Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd, April 2016

Section 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 Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd (the College) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the April 2014 Review for Specific Course Designation.

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review visit

2   The succession process in place at the 2014 review, which was planned to culminate in the retirement of the College's founding Director in August 2014, initially went according to plan, but the sudden departure of the Director delayed its implementation. In September 2015, the current Director took over ownership of the College. The College Management Team stated, and students and staff confirmed, that the transition was carefully managed and communicated without compromising the continued security of academic standards, and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The UK Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP) Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy College, in its quinquennial review report in December 2015, reported positively on the success of the changeover. However, the review team notes that the composition of the Management Team, with only two members, including the owner/Director, may, in the long run, compromise the management of academic standards. The College plans to appoint a third member to the team in September 2016. The College is therefore yet to conduct a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the new structure.

3   The College still offers higher education programmes awarded by Middlesex University, and maintains contact with, and offers additional support to, students who complete each award. This system was designed to allow all students to complete the required clinical hours. The number of students is currently 74, which is 11 per cent less than at the time of the 2014 review (83).

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

4   The College has not developed its own action plan to manage quality, and is still working with, and has made acceptable overall progress implementing, the action plan from the 2014 review. It has maintained both areas of good practice (paragraph 5) with its interaction, membership and application of the requirements of the key bodies in psychotherapy (paragraphs 5 and 16), and continues to offer effective arrangements for student support (paragraph 5). Although the College still needs to evaluate the effectiveness of its new structure (paragraph 2), it has made good progress implementing both the advisable and desirable recommendations. The Governance Internal Structures Document (paragraph 7), which details and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of staff (paragraph 14), has been published. A range of policies, which are reviewed annually (paragraph 11), are in place, and are mapped to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) (paragraph 8 and 17). There is, however, a lack of staff development on the

Quality Code (paragraph 16). A range of methods (paragraph 11) are effectively used to disseminate policies, roles and responsibilities, and other key information. Staff observations continue to take place, although there is scope to apply the information collected from these and other staff-related processes to plan staff development activities (paragraph 9). The Management Team stated that the virtual learning environment (VLE) would be fully functional in May 2016 (paragraph 10). Effective systems are in place to support or signpost students with learning support needs to additional outside assistance (paragraph 12). A fair admissions process, defined in the new Admissions Policy, and with clear English Language requirements, is in place and readily available (paragraph 13). Internal monitoring is strong, with staff and students evaluating all College processes (paragraph 14), the results from which feed into the annual monitoring process under the College's agreement with Middlesex University. Student retention rates are consistently high among all cohorts (paragraph 15).

5   Both areas of good practice identified during the 2014 review remain in place. The College continues to be a Training Member Organisation of the UKCP Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy College. Students are required to undergo supervision hours with a supervisor who is UKCP registered or equivalent such as accreditation by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). The highly effective arrangements to support students remain in place, with, for example, students attesting to the Management Team's assertion that the support provided by the College in finding placements has increased. Students continue to attend weekend seminars, and tutorial and essay days, and have opportunities to provide feedback on these and various other stages of their learning journey. Students met by the review team expressed satisfaction with the College's continued positive response to their needs.

6   The College has made good progress with implementing elements of the action plan relating to both the advisable and desirable recommendations from the 2014 review.

7   A Governance Internal Structures Document was published in September 2015 articulating staff roles and responsibilities, and other governance arrangements. The Tutor Recruitment Policy details the roles and responsibilities for tutors; the Programme Handbook contains information on the staff responsible for student support; and the Attendance Policy outlines responsibilities for monitoring student attendance. The Induction Checklist lists governance arrangements as one of the items covered at induction, and both staff and students met by the review team were familiar with the roles and responsibilities of all staff. A Codes and Procedures Handbook is also in place.

8   The College has mapped its policies to the Quality Code, and identified areas of improvement and actions still to be taken to align each policy to the respective expectations.

9   Staff observations continue to take place, and in an evaluation conducted on their outcomes, staff expressed satisfaction with the process. The Management Team stated that staff observations fed into the College appraisal system. However, the completed appraisals do not show explicitly how they are linked to the observations. The extensive processes for staff induction, observation and appraisal, and the equally extensive evaluation system, offer opportunities for the College to compile staff development needs, which are currently not used.

