

TEF Provider Submission

Provider Context

Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy (Matrix) is a small and specialist counselling College that delivers a single course, a full-time BSc (Hons) in Integrative Counselling.

The course is validated by Middlesex University and professionally registered by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP); this means that Matrix graduates can go on to gain professional recognition as a UKCP Registered Psychotherapeutic Counsellor.

As well as running the higher education course, Matrix provides support and a professional 'home' for our graduates who have gained UKCP registration. This connection with the graduates (we undertake yearly and five yearly professional checks in order for them to maintain their registration) means we have continual feedback from those who are working in the profession, giving us information about the working climate, professional issues and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities that may benefit our Year 3 students.

We currently have 90 students in training, plus 34 students who have completed the taught aspect of the course and are now completing their clinical hours and final case study. We also have 132 UKCP Registered graduates.

We chose to include a student submission, as in line with our relational ethos and how much we value our students, it would be inconceivable to think we would be able to present our submission without including the voice of our students. [redacted] coordinated and wrote the student submission; it was a role [redacted] volunteered for after we announced the opportunity on Moodle. [redacted] was the only person who volunteered; however, if more students had declared interest, we would have suggested they collaborate on it together, again, in line with our relational approach. Support was available for [redacted] if needed; however, we encouraged [redacted] autonomy in completing the process.

We are incredibly proud of our training, our students and our graduates. Our consistently good NSS student satisfaction scores demonstrate our commitment to delivering high-quality training, developed and delivered in partnership with our students and the counselling profession.

History

Matrix was founded in 2001 by Dr Susie Jones, whose vision was to develop a relational integrative training in East Anglia. At that time, the only other relational integration courses were based in London. Dr Jones retired [redacted], and Fiona Paul, who had been on the management team [redacted], took ownership of the College.

The founding principle of Matrix was to create a training organisation based on the values of integration, holism and integrity; this commitment continues today. The training values the development of self-in-relationship with others as a constantly evolving intersubjective process. Matrix is managed in the knowledge that staff, tutors and students can all grow and learn from their joint experiences.

“Relational integration is based around the idea that what makes life difficult for people usually has its origins in early relationships; healing occurs therefore ‘in relationship’. The value we place as an organisation on fostering good, open relationships with the students and staff and working with integrity (in order to create the trust necessary in a healing relationship) is at the core of everything we do as a college”. (Fiona Paul, Principal, 2023)

Matrix has evolved from renting venues (such as schools) at weekends in both Ipswich and Norwich to in 2018, having its own self-contained, leased premises in Wymondham, Norfolk. The investment in leasing our own premises was primarily to create a ‘secure base’ for the students, to enable them to feel part of a learning community, and to provide a more adult teaching environment and better library resources. We have since taken on two additional adjacent buildings, the first to enable safe face-to-face teaching during Covid (by being able to separate teaching groups in different buildings) and the second to provide improved rooms for practising counselling skills. Teaching in Ipswich ended in July 2021, when the final cohort of students completed the BSc taught aspect.

Counselling training is generally a second career. Traditionally teaching was always delivered at weekends (in a two-day teaching unit, running once every three weeks) in order for students to be able to work whilst completing the course. In September 2020, a mid-week teaching cohort was added on a Thursday and Friday (again, once every three weeks) in response to demand from applicants.

Matrix was awarded OfS registration in the Approved category in March 2019, having previously been registered with HEFCE. In May 2022, we gained Approved (fee cap) registration. Our application for fee cap status was driven by our desire to improve the student experience by being able to access OfS grant funding. We did not apply for (and do not want) to charge above the basic fee as we believe that with the demographic of our students, many of whom are not eligible for a student loan, a higher fee would make the course impossible to access.

Governance

The Board of Governors (the Board) was created in June 2021 to replace the Advisory Board, which had previously overseen the management of the College. The Board has adopted the Core Values of Higher Education Governance and the Seven Primary Elements of Higher Education Governance that underpin the values and beliefs identified within the CUC Higher Education Governance Code (Ref 1). It sets the College’s strategic direction and ensures we achieve our mission, goals, and objectives. The Board mandate and oversees the activity of the Operational Team (the executive group) to drive the strategic plan and the Academic Board, which is the senior academic authority at the College.

