



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education Ltd, November 2018

### 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 St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education Ltd (the Centre) is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the November 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The Centre has 312 students, 49 of which are studying the Certificate in Higher Education or Foundation Degree in Montessori Early Childhood Practice validated by London Metropolitan University (LMU); and 263 are studying the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy awarded by Crossfields Institute. The Centre has a Director, four managers, three full-time and four part-time academic staff and six administrative staff. Montessori St Nicholas, including the Centre (Montessori Centre International - MCI) moved to freehold premises in St John's Wood in April 2018 which is the reason the monitoring visit was triggered.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education has made commendable progress in meeting the objectives set out in the Action Plan for 2017-18. In respect of the seven features of good practice identified in the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) 2017, strategically driven initiatives have been developed aimed at enhancing the quality of student learning experiences over time. Action plans for addressing the two recommendations have been completed fully. The Centre has adopted a strategic approach to enhancing the seven features of good practice identified in the HER (AP) 2017 with a focus on developing and embedding good practice initiatives in the longer term. The Centre also continues to maintain the high standards of policies and practices for admissions and assessment identified previously in the HER (AP) report and to make highly effective use of external reference points.

4 The Centre continues to develop good practice in supporting potential students. Admissions staff remain committed to providing individual advice based upon application details, qualifications, interview results and personal circumstances, and this is supported by feedback from students. The pre-course online orientation session has been updated, with a completion rate of 100 per cent in September 2018. The measure of success has been set above 85 per cent, and positive views expressed about online orientation in the student meeting and in survey results confirm this to be the case.

5 The Centre's strategic approach to the integration of Montessori principles into teaching and learning is set out in *The Framework for Teaching and Learning*. Opportunities for change have been created by the revalidation of LMU programmes in January 2018 and

Crossfields' review of the diploma course, scheduled for 2019. Plans are underway to embed the principles within the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with focus placed upon the development of soft skills. Initiatives include establishing a Montessori Centre International (MCI) Training Hub and workshops for trainers. A nursery is currently under construction and scheduled to open in 2021 and will provide additional opportunities for integrating Montessori principles into the students' learning environment.

6 The Centre takes a long-term view in developing and extending support mechanisms that promote holistic student development. The Wellbeing programme, focused upon developing soft skills, is underway and workshops have taken place in 2018 for staff members as well as students. Online initiatives include the expansion of webinar capabilities and enhancement of current provisions for blended learning. To provide students with additional technical support, the Centre has recently appointed a Blended Learning Teaching Assistant.

7 The Centre continues to enhance the good practice previously identified in respect of the comprehensive and detailed placement support provided to students. Current initiatives include developing a suite of training materials for current and new placement tutors and mentors on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and expanding webinar training capabilities.

8 The Centre has strengthened the good practice of operationalising consistently its strategic commitment to enhancement by creating the post of Student Services Manager. The new postholder exercises responsibility for managing and overseeing the student journey and the enhancement opportunities from start to finish.

9 In 2018, substantial progress has been made in the use of technology, particularly in respect of extending webinar and blended learning capabilities, and learning opportunities for staff and students. Objectives are based upon the Centre's Blended Learning Pedagogy Strategy. Level 4 modules have been rebuilt to accommodate a blended learning approach. Inclusive approaches to blended learning have increased prospects for positive interactions between distance-learners and students attending classes, by facilitating learning in synchronous whole group blended sessions and small group seminars. Study skills webinars are now in place and have been well received by students. Webinars are used to host meetings for tutors, professional placement tutors and freelance staff.

10 The Centre has completed the first recommendation to review the approach taken regarding student representation on deliberative committees to maximise the continuity and effectiveness of student participation. Student representatives are members of the Academic and Education Committees. In addition to this, a Lead Student Representative has been appointed to attend all Academic and Education Committee meetings. Education Committee meetings have been retimed to provide more opportunities for students to attend. Level 5 student representatives now brief new representatives at level 4. A workbook for student representatives is in production. A lead student representative has been appointed to ensure the student voice is heard, for example, in the new campus building, students had input into the design and selection of furniture for the student common room. The students who met the team confirm that they are well represented and that their voice is heard and acted on.

