



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute Ltd, May 2016

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 Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute Ltd (the Institute) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2014 [Review for Specific Course Designation](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The Institute has changed validation partners from Coventry University to Staffordshire University, with a formal partnership agreement signed in July 2015. All continuing and new students are registered on Staffordshire University awards. The award titles are the same for the BSc (Hons) Counselling and Psychotherapy and MSc Integrative Psychotherapy. The MSc in Person-Centred Psychotherapy and Counselling has now been approved as the MSc Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy to provide a more accurate description of the programme.

3 The Institute also achieved reaccreditation with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) in 2015. All recommendations and conditions were fully met, and the accreditation with BACP is in place until March 2020.

4 Since the 2014 review there has been a 9.5 per cent increase in students, from 202 to 221 enrolments.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The Institute has made acceptable progress in relation to outcomes and advisable recommendations from the 2014 review. This conclusion is based on the analysis of documentation, and discussions with staff and students of actions that include guidance information and procedures for admissions (paragraphs 7, 9 and 17); the development of placements for supporting academic reflection and clinical practice (paragraphs 7, 8 and 13); the drafting of a new Quality Assurance Manual and development of the virtual learning environment (VLE) (paragraphs 11 and 15); the implementation of peer observation following a pilot phase of operation (paragraph 14); and the successful completion of a transition plan for the new partner university (paragraphs 9 and 11).

6 The Institute has addressed all recommendations from the 2014 review. A comprehensive action plan tracks progress on a monthly basis, and includes two further areas of development, which are to promote and expand participation in professional research and the sharing of core values. Actions are evaluated at a strategic level by the directors and at an operational level through programme leaders' meetings.

7 The frequently asked questions (FAQs) booklet continues to be updated and now includes details of the newly validated Staffordshire University programmes. It provides clear guidance on the admissions process, entry requirements, fees, open days together with an introductory reading list, and placement information. Student testimonials are also included,

indicating possible career pathways and interim awards. The booklet is available on the website, and students provide feedback on the accuracy and relevance of content at Information Days, at induction, and at Combined Programme Committee meetings.

8 Students use their clinical placements to reflect on the academic content of their programme, and confirmed that they continue to work in clinical placements during the week and attend the academic classes, which are scheduled every six weeks over a weekend. They particularly valued the live case studies that tutors use in the classroom to illustrate theory and practice.

9 The Institute has successfully completed a transition timeline with Staffordshire University, tracking key stages of the programme validation process and student support. All students have transferred to Staffordshire University validated programmes. Students confirmed that they had been informed in writing of the new validating partner and associated programme changes. These changes include the slight change to the title of one of the postgraduate degrees as noted in paragraph 2, the use of online enrolment, revised graduation dates, the use of a different referencing system, and a new set of academic regulations. The regulation changes will not have an impact on the calculation of degree classification. Students confirmed that they had received guidance on the new regulations and had completed the online enrolment process. Under the new partnership, students have access to e-resources and journals at the University library, thus enhancing the resources available to them. Staff confirmed that they had been supported in the revalidation process by the Institute and have attended a Partnership Day, which provided information on the regulations and monitoring requirements of the University.

10 The Institute has produced a schedule of its policies and procedures, which indicates how they map to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). This document was shared with staff at the All Tutor Team Day in November 2015, and the Institute has in place plans to ensure staff engage further with the Quality Code as part of the annual review of policies and procedures, and staff development event.

11 A draft Quality Assurance Manual is a central resource for all of the Institute's policies and will be made available to staff and students through the VLE once it has been signed off by the directors. It includes links to the Review for Specific Course Designation report, published by QAA in August 2014, essential University policies and procedures, student handbooks, external guidance for financial support, and to relevant professional bodies.

12 The Institute has updated its internal databases to facilitate better analysis of student information, including the monitoring of disabled students' needs and the provision of appropriate support. In 2016 the Institute is required to make a Higher Education at Alternative Providers Early Statistics survey return, and also a Higher Education Statistics Agency return. Key staff have attended external seminars to support these requirements. The Institute has an Information Management Policy in place to meet the requirements of student confidentiality and data protection, and students have been informed of data collection requirements.

