



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The Minster Centre, February 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 Minster Centre (the Centre) has made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the February 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA review/monitoring visit

2 At the monitoring visit in February 2018, there were 103 part-time students enrolled on the counselling and psychotherapy awards validated by Middlesex University. This compares with 116 part-time students at the time of the monitoring visit. Though some development of provision in Professional Practice is planned, it is envisaged this will be small with no significant growth in student numbers.

3 There have been no significant changes to the academic structure or premises used by the Centre since the February 2018 monitoring visit. In April 2018, the Centre negotiated a five-yearly rent review, thereby securing the Centre's premises for at least the next five years. The Centre has also recruited a Quality Manager, a Learning Support Coordinator, a VLE Support Officer, and a temporary Data Officer to support completion of HESA data returns. These are new posts. A replacement Coordinator and Administrator for the affordable therapy service have been recruited, along with maternity cover for the Admissions Officer.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

4 Since the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of February 2017, and the monitoring visit of February 2018, the Centre has maintained its good practice in relation to the care it takes in its admissions process, and the employment of experienced professional practitioners.

5 The recommendations relating to the Quality Committee and to the documentation of internal arrangements for programme design and development have been fully addressed. Procedures for the approval of public information have been enhanced as a result of the redesign of the Centre's website and the further embedding of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Action taken in relation to the admissions and website redesign has further improved access to information for new applicants and prospective students. Work is being undertaken to respond to survey feedback on placement information. Acceptable progress continues to be made in introducing measures to enhance the quality of student learning; this is supported by the adoption of a formal enhancement policy.

6 A review of admissions procedures took place in spring 2018 which prompted actions and improvements at the interview stage, in the management of progression, and in training options, bursary contracts, and taster sessions. The new website will make the application process more streamlined and improve access to information. Course promotion has been reviewed, and applications from students from diverse backgrounds will be further

encouraged. A Deputy Director now has designated responsibility for oversight of admissions.

7 The Centre arranged a number of staff training days focusing on professional and pedagogic matters. Student survey feedback indicates overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and with the tutorial system, learning support, support for students with additional needs, and the Centre's rigorous training arrangements. The external examiner commends the high standard of teaching and learning.

8 The Centre continues to strengthen arrangements to support the quality of public information. This includes placements through placement providers' surveys. Recent survey results indicate satisfaction with student competencies and Centre support for students, but some placements have used the feedback opportunity to indicate areas where they would like additional information.

9 The Centre is redesigning the institutional website - students are aware and supportive of this. The Centre is also working to fully implement its VLE. Matters relating to these initiatives are monitored by the Senior Management team (SMT), the Training Committee, Board of Studies, the Quality Manager, and the Quality Committee. The Centre has taken steps to encourage staff engagement with the VLE and to respond to student feedback on VLE related issues. Action has been taken to meet external regulatory requirements for the website and VLE. The Quality Committee will review progress on placing materials on these platforms.

10 Guidance for students is available in programme handbooks, in the Aids to Study document, on the Centre's VLE and through tutorial support. All marking is subject to moderation and sampling. Assessed work is made available to the external examiner, appointed by Middlesex University, who attends twice-yearly Assessment Boards and submits a written report which is considered and actioned. Cases of academic misconduct are given thorough consideration at Assessment Boards and academic misconduct is a topic raised at annual marking workshops, held in February each year. The Centre has in place a policy and guidelines for APEL, though, in recent years, no higher education provision student or applicant has made use of this procedure.

11 The Centre is addressing an external examiner recommendation about feedback consistency through the annual marking workshop, Training and Quality Committees and SMT. These committees have also considered the increase in the number of extensions being granted for late submission of assessed work, and the requirement to conform consistently to procedure. Students indicated good awareness of procedural requirements and planned changes.

12 The current requirement for written feedback is that it should be provided within 30 working days. These matters have been discussed at committee level and further discussion, with proposals for action that include reviewing lead-in times, are scheduled for the marking workshop.

