



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The Minster Centre, February 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 The Minster Centre (the Centre) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the February 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 At the HER (AP) visit in February 2017 there were approximately 100 part-time students enrolled on the counselling and psychotherapy awards validated by Middlesex University. This compares with 103 part-time students at the time of the monitoring visit.

3 There have been no significant changes to the academic structure or premises used by the Centre since the 2017 review visit. However, the Centre has successfully recruited a new Registrar, Operations Manager, and Assistant Finance Officer and re-structured the operations of the Reception Team. The staff and students whom the team met spoke very positively about the management of these changes and commented on the positive impact the new appointments and changes to the support provided by the Reception Team were having.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The review team met staff and students during the monitoring visit and considered the Centre's annual return and supporting documentation. The Centre has continued to develop further its actions in response to the recommendations and good practice identified at the HER (AP) review in 2017. The team found that the Centre has continued to make acceptable progress in building on the two features of good practice (paragraphs 5 and 6), and that acceptable progress has been made with the six recommendations (paragraphs 7 to 12).

5 The Centre continues to take care of its admissions process, which was identified as good practice at the 2017 review visit. The admissions process requires applicants to provide information about their academic and professional experience as well as a personal biography. The interview involves an exploration of the applicant's capacity and commitment to the qualities that will make them suitable for the professions of counselling and psychotherapy. Students spoke enthusiastically about the emphasis on ensuring the course met their needs both prior to commencing their studies and when commencing further courses of study at the Centre. A review of the administrative procedures associated with admissions is planned for spring 2018 to further enhance the process.

6 The Centre continues to employ highly experienced professional practitioners who bring to the programme a wide range of approaches to the subject, underpinned by research. Many of the staff delivering on the programmes teach at other institutions, have published articles recently, and the majority undertake current professional practice. The external examiner for the Integrative Psychotherapy and Counselling and Professional

Practice (Advanced Clinical Practice) awards reports that 'The student performance is clearly enhanced by the high calibre of teaching from, in some topics, specialist practitioners.' The students confirmed that the staff bring up-to-date knowledge and learning and teaching approaches to all aspects of the programmes. The Centre provides appropriate staff development opportunities for both new and more established staff members. Staff new to the organisation are closely mentored and all staff attend sessions both to ensure a consistent approach to learning, teaching, and assessment and to keep staff up to date with changes.

7 Acceptable progress has been made to address the six recommendations identified at the 2017 review visit. Following the 2017 review visit the Centre made immediate changes to the information provided to prospective students. The website now has comprehensive information on entry requirements and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) procedures. Links are also provided to the full programme handbooks to ensure that students are fully informed in advance of application.

8 To address the recommendation to produce a definitive document which sets out placement requirements, expectations, and responsibilities the Centre has in place published placement information and agreement documents which detail placement requirements, expectations and responsibilities of all stakeholders including the Centre, placement providers, supervisors, and students. In addition, the Centre has Codes for Practitioners available on the website alongside the Minster Centre General Code of Ethics, the Code of Practice for Practitioners, and the Code of Practice for Trainees. Students confirmed that they are clear about requirements, expectations and responsibilities and received appropriate support prior to and during placements. The students also confirmed their understanding of the clear link between placement activities and academic work. A placement providers survey was carried out in December 2017 and results indicate a high level of satisfaction with the competency of the students and the support received from the Centre.

9 The Centre has now established the Quality Committee, which includes students in its membership. The Quality Committee takes responsibility for developing and tracking an overall Quality Action Plan arising from quality assurance and enhancement actions identified through other committees, annual monitoring, and external reviews. It held its first meeting in November 2017 and details of how its activities will integrate with other committees have recently been finalised. While the work of this Committee is still in its initial phase there are plans to appoint a Quality Manager. The remit for this post includes embedding the Quality Committee activities within the overall Centre management framework.

10 The Centre has in place a policy and procedures for the production and approval of public information. A suite of support materials for existing staff and induction of new staff was developed. Training was provided to key staff in July 2017 with follow-up in September for new staff. In addition, information was provided to autumn term Training Committees meetings. This Committee has strategic oversight of the learning, teaching, and assessment strategy, with terms of reference which include the requirement 'to discuss and implement measures to assess, assure and enhance the quality of training.' The website provides information for prospective students in line with the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance. Any changes to publicly available information on the website can only be made by the IT Manager, Quality Manager, Registrar or Admissions Officer. A new website is in development which aims to enhance ease of access to all relevant information.