13 Actions have been taken to further develop placement opportunities and these are addressing the shortfall in placement hours that was noted in the 2014 review. A Placement Coordinator has been appointed to support students in finding a placement, *and* to assess the suitability of providers. The placement provider database is being updated to a 'red, amber, green system' to indicate the status of each placement provider. The information available to support students on placements, to include Placement Provider Days, has been expanded and is now available on the VLE. Revised forms have been developed to streamline the placement process and to map to Staffordshire University's Placement and

Practice Learning Policy. Students are able to access the University 'e-coach' online resource to support them in writing their curriculum vitae and making applications for placements. Students confirmed that they had been effectively supported in finding their placement.

14 The Institute has formalised teaching observations of all teaching staff through co-tutoring and peer observations, as reported in the review visit action plan. A Peer Observation Policy was approved and introduced during 2014-15. A log of peer observations is maintained to capture the type of session observed, duration and outcomes. The Director of Training is responsible for reviewing the peer observation process with programme leaders in order to identify areas of good practice, and individual and team training needs. From the sample of peer observation logs reviewed, areas for enhancement had not been recorded formally. The Institute would benefit from formally recording areas for enhancement; staff reported that this is discussed after the observation and at line management meetings. The Institute intends to encourage peer observations across programmes to extend the sharing of good practice.

15 Development of the Institute's VLE has continued, and the Institute considers it to be a central point for student engagement, as well as providing access to psychotherapy software. Staff make use of the system for teaching and learning, and the Institute recognises this as an ongoing area for further development. Students confirmed that they made use of the VLE for accessing resources associated with their modules.

16 The Institute collects and responds to feedback from students through surveys, meetings with student representatives, Combined Programme Committee meetings and VLE forums. The student survey contains specific questions relating to the provision of information, including handbooks, placements, the VLE and the website. Student feedback is integrated into the FAQ booklet and Information Days. One illustration involved providing feedback on the online enrolment process concerning questions asked as part of the enrolment process, which did not align with the Institute's approach to diversity. The response rate to the most recent student survey is low at 14.8 per cent, and the Institute is considering ways to improve student participation by combining questions in the survey with the feedback forms students complete after each workshop.

17 There is a robust admissions system in place, and the Admissions Policy has recently been rewritten and mapped to the Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. The admissions team has undergone further training in anti-discriminatory practice and working with diversity. The level of English language has been raised to IELTS 7.0 or equivalent for postgraduate programmes and IELTS 6.0 for undergraduate programmes, to align with the entry requirements of Staffordshire University. These requirements are clearly stated on the website and in the FAQ booklet. All applicants complete an application form, provide references confirming their potential to study at the relevant level, engage in interviews with programme leaders, and go through the disclosure and barring process. Applicants can also apply via the accreditation of prior learning process, whereby programme learning outcomes are matched against the applicant's experience and qualification.

18 The Institute effectively monitors quality through its deliberative committee structure, which includes appropriate participation by company directors, programme leaders, students, administrative staff, placement providers, external examiners, Staffordshire University representatives and tutors. Committees draw on data collected from student feedback, the assessment process, placements and admissions. A comprehensive 2014-15 Annual Quality Monitoring Report and action plan effectively reviewed completion data, as well as feedback from programme committees, students and placement providers.

Under the new partnership with the University the Institute is required to complete a similar annual monitoring report.

19 External examiner reports are positive and indicate that action has been taken in response to previous reports. Effective responses to these reports are made by the programme leaders, who share the reports with their teams.

20 Retention rates are generally high at 82 per cent overall. Three of the postgraduate programmes have lower retention rates. These are the MSc Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy October 2014 cohort at 73 per cent, compared with 91 per cent for the 2013 cohort; MSc Integrative Psychotherapy October 2013 cohort at 68 per cent, compared with 71 per cent for the 2012 cohort; and MSc Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy October 2012 cohort at 60 per cent, with subsequent cohorts achieving 91 and 73 per cent retention rates. The Institute attributes these lower retention rates to students' financial problems and work commitments, and monitors performance on a regular basis.

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

21 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 relating to the Quality Code. All module descriptors, programme information, student handbooks, quality assurance documentation and policies were reviewed and approved at validation by Staffordshire University, and include *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* external reference points.

22 The Institute successfully achieved reaccreditation with the BACP in December 2015. The BSc (Hons) Counselling and Psychotherapy programme has been designed to enable students to progress to accredited membership of the BACP. The Institute is also a recognised training organisation with the UK Council for Psychotherapy.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

23 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.

24 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Brenda Eade (Reviewer) and Mr Robert Saynor (Coordinator) on 9 May 2016.

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