The Director and Principal, Fiona Paul, oversees the day-to-day management of the College. She is currently Chair of the Academic Board. She is assisted by the Head of Clinical Practice, _____, a member of the Operational Team, and _____, Head of Operations and Chair of the Operational Team. All these posts are part-time, as all members of the Operational Team (the Principal, Head of Clinical Practice and Head of Operations) are practising clinicians and have counselling practices alongside their work at Matrix. Being practising clinicians ensures that the College’s strategy and curriculum are developed and delivered with both students and clients in

mind. Both are needed to guarantee our students leave us equipped to service the best needs of the vulnerable population they ultimately end up working with.

The Academic Board is the senior academic authority at the College. Subject to the overall responsibility of the Board of Governors, the Academic Board acts as the overarching authority and decision-making body for matters concerning academic strategy and policies, academic standards, curriculum design and development, the organisation of teaching, assessment and research and the overall quality of learning opportunities. Fiona Paul is currently Chair of the Academic Board. The College is recruiting for a Head of Curriculum who will Chair the Academic Board.

There is also a Programme Lead team comprised of senior tutors who each run a cohort of students. The Programme Lead team meet every six weeks, chaired by the Principal. Each Programme Lead is responsible for the students in their group. They act as the primary contact, take care of student welfare and teach the group at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year to ensure they are a 'secure base' for the students. They discuss the progress of students and any teaching issues that need to be taken back to the Academic Board or Operational Team. All Programme Leads are practising counsellors or psychotherapists and have private practices alongside their part-time teaching work.

Student Experience

Context

Training to be a counsellor is generally a second career. In order to be able to understand and work with the complexity of what it is to be human, prospective counsellors need to be able to show that they can be personally reflective and reflexive.

'Courses of study in Counselling and Psychotherapy therefore prepare students to be knowledgeable, self-reflective, and reflexive practitioners, with a commitment to career- long professional development and to the maintenance of professional standards. Students strive to develop their self-awareness, skills, knowledge, and competencies to work safely, ethically and effectively with clients, while also maintaining their own well-being.' (QAA Subject Benchmark Statement, 2020: 1.1)

Reflective ability develops with life experience. We have found that applicants to our training are all mature (all over 21yrs) as our entry criteria require an applicant to have some life and work experience. The data shows that generally, applicants are over 30yrs (87.6% were 31yrs or older in 2021/21). Students who apply to Matrix can demonstrate reflective skills in their application, together with evidence of self-awareness, open-mindedness, and sensitivity from the experiences they have had in their professional and personal relationships.

Our position at Matrix is to re-skill students to qualify for a much-needed profession. The course structure is designed for this re-training and upskilling with the understanding that counselling training is a second career.

The data shows that 37.3% of our students are not local. Many students travel to us from some distance, based on our reputation.

Course Organisation

We configure our course for our unusual student population - mature students, most of whom work and have families, and many who live quite a distance away. We run three cohorts of students who each attend at different times. We have two cohorts training at weekends and one midweek cohort.

We currently have 90 students in training (34 in Yr 1, 25 in Yr 2 and 31 in Yr 3). We have 34 students who have yet to graduate; having completed the taught aspect of the course, they are currently completing their clinical hours and final case study; of these 34 have their BSc viva booked for March 2023 and will almost certainly complete then.

Unlike most university courses, completion of the taught aspect of the course does not coincide with graduation. Students have clinical work to complete before writing their final piece of work and undertaking the final viva assessment examination.

It is possible for students to exit with an award at the end of Year 1 (Cert HE). After year 2, students can exit with a Diploma HE; the Diploma is also a counselling qualification; these students may exit and work as a counsellor, but they won't have had enough training hours to get professional registration. In terms of our mature student population, some students leave at the end of Year 1 and Year 2 when life, financial, or family circumstances change unexpectedly, which means they cannot complete all three years. Up until 2021, every student who completed Year 2 had to take the Diploma award. This was historically the way the course had been set up. In 2020 we discussed this with our External Examiner and Middlesex University as we felt the anxiety levels of students in Year 3 were increased by the need to complete an award they did not need. We put the proposal to students, and over 75% agreed. We then gained agreement from Middlesex University, and the requirement was dropped for all students in the academic year 2021/22. Students can still take the Diploma award, and some do if they leave at the end of Year 2, or some choose only to do the Diploma after completing Year 3. Some take it whilst in Year 3 if they have been offered paid work by their placement for which, ethically, they need to have a counselling qualification (which the Diploma is).

