



Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Sherwood Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd, June 2019

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 Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd (the Institute) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 There have been no significant changes at the Institute since the annual monitoring review of June 2018. There has been a slight increase in overall student numbers at 241 from 231 in 2018. Enrolment on the BSc programme is limited to 32 by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) one of the professional bodies which accredits the Institute's programmes. Both the Institute's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are awarded by Staffordshire University and accredited by BACP and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). There are 10 academic staff teaching on the BSc programme and 12 on the master's programmes; all on part-time contracts which is a condition of the professional accrediting bodies requiring teaching staff to be involved in current practice.

Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The Institute has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan and demonstrates a satisfactory level of engagement with external reference points including the Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 15). Information that it produces is trustworthy, accessible and fit-for-purpose (paragraph 6). It has built on all five areas of good practice identified in the 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) and has further enhanced the identification and sharing of good practice across staff since the 2018 annual monitoring visit (paragraph 4). The affirmation regarding steps being taken to improve the timeliness of assessment feedback, continue to be investigated and developed (paragraph 7) and the steps to restructure academic governance and management to ensure oversight of quality of learning opportunities has been completed. The recommendation for training for student representatives has yet to be fully discharged as there was a change of postholder which delayed complete implementation at the beginning of the 2018-19 academic year and will now be operated for 2019-20 (paragraph 6). The Institute has reviewed its approach to student partnerships and has arrived at considered and appropriate arrangements which works for the student constituency and the Institute (paragraph 5). The recommendation concerning development of a documented approach to information management has been successfully implemented and reviewed (paragraph 6).

4 The Institute has continued to build on good practice which has now become a standalone and standard agenda item for programme leaders, tutor team, the Combined Programme Committee (CPC) and administration meetings to ensure that commendable procedures and ideas are clearly identified and shared. In addition, the Institute has been proactive in collating and recording good practice in a log which is distributed across the staff. The Institute continues to support and facilitate staff development and peer learning,

support for students, and placements to reinforce professional development. Placements, which run throughout the year, are regarded by students as being particularly useful in developing their professional practice. The Institute maintains its assistance for master's students to develop a project to a formal research venture.

5 The recommendation to review the approach to student partnerships so that the collective student voice is represented at committee meetings has been satisfactorily and appropriately addressed. The student voice is evident at CPC and programme leaders' meetings. Students find these meetings useful vehicles to express student concerns and to gain information about events within the Institute. The recommendation to provide formal appropriate training for student representatives has been delayed due to a change of postholder. A training programme has been developed and widely disseminated for comment. The current programme will be rolled out for September 2019.

6 The recommendation regarding information management has been fully addressed and actions aligned to CMA guidelines. The publishing policy has been reviewed to include a flowchart to clarify more fully the roles and responsibilities for approval and release of information. Staff and student representatives are promptly informed of updates to the policy to ensure requirements and responsibilities are clearly understood. A comprehensive Policy Matrix has been established which logs each policy review date and forms a single source of reference for staff when referring to policies. There is also a careful version control system.

7 The Institute has made satisfactory progress on the affirmations. The timeliness of assessment feedback continues to be debated. There has been trialling of a four to six-week turnaround but the commitment remains as six to eight weeks, which some students feel is satisfactory as the quality of feedback is so informative, constructive and comprehensive. Other students feel that they would like feedback sooner. The current feedback arrangements fit in with the delivery pattern of the courses, but staff felt that the introduction of online submission of work and feedback has the potential to shorten turnaround times. An all-tutor staff development event in June 2018 was focused on feedback on assessment to maximise learning. Restructuring of academic governance and management to ensure deliberative oversight of the quality of learning opportunities has been completed. The Institute has recruited to a number of key posts which have had positive impacts on the student experience.

8 The Institute has comprehensive internal quality monitoring processes. Students provide feedback at CPC meetings and academic staff complete an end of module evaluation. These are discussed at programme leaders' meetings and analysed by the Head of Training who develops appropriate actions. These are incorporated into an institutional Action Plan which also includes actions from other sources such as Staffordshire University annual monitoring, the Academic Link Tutor (ALT) report, National Student Survey outcomes, professional body annual reviews, external examiner reports, and items from senior management. It has a clear tracking system which ensures actions are completed and signed off.