11 The Centre has revised internal processes for the design and development of new programmes, which involves all stakeholders. A detailed policy and procedure for the design, development, and approval of programmes for use within the Centre has been developed.

This would be used in conjunction with the policies and procedures of the awarding body. It is due for final consideration by the Quality Committee in July 2018. In addition to more direct student/alumni involvement in the future design of new programmes and in programme reviews, the Centre is introducing student representation on the Board of Trustees to ensure student engagement in a wider range of Centre activities. A request has been submitted to the Charities Commission to alter the Memorandum and Articles of Association to facilitate this change.

12 The Centre has taken steps to improve the formal and systematic steps taken to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Board of Trustees has a stated objective of ensuring steps are taken to enhance all aspects of the student experience. The newly established Quality Committee will oversee quality enhancement activity while also setting policy and prioritising action. To take this forward, the Centre has developed a draft statement on how it understands and develops enhancement. The Quality Committee has welcomed the contents as a statement of principles and has asked for further work to be undertaken in order to ensure it is accessible for both staff and students.

13 Annual programme monitoring is carried out in line with awarding body requirements. Centre committees, including the Training Committees and Board of Studies, consider a range of monitoring data and internal reports, external examiner reports, and develop and monitor Centre action plans. The Quality Committee will oversee the quality monitoring activity undertaken by Centre committees in order to ensure there is comprehensive oversight and that actions are taken forward.

14 Retention rates are very high and range between 100 and 97 per cent for the 2014-15 to 2016-17 cohorts. However, pass rates are low; for example, the pass rate for the 2014-15 cohort was 44 per cent. The Centre reported that students routinely take more than one year to complete their finalist work, specifically the dissertation. An analysis undertaken by the Centre indicates that 23 of the 39 students who have not completed by the expected completion date have to submit dissertations. The Centre reports that a number of students are unable to complete by the expected end date due to managing issues relating to caring commitments, employment demands, personal health, and finances. The Centre aims to be supportive in these circumstances and the majority of such students return to complete their training. As a result, students often take more than two years to complete their programme of study. The students are registered with the University for five years, and have this time in which to complete their studies. The Centre reports that the students yet to complete from the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years are expected to complete successfully. This has the potential to improve pass rates to 94 per cent for 2014-15 and 95 per cent for 2015-16 cohorts.

15 The Centre has identified a number of actions to support students to complete in a timely manner. The Centre Registrar is reviewing current student monitoring and recording systems and procedures. Working closely with the Finalist Heads of Year, students will be systematically and proactively contacted to ensure they are aware of the support available, to discuss options, and to consider the possibility of the Postgraduate Diploma as an exit award. Students whom the team met were very complimentary about the support provided by the Centre concerning dissertation supervision and additional support for research.

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

16 The Centre demonstrates its use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) through adopting the awarding body academic regulation, policies and procedures. The student handbooks make explicit references to the Quality Code. The qualification descriptors, curriculum design academic policy and Subject Benchmark

Statements were reviewed and approved at revalidation by Middlesex University, and include *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) external reference points.

17 The Centre has strong links with relevant professional bodies. The professional training for psychotherapists has recently been successfully reviewed by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). The Centre's training is accredited by UKCP on a five-yearly review cycle and underwent a successful re-assessment in May 2017. The review commended the quality of the student experience, which included the excellent training and facilities, thus ensuring students are fit for practice. The Centre is also accredited with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). The underpinning Diploma in Integrative Counselling and Diploma in Integrative Psychotherapy programmes are recognised as accredited courses of the BACP.

18 The Centre has used other relevant external reference points, including the CMA guidance to developing the information it provides to prospective and current students. In addition, it has reviewed the Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidance to ensure its policies and procedures for complaints and academic appeals align appropriately.

## **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

19 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.

20 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Catherine Symonds, Reviewer, and Mr Robert Saynor, Coordinator, on 06 February 2018.

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