students extending their final year to obtain the necessary hours. However, the Institute has actively addressed this issue and for this year's graduating cohort only two students are in this position. Retention rates on the master's programmes vary between programmes and are generally lower than for the undergraduate programme. In 2015-16, for the Integrative Psychotherapy and Person Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy, these were 80 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively. Financial and personal reasons are the predominant reasons for early withdrawals.

4   Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

14   The Institute demonstrates its use of the Quality Code through the mapping and updating of policies and procedures, the development of the Quality Assurance Manual, and staff development. All module descriptors, programme information, student handbooks, quality assurance documentation and policies are reviewed and approved at validation by the awarding body and include *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) external reference points.

15   In addition to the Quality Code and FHEQ, the Institute fulfils the requirements of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy - the professional bodies responsible for professional accreditation and registration.

5   Background to the monitoring visit

16   The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

17   The monitoring visit was carried out by Francine Norris, Reviewer, and Catherine Fairhurst, Coordinator, on 12 June 2018.