9 Staffordshire University's Continuous Monitoring procedure was introduced during 2019 at both module, course and institutional level. The ALT confirmed that Sherwood's current processes and timing for collection of student feedback are appropriate and align with the new continuous monitoring process. The new process will enable the Institute to reflect and act promptly on information when it becomes available. The Institute also produces an annual monitoring report to the professional body, BACP.

10 The Institute is meticulous in its admission of students. It has very a detailed, comprehensive Admissions Policy and associated procedures to ensure that applicants are appropriately qualified, motivated and sufficiently robust to successfully complete the demanding programme. All potential students attend an information day and go through an

interview process which is rigorous and identifies their readiness to undertake the demand of undergraduate or postgraduate programmes as well as prior experience and English language competence. Students without formal entry qualifications may complete a marked academic exercise and may be required to attend pre-entry courses. The process ensures that students are clearly informed about the requirements and commitment needed to undertake the programme. The Institute tests the integrity of its admissions processes using evaluative feedback from students and is examining student profile data in order to improve gender and ethnicity balance. Admissions personnel, programme leaders and the Director of Finance also meet to review applications, reflect on the applications process and examine degree outcomes to assess whether suitable candidates are recruited.

11 The Institute adheres to the Assessment Policy and regulations of Staffordshire University including those for academic misconduct. No academic misconduct issues have arisen so far. The nature of the programmes and assessments undertaken by students involve personal experience and reflection which reduces the opportunity for academic malpractice. In addition, there are close working relationships between staff and students which enables markers to identify any change in writing style. Ethical practice is a core element in the training for professional and academic behaviour. The Institute has purchased plagiarism-detection software for use from September 2019.

12 To ensure that assessment is carried out with rigour and integrity, academic staff mark and provide feedback against learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The Institute provides induction, training and peer marking to support new tutors. Programme teams carry out standardisation and moderation meetings. Dissertations are assessed blind and double marked. Staffordshire University also carries out moderation before student work is sent to external examiners who confirm that marking is consistent, fair and the academic standards are comparable with similar programmes in other institutions.

13 Over recent years, retention, progression and achievement rates for all programmes have been relatively high. For example, the BSc programme consistently showed high rates of retention. The 2015-16 cohort which completed in 2018 had a retention level of 94% (29 out of 31). The cohort which enrolled in 2016-17 is due to complete in 2019 and has a retention of 84% (27 out of 32). For the MSc programmes, retention is slightly lower. For the 2015-16 entry groups, the retention rates are 81% (22 out of 27) for the MSc Integrative Psychotherapy (MINT) and 64% (9 out of 14) for the MSc Person-Centred and Experiential Psychotherapy (MPCA) and for 2016-17, 95% (20 out of 21) and 76% (13 out of 17) respectively. For the 2017-18 entrants, rates are 88% (BSc 29 out of 33), 85% (MINT 22 out of 26) and 75% (MPCA 15 out of 20). These rates reflect well on the support for students as they are part-time, mature and in employment, and the demands of the programme involve a significant quantity of practice placement as well as academic requirements.

14 Achievement rates on the BSc are high. The cohort starting in 2014-15 had a pass rate of 91% (21 of 23) and for the 2015-16 cohort it was 93% (27 of 29). For the MSc programmes, achievement levels are lower. For the MINT cohort starting 2014-15 and due to complete in 2018, 10 of the 20 initially enrolled, graduated (50%) but there are six students still in training. For the MPCA 2014-15 cohort due to complete in 2018, three graduated from the 11 enrolled (27%) but four are still in training. Again, the rates are good considering the nature of the students and high demands of the programmes.

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

15 The Institute continues with the mapping of its policies and procedures to the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), and provides staff information and liaison

to ensure compliance. The Institute has put in place the new post of Head of Quality Assurance and Business Development to oversee the implementation of the Quality Code. The Institute reviews its policies on a regular basis and will work closely with Staffordshire University to implement the revised Quality Code to ensure policies are properly aligned with the new version and university requirements are met. The guidelines and policies of BACP and UKCP are followed conscientiously to ensure programmes are at the standards required for professional recognition and practice.

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 Patricia Millner, Reviewer, and Millard Parkinson, QAA Officer, on 11 June 2019.

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