We have built into the programme a 'consolidation' year; this is a year students can take between Years 1 and 2 or, more commonly, between Years 2 and 3. In this period, students can either have more personal counselling if it is felt they need to work on a particular trauma, for instance, or build up clinical hours if they have been delayed in starting their placement. In addition, some self-funding students may use the year to save up for the following year. We may also sometimes suggest that a student take a consolidation year, as training to be a counsellor needs to be done at a pace that matches the student's academic or reflective abilities. In the consolidation year, they get, as a minimum, one tutorial per term, placement support and any extra academic support they require, plus the use of the building for study and to access library texts.

Our Students

All our students are mature and come with various previous qualifications, the aggregate data shows that 41% have an HE qualification and 39% are in the 'unknown' category. Our recent data generally corresponds to this:

Entry Qualifications FHEQ level	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Level 1			
Level 2	33%		20%
Level 3	22%	24%%	23%
Level 4			
Level 5			
Level 6		21%	37%
Level 7		18%	
No Qualifications			

In our experience, some applicants have had a challenging time at school for various reasons (for example, dyslexia, gender dysphoria, and sexuality). Their lack of qualifications is not a measure of their academic ability, and in many circumstances, we see their resilience as beneficial to training to be a counsellor. We assess students' academic ability during the application process and have many years of experience teaching groups of mixed-ability students. Some students may have few qualifications but show an excellent grasp of skills, and others may have a PhD but struggle more with skills. In addition, we run extra study skills sessions to help some students learn how to learn.

As many of our students have existing HE qualifications, only about half are eligible for a student loan.

Student loans v Self funding	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022/23
Student loan	54	58	52	51
Self funding	26	32	33	39
% with student loan	68%	64%	61%	57%

Matrix has a strategic approach to student recruitment. We aim to keep numbers consistent to ensure a good student/staff ratio and financial sustainability. Our student numbers over the last four years show only a steady increase which is our aim (Covid impacted 21/22 admissions).

Academic Year	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Students in training	80	90	85	90

100% of our students are recognised in terms of OfS grant funding.

Matrix is based in Norfolk which is an area of low diversity.

Population %	Norfolk
White	94.7
Asian	2.1
Mixed	1.6
Black	0.9
Other	0.7

Counselling has traditionally been seen as a white, female, middle-class occupation. Matrix aims to challenge this perception. Our increasing staff diversity (gender, ethnicity and sexuality) reflects the student population we want to recruit. In addition, we are committed to encouraging applicants from a variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds, recognising the dominance of the main cultural norms in the profession and in the region.

We believe that being a small and specialist provider attracts students that might otherwise not engage with an HE course. 50% of our students are from some of the lowest participation areas. We also have to consider that 50% of our students already have a bachelor's degree, so they will be self-funding course fees and managing the associated financial and resource pressures to complete the course.

Counselling students require family support, financial and time resources to complete their studies in ways that differ from younger students; these demands impact both the student and their family. Therefore our student population doesn't include many students from areas with high deprivation. Nevertheless, we consider we positively impact people from disadvantaged backgrounds through our students' work in their placements, predominantly working within charitable organisations that offer free or heavily subsidised counselling services. Considering our current student intake of 90, these students will deliver over 22,000 hours of counselling support to some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our society by the time they qualify.

We continue to explore ways to widen our student participation and recruit students from deprived areas; this is an area of ongoing review and development that influences the College's overall strategy and action plan. The additional funding from achieving Approved (fee cap) status will allow us to use some of the money to directly and positively impact students we identify as being from deprived areas or those who experience financial hardship during their studies. We plan to introduce a bursary this year as a method to do this; it is being set up in memory of a tutor who died in 2021 and will be supporting less financially well-off students, as was her wish. We are receptive and positive about OfS initiatives to better serve the needs of students from areas of high deprivation. As a small and specialist provider, we can be agile and responsive in developing and delivering course offerings. For example, between 2019 and 2021, we introduced and delivered multiple Introduction to Counselling Skills short courses in direct response to local demand.

Student Recruitment

Most applicants hear about us through recommendations, often from other counselling professionals. Whilst this is a testament to our good standing within the profession, we have been working on increasing our online visibility to ensure those who don't know anyone in the profession can find out about our training.