10   The College stated that its new VLE will be functional in May 2016 after experiencing some delays related to finding a suitable provider. Information available at the monitoring visit confirmed that some progress has been made on the development of the VLE.

The College continues to use the externally-hosted intranet while awaiting the VLE to be fully functional.

11   The Governance and Internal Structures Document, mentioned in paragraph 7 serves as the key policy document. There is a set of policies that the College reviews annually. The College uses a range of methods to disseminate these policies, codes of conduct and procedures, including through the externally-hosted intranet, through the induction process, the Codes and Procedures Handbook, the Programme Handbook, and the website. The College has significantly increased the range of information available through its website to include its ethos and quality assurance processes, and information on courses and the application process.

12   Students who require additional learning support have the opportunity to declare their needs during the application process. The College continues to apply the Codes and Procedures Handbook to encourage working positively with diversity and to offer support for dyslexic students. The Programme Handbook refers students with extra support needs to the Head of Training and Programme Leaders, who it states are available to arrange assessments and referrals, and to make necessary adjustments, although a Learning Support Tutor has been appointed, who the College states is the main point of contact for student who require additional learning support.

13   The admissions process, described in the newly published Admissions Policy and on the College website, is fair and transparent. It sets out entry requirements and procedures, including the English Language requirements for applicants whose first language is not English. The minimum English Language requirements are stated as grade 6.0 (with at least 5.5 in all components) on the secure IELTS scale, a Cambridge Proficiency Certificate at grade C, or the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English at grade B. The application form now requires two written submissions, which the College uses to assess the writing abilities of the applicants. The Management Team stated that all applicants attend an interview with the Head of Training and Deputy Head of Training to explore their suitability and intention to study, making use of a standard set of questions. The well developed process for the assessment of applicants' accreditation of prior learning (APL) is available on the website. Applicants using the APL route are required to complete a portfolio of evidence, with clear guidance from the College concerning the required documents. Applicants receive an information pack, which provides details on fees, finance and other costs they may incur, and other important information. The students confirmed that the process of applying to the College was supportive and that they had access to all the information they required in order to make decisions.

14   Effective feedback mechanisms are in place: from tutors at induction, during staff observations and staff appraisal processes, and from students at admission and throughout their learning journey up to the end of the year. The student representative system and boards of studies also serve as important methods of collecting student feedback. The College actively collects and evaluates the results of all feedback and tables them at the Training Committee, where Programme Leaders identify and monitor actions. The results of the feedback processes serve as inputs into the Annual Monitoring Review conducted for Middlesex University. For the first time, this year the College is planning to produce its own well documented Annual Evaluatory Report, a collation of all the feedback from external examiners' reports, placement agencies, student and staff evaluations, and weekend registers. It will be written by the Head of Training and presented to the Board of Studies at the start of the following academic year, and is intended for use as a support document for the writing of the Annual Monitoring Report. If used as planned, the Annual Evaluatory Report will formalise the annual monitoring procedures at the College and make the University's annual monitoring process more effective.

15   The College has consistently high retention rates across all cohorts and campuses, ranging from 82 per cent to 100 per cent. To maintain consistency with the 2014 review, the review team included students on the consolidation and supplementary years in its consideration, even though results excluding these students still show high retention and progression statistics.

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

16   As stated in paragraph 5, the College continues to engage with UKCP, and UKCP standards. It publishes and applies these standards, and those of the UK Psychotherapeutic Counselling Section of UKCP, in all its processes. These standards are embedded within the College's policies, such as the Supervisors Policy, where expectations for tutors and students, and requirements for students to complete the appropriate number of supervision hours, are clearly stated. The Management Team still holds key positions on these boards. The College went through its first quinquennial review in 2015, with a positive overall outcome.

17   As stated in paragraph 8, the College has mapped all its policies against the Quality Code and referenced the Quality Code in core documentation such as the Programme Handbook, Mission Statement, and the Governance and Internal Structures Document. However, staff met by the review team were not familiar with the Quality Code.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

18   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.

19   The monitoring visit was carried out by Rebecca Morrison, Reviewer, and Christopher Mabika, Coordinator, on 15 April 2016.