



# Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd, May 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 Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd (the College) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the June 2017 [Higher Educational Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

## 2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 At the time of the monitoring visit there were 65 students, up from 58 at the June 2017 review. The BSc (Hons) Integrative Counselling awarded by Middlesex University was revalidated in November 2017 for a further six years. The College has recently relocated one of its two teaching venues to new premises in Wymondham.

## 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2017 review. It has maintained and developed the three areas of good practice and the single affirmation has been progressed but is yet to be evaluated. Support for students professional development is in place with an annual conference now being offered as a service to the College's graduates (paragraph 4). Learning and pastoral support extends from the initial application stage beyond the qualification stage (paragraph 5) and placements now incorporate strengthened supervision (paragraph 6). The committee structure introduced in 2017 to support management decision making is operational, although it is still to be evaluated (paragraph 9). With regard to recommendations, the College is implementing actions to further develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities and to develop staff awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education. An enhancement strategy is now in place and priorities, which still require implementation, include the improvement of library and teaching facilities at the College's newly acquired premises, the use of the new premises as a venue for student and staff study groups and the implementation and evaluation of actions put in place for the improvement of completion rates for students (paragraph 7). The development of ongoing staff awareness is being addressed through the provision of information on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and staff participation in discussion at assessment and curriculum and research committee meetings. There are plans to recruit a higher education adviser onto the Advisory Board, and to develop a formal method of disseminating information on learning and assessment to staff. These plans are yet to be implemented and evaluated (paragraph 8).

4 The College has maintained its systematic approach to supporting students' professional development as integrative counsellors. The BSc (Hons) Integrative Counselling encourages students to interact continuously with staff and placement providers throughout their training, and graduates from the College to maintain their CPD through the

College. An annual conference day, with a leading academic as a key speaker, has been introduced primarily as a professional service for graduates and professionals but to which current students have access to at a reduced price. The College considers this relational approach to teaching and learning, built into the degree, essential in the learning and practice of counselling and psychotherapy. A variety of teaching methods, suited to the material being delivered and personalised to student needs, is used. The College has a range of approaches to strengthen the academic skills of students, including essay writing training days, individual tutorial support and online video training on referencing. Students the review team met confirmed that these activities provide highly effective support for their professional and academic development.

5 The learning and pastoral support provided from initial application through to completion of their studies enables students to develop their potential. Some students have been encouraged and supported to start their personal counselling earlier in order to access more support with their individual needs and to ensure they are ready for the demands of the course, and personal support plans are agreed with students as required to support their learning.

6 Support for student placements has been further developed, with strengthened supervision arrangements, including an initial placement report, being provided a few weeks into the placement. The rigorous College arrangements when setting up new placements include visits to placement providers by senior staff where necessary. The four-way placement agreements noted at the 2017 review are still in place and are communicated to students in the first year in a seminar session in June by the Deputy Head of Training.

7 Although the updated action plan states that the actions regarding the development and implementation of the strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities have been completed, and progress is being made in developing the strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities, some of the priorities and targets that have been identified for the Enhancement Strategy are yet to be implemented. The College has now identified premises, which it considers as its permanent base in Norwich. However, there is a need to set up learning and library facilities within the new premises and for them to be effectively used as a venue for student and staff study groups. Actions put in place for the improvement of completion rates for students are also yet to be implemented and evaluated.

8 To ensure that teaching staff develop a continuing awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education, the College holds assessment committee meetings at which issues relating to the design, structure and range of assessments are discussed. Examples of the issues discussed at the assessment committee meetings are the need to adopt a modular approach to assessments in line with the modular structure of the new curriculum, and to encourage students to address learning outcomes in their assessments. Information on any new developments in the industry and within the curriculum is also made available to staff on the VLE. However, plans to recruit a higher education adviser onto the Advisory Board and to develop a formal method of disseminating information on learning and assessment to staff, scheduled for September 2018 in the action plan, are yet to be implemented and evaluated.

9 The internal committee structure, newly formed at the review visit in 2017, remains in place and operational, but it is due to be evaluated and the outcome disseminated to relevant bodies. Committee meetings are convened regularly and contribute to strengthened management decision-making processes through discussion and evaluation before management approval. Examples of issues discussed include proposed structural changes to the curriculum which were adopted in the newly approved programme and an ongoing discussion at the Research Committee concerning the introduction of a master's degree.

10 In 2016 taster sessions were introduced to give potential students detailed information about the course, including the opportunity to learn about and discuss the necessary demands and rigours involved in the training. From 2017, videos of both student and graduate experience have also been made available. All applicants are interviewed by the Head of Training and a senior tutor and this process includes an assessment of the student's intention to study, which is included in the statement that is submitted with the application form. The College has strengthened its recruitment practice with changes to the Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy (APL) to include a requirement for applicants to show evidence of the credits to be assessed through APL and to obtain a reference from their most recent place of study. English language requirements are in line with awarding body requirements, stated in the Admissions Policy and available for applicants on the website. Applicants are also required to demonstrate the ability to write in English within their application.

11 The College's Quality and Standards Policy sets out the annual monitoring processes as well as defining roles and responsibilities. Inputs into the annual monitoring process include summaries of student feedback on their teaching and learning from weekend and seminar evaluations, student end of year evaluations, tutor information feedback, external examiners' reports and external reviews, and student data analysis. The annual monitoring review process results in the production of the annual evaluatory report (AER) which is the summative element in annual monitoring and is an overview and commentary reflecting feedback from students, external examiners, and employers. The AER is presented to students and staff at the November Board of Studies meeting by the Head of Training and uploaded to the College's VLE.

12 The College makes good use of student data in monitoring student retention, completion and achievement. Student numbers on each cohort allow the College to maintain a close relationship with individual students giving them continuous support throughout the programme. For the 2015-16 Cohort 23 students initially enrolled of whom three (13 per cent) have withdrawn and five (22 per cent) have exited early with an intermediate award. This results in a retention rate for the cohort of 65 per cent, and the achievement rate of this cohort is 12 per cent, with the rest of the students still completing their assessments. For the 2016-17 cohort of 27 students retention is currently 78 per cent with three (11 per cent) of the cohort having left with an intermediate award. The College states that the completion and achievement rates are affected by the intensive nature of the training and the demands of the career which can provide significant challenges to students despite the support available. The College has drafted some actions to improve completion rates, which are yet to be implemented.

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

13 The College's programme is accredited by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and its curriculum aligns with the UKCP's Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy Standards for Education and Training (PCIPC SETS). The approval document for the new programme references the Subject Benchmark Statement: *Counselling and Psychotherapy* and the FHEQ Level Descriptors. The APL policy also references FHEQ Level Descriptors and the student handbook introduces students to the UK Quality Code

14 Management staff are involved in the activities of external bodies relating to psychotherapy, and all staff, students and placement supervisors are required to be members of UKCP or equivalent, such as Accredited by the BACP.

## 5 Background to the monitoring visit

15 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.

16 The monitoring visit was carried out by Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Christopher Mabika, Coordinator, on 18 May 2018.

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