



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd, May 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 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 May 2018 [monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 At the time of the monitoring visit, the College had 78 students, up from 65 at the May 2018 visit. The College awards are validated by Middlesex University. The College continues its phased relocation from two teaching venues (in Ipswich and Wymondham) to the one location in Wymondham. The intention is to finish teaching in Ipswich in 2021.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The College has continued to make acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2017 review. It has maintained and developed further, the three areas of good practice (paragraphs 4-6), addressed the two recommendations (paragraphs 7-8) and implemented significant developments to take forward the single affirmation (paragraph 9). The college has developed a new, brief, action plan in December 2018 identifying further areas for development around annual monitoring (paragraph 10) and student feedback (paragraph 11). The College has robust admissions procedures (paragraph 12) and continues to seek ways to improve its assessment processes (paragraph 13). The College continues to make use of the Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) as well as other relevant professional standards through, for example, accreditation from the UK Council for Psychotherapy (paragraph 15).

4 The College has developed further its systematic approach to supporting students' professional development as integrative counsellors. Students refer to the strong, knowledgeable and insightful support provided through these activities. All students at the College undergo personal counselling for a minimum of 35 hours per year for the duration of the course. Students feel that they could not complete their studies without this and that sessions also act as a bridge between study weekends. The College hosts an annual conference with leading speakers, and students appreciate the opportunity to hear internationally renowned speakers.

5 Academic and pastoral support continues to be strong, and students consider it part of the ethos of the College, emanating from the Director. The thorough learning and pastoral support provided from initial application through to completion of studies enables students to develop their potential. A variety of teaching and learning methods, personalised to student needs, is used. The College has implemented a range of approaches to strengthen the academic skills of students. The College has modified the tutorial support provided to students and implemented an independent study log.

6 Comprehensive support for student placements has been developed further. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for sourcing their own placements and a four-way placement agreement continues to be used. A placement day is organised by the College to help with advice and introductions to some placement organisations. The guide on placements, written by the College, has been written and produced in the past year. Fitness to practice has been strengthened and students now have fortnightly meetings with placement supervisors and supervision reports are compiled earlier, after the first twenty hours of placement.

7 The College has implemented an enhancement strategy and, over the past year, has sought to improve the recording, evaluation, and dissemination of enhancement measures. For example, the improvement of learning resources is a strategic enhancement priority for the College. Students have requested increased access to library resources. Library provision at the College is small and specialist, and students note access is limited. The College acknowledge the issue and are seeking to address it. For example, the College has initiated pre and post-study weekend reading, with relevant book chapters and journal articles provided on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

8 The development and currency of staff awareness of teaching and learning in higher education is primarily being addressed through the provision of information on the VLE. Discussion of these areas is being integrated into the Assessment and Curriculum Committee and the Research Committee meetings. A higher education adviser has been recruited to the advisory committee who will provide advice and training to staff. The impact of the new measures has yet to be evaluated, and the College acknowledges that this is still work in progress.

9 The internal committee structure introduced in 2017 has been reviewed further. The regularity of committee meetings has been defined. Teaching staff note that active committee membership helps to consolidate ideas about the organisation and the curriculum. To allow for systematic evaluation to take place, the College has developed a quality tool for assessing committee effectiveness. An assessment of the effective functioning of each committee is recorded formally and evaluated. One committee was considered not to be working effectively and was subsequently re-established.

10 The College's Quality and Standards Policy sets out the annual monitoring processes, and the roles and responsibilities within these. The College aligns the processes for annual monitoring required by Middlesex University with the production of its own reflective annual evaluatory report (AER). The College produces a single set of actions from these two processes. However, from the evidence reviewed by the team, not all actions were recorded in the current action plan. The external examiner reports for consecutive years record similar comments concerning weaknesses in academic writing and practice. While the College noted this in the AER, and implemented actions to address this (see paragraph 13), action and evaluation is not recorded in the action plan.

11 Students considered that feedback on work was very thorough and helpful. This is confirmed in external examiner reports. The turnaround time for return of marked work was four weeks. Students confirmed that the four-week deadline was always met and appreciated that the marking process was thorough but noted that it was slower than they would like, or in rare cases, need. This had been raised at the Boards of Studies and was considered to have been resolved.

12 Students confirm that the application and admissions processes were straightforward, and that support from administrative staff is helpful throughout. The College's Student Selection and Recruitment Policy and Criteria for Admission Policy were updated in 2018-19. Due to the relational way of working within the programme, this

approach is emphasised from the outset. Students are encouraged to seek advice and discuss study intentions on a personal level. Formal determination of intention to study is rigorous, and includes one-hour interviews and the submission of a 500-word personal statement. In addition to offering taster days, the College has introduced an introductory course in counselling skills for those considering whether to apply for the degree course. It is hoped that this approach will encourage the diversity and gender balance of applicants.

13 The College has strengthened its approach to assessment. It operates according to its learning, teaching and assessment strategy. Assessment matters are now overseen by the Assessment Committee but are also discussed in the Curriculum Committee. This has included monitoring pre-sessional reading, amending essay titles, and use of case studies. The College's action plan includes work in progress to ensure that staff become, and remain, up-to-date with developments in assessing students in higher education, including in maintaining academic integrity. The College has put in place strategies to help reduce the number of essay deferrals and to speed up completion of studies. Curriculum changes have helped to ensure that students progress from a more solid foundation. The measures put in place have not yet been evaluated formally.

14 The College has experienced, and acknowledged, some issues relating to progression on the BSc Integrative Counselling programme. Of the 24 students who enrolled in the 2015-16 cohort, the retention rate was 63% with nine students discontinuing the course. Of the 28 students who enrolled in the 2016-17 cohort, the retention rate was 71% with eight discontinuing. Of those who discontinued, about half of the students left with a Diploma or Certificate in Higher Education. The College has sought ways to address these issues (for example, see paragraphs 5, 6 and 7). As a result, of the 26 students who enrolled in the 2017-18 cohort, to date the retention rate is 92% with two students discontinuing.

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

15 The College's bachelor degree programme is accredited by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). The curriculum aligns with the UKCP Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy Standards for Education and Training (PCIPC SETS). All staff, students and placement supervisors are required to be members of UKCP, or equivalent, and hold accreditation of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, where appropriate. All senior staff were familiar with the Quality Code and considered that it guided every aspect of higher education management and provision at the College. The approval documentation references the Subject Benchmark Statement - Counselling and Psychotherapy - and *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* Level Descriptors.

## **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 Helen Corkill, Reviewer, and Rafe Smallman, QAA Officer, on 17 May 2019.

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