13 The Centre has taken prompt action to address a higher than usual first attempt failure rate in finalist long case studies. Following discussion at the Assessment Board and the November 2018 Training Committee, case study examples have been reviewed and replaced, guidance in Aids to Study has been reinforced, and case study workshops have been arranged for finalist students.

14 The Centre continues to make progress in introducing and embedding measures to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The Quality Committee, which includes student representation, produces a Quality Action Plan that draws on good practice and recommendations arising through internal quality monitoring and through external input. In

July 2018, the Quality Committee gave final approval to a formal enhancement policy document, *How the Minster Centre Understands and Implements Enhancement*.

15 The Centre is taking steps to improve its diversity and inclusion policy and practice. There is ongoing work to embed diversity in modules and in supervision, to review barriers to achieve a more diverse student and staff body, and to support progression of students from diverse backgrounds. Students indicated their awareness and appreciation of such developments. In response to staff feedback on support for their needs as trainers, the Centre is to provide diversity training. Deliberative committees are also promoting the introduction of inclusive forms of assessment and increasing student choice in assessment formats during the 2019-20 academic year.

16 Annual programme monitoring is undertaken in accordance with awarding body requirements. The Quality Committee exercises oversight of quality monitoring activity undertaken by the Centre's deliberative committees, including the Training Committee and Board of Studies. These bodies make use of a range of data, internal and external reports, and survey feedback. Action plans are monitored by the relevant committee.

17 The Centre has identified opportunities for further embedding research, for disseminating the Adult Attachment Interview assignment tool, and for involving students in programme design and development. The Centre has also identified actions to address the relatively low returns to internal student surveys. Staff and students are now represented on the Board of Trustees. Following approval of a revised Memorandum of Association by the Charity Commission in April 2018, these changes were endorsed by the Board in November 2018 and have been put in place.

18 The Centre continues to monitor the time it takes students to complete their studies. Data indicates that, while retention rates continue to be high, finalist students regularly take more than two years to complete the dissertation component of their assessment, with some students taking close to the five-year period for completion as stipulated by awarding body regulations. Ongoing monitoring takes place both through internal regulatory and academic support mechanisms and through the Centre's committee system. Progression and completion, including Centre policy and practice on completion of the final dissertation component, are discussed at Assessment Boards.

19 The Centre identifies the student profile as a major contributory factor to timely completion. The Registrar has worked closely with finalist Heads of Year to track student progress and to provide support, and a Dissertation Supervision Log has been introduced. All finalists have been contacted to ensure that they are aware of the regulatory position, the availability of support, and options available to them. In January 2019, the Centre surveyed all students regarding factors that support them in successfully managing their studies. The Head of Research is reviewing the timing and format of research teaching, and the Training Committee in November 2018 heard proposals to support students to complete in a more timely manner. The outcome of this review will be consulted on with students. Students were positive about the support provided by the Centre and were aware of and involved in discussions around proposed changes in the support for research.

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

20 The Centre works closely with its awarding body and demonstrates its use of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) through conforming to awarding body academic regulations, policies and procedures. Programme handbooks make explicit reference to the Quality Code, and use is made of programme specifications. Qualification descriptors, and the use made of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and

Psychotherapy and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ), are reviewed and approved through the awarding body revalidation process. Other external reference points used in curriculum design and development, include the Middlesex University Learning and Teaching Strategy and Handbook.

21 Use is made of the accreditation and training standards and requirements of the UK Council for Psychotherapy/Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy College (UKCP/HIPC) and British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). The Centre's Diploma in Integrative Counselling successfully completed its BACP quinquennial review in February 2018 and, though not subject to QAA review, prompted a series of enhancements to policies and procedural documentation that apply to the Centre's higher education provision.

22 The Centre continues to make use of Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance on best practice in higher education marketing. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) framework for handling student complaints and appeals, has been used to benchmark the Centre's policy and procedure in that area. In October 2018, the Centre achieved Office for Students (OfS) registration and this process prompted enhancements to some of the Centre's policies.

## 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 Professor Jethro Newton, Reviewer, and Judith Crowther, QAA Officer, on 6 February 2019.

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