11 The Centre has completed the second recommendation to develop a formal policy and establish procedures for ensuring that student information is reliable and fit-for-purpose. The Information Policy and Procedure document was approved by the Education Committee in June 2018 and relates to all appropriate sources of information. The Information Responsibility Grid ensures that postholders are aware of their responsibilities in writing and updating, approving and reviewing information. From the evidence submitted for annual monitoring by the Centre and scrutiny of the website, the team conclude that information

produced by the Centre for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

12 In the HER (AP) 2017, reviewers concluded that the Centre had transparent, fair, and inclusive recruitment and admissions procedures that enabled students with potential to complete their chosen programme and the review team confirms that this continues to be the case. They also identified the level of support provided to potential students as a feature of good practice which again is confirmed by the review team. The Admissions and Registration Officer, in consultation with senior team members, oversees the admissions process to ensure that procedures are managed effectively, integrity of the system is maintained, and ample support is provided to potential students. Entry requirements are explicit, have been approved by the relevant awarding body, can be accessed on the website, are explained in open day events, and published in handbooks. English competency is assured through setting entry requirements at the appropriate course level (IELTS 6.5) and requiring candidates to submit a personal statement in English that is assessed for written competency. Specific requirements for prior qualifications are set out clearly in the admissions policies approved by each awarding body. Each candidate is interviewed by an academic staff member to ensure suitability for the programme and to establish whether a genuine intention to study exists. The Centre maintains the integrity of the system by undertaking periodic reviews of recruitment, selection and admissions processes, including complaints and appeals made by unsuccessful candidates, information policy and procedures, feedback on the admissions experience provided by students, and reviews undertaken by the Academic and Education Committees.

13 The review team conclude that the Centre's assessment processes are reliable and that students have sufficient opportunities to demonstrate individual learning outcomes for progression in its level 4 diploma and foundation programmes. The Centre's internal quality systems operate effectively to ensure that assessments are carried out with rigour and integrity and that student work is genuine. London Metropolitan University's policy and procedures operate in the Foundation Programme (FdA) and students are informed about academic misconduct and plagiarism in induction sessions on the VLE and in hard copy information provided in the student common room. In the Diploma Programme, the Centre has developed and implemented its own Assessment and Academic Misconduct policies and procedures, in consultation with the awarding bodies, and takes decisive steps to ensure that students are fully informed of their responsibilities. The Centre's processes for internal and external verification ensure that student work achieves the learning outcomes required, that marking is fair, and results are secure. Assessments in both programmes are mapped against learning outcomes in programme specifications. In the FdA programme, the Centre follows the requirements for marking and moderation set by the University, for example, Centre staff first mark and moderate work, University tutors moderate the Centre's marked work and external examiners review scripts and confirm results. Similar procedures are applied in the Diploma Programme, with tutors and assessors supported by an Internal Quality Assessor, with the External Quality Assessor sampling marked work. Assessment Boards take place to ensure marks are approved prior to notifying students of final results. Assessments are submitted individually electronically, and all results stored in a secure area on the College's VLE.

14 The numbers of students enrolled on either the Certificate of Higher Education or Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Practice was 22 in 2015-16, 23 in 2016-17, 18 in 2017-18, and 44 in 2018-19. Retention rate for the 2015-16 cohort was 91 per cent with 100 per cent achievement rate. Subsequent cohorts have not all completed yet but of the 2016-17 cohort, 87 per cent are still on the course, and of the 2017-18 cohort, 12 students have passed so far and only one has discontinued. The number of students enrolled on the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy was 202 in 2015-16, 159 in 2016-17, 105 in 2017-18 and estimated as 151 in 2018-19. Retention rate for the 2015-16 cohort was 78 per cent with 100

per cent achievement rate. Subsequent years have not all completed yet but 10 students discontinued from the 2016-17 cohort and three students discontinued from the 2017-18 cohort. The Centre admits students with integrity and operates effective assessment processes as outlined in the previous paragraphs (paragraph 12 and 13).

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

15 The Centre demonstrates highly effective engagement with external reference points to improve the quality of higher education provision. Appropriate chapters of Part B of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education have been used to develop the Action Plan, and discussions of results have taken place in the deliberative committees. Foundation and diploma courses have been mapped against validating body requirements. Level 4 provision on the diploma and foundation programmes have been aligned to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ) to ensure comparability and appropriate transition to the next level. The Centre also makes effective use of comments made in external examiner reports. Annual reports and revalidation reviews are undertaken by awarding bodies, in addition to reviews undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

## **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 Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest, Reviewer, and Kevin Kendall, QAA Officer, on 20 November 2018.

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