Routes to Matrix	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Recommendation	80%	63.5%	51%
Online Research	14%	35%	41%
Reapplying	2%	0%	2%
UKCP Website	4%	1.5%	6%

We do not have a campus; all students travel to us for the two-day training units. Because of our reputation, many students come from out of the immediate geographical area. We do not have student accommodation; however, we have negotiated reduced rates at a local Bed and Breakfast in Wymondham for students who need to stay overnight during their teaching units. We have also negotiated discounted rates for our students at some local eating establishments and coffee shops.

The Operational Team reviews the Admissions Policy annually. This review considers the College's annual monitoring evidence (Ref 2), withdrawals from the Programme, number of essay defers and any specific difficulties for students, such as when English Language is not their first language.

Matrix's website presents information about the course and its application process (including RPL criteria) clearly and transparently. Students are given information about fees and all additional fees on the website, during taster sessions, telephone enquiries and in hard copy at interview (Ref 3). Students have to fund their own personal counselling each year. The requirement is for 35 hours of counselling each academic year. In Year 2, they also have to self-fund their fortnightly supervision, professional membership and insurance if their placement doesn't provide it. Personal counselling and supervision adds an additional cost of approximately £7000 (in total over the three years) on top of the course fees. It is essential we provide this information transparently and explicitly to prospective students as, being mature students, they will need to consider managing their existing and upcoming financial commitments alongside those of the course.

We have run three-hour information-giving 'Taster Sessions' since 2016. We have found these to be very important with our particular student population. Transparency around the demands of the course is important for mature students as a decision to re-skill and fit training in whilst often working, managing child care, and additional financial burdens will need careful consideration.

The sessions also offer a chance for applicants to learn more about counselling skills, begin the process of being reflective (we run an experiential exercise during the session to give them an insight into how we might deepen reflection on the course), the financial and time commitments and more generally about Matrix and what we have to offer. The Taster Sessions are run on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings as we appreciate our potential students will have existing personal and professional commitments.

The Principal facilitates the sessions with at least one other senior tutor, an existing student and a graduate. Hearing from both staff and students helps prospective students understand both the positive aspects of the training and the demands of the course. These sessions are also an opportunity to hear from prospective students, and it was following feedback in Taster Sessions in 2019 we introduced midweek teaching on a Thursday and Friday.

'Students met by the team tend to agree that the admissions system is reliable, fair and inclusive, and place particular emphasis on the quality of information provided to applicants.' (QSR review, 2022)

The application process is the first step on the student's learning journey. The requirement for the applicants to be reflective from the outset in the application form gives an early indication of the need for this developmental aspect to the prospective student. The college selection process requires a written application form, attendance at an interview and the uptake of two references. Therefore, it is imperative that each applicant's personal readiness to undertake such a demanding course is assessed thoroughly. This assessment involves specific regard to an individual's internal resources, particularly those involved in enabling engagement with the psychotherapeutic demands of the course, such as an aptitude for self-awareness and commitment to self-development.

A panel of two staff members interviews every prospective student, either the Principal or the Head of Clinical Practice, together with a senior tutor. Each interviewing staff member adheres to the Admissions Policy and is an experienced practitioner with professional experience in client assessment. This is a transferable skill for evaluating an applicant's fitness to study on the course. The College limits the number of staff undertaking interviews to ensure accuracy and fairness across the applicant cohort. Decisions about acceptance are taken after a process of due reflection from both interviewers and taking both interviewers' assessments into account. We give students individual feedback if we do not offer them a place.

Given the specialist nature of the training, our Recognition of Prior Learning policy (RPL) is robust (Ref 4). The policy ensures that any students wishing to transfer from a previous training can match the learning outcomes of the 'missed' year(s) to facilitate parity of understanding and experience. For instance, the RPL Policy also requires students to have equitable personal counselling hours for the year group they are entering. RPL students must be ready to join an existing cohort showing the concomitant self-awareness necessary to become successful reflective integrative counsellors.

Teaching Excellence

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (Ref 5) clearly defines the College's approach to enabling students to develop and achieve. A crucial part of our strategy is appointing, developing and retaining high-quality knowledgeable, enthusiastic, motivating and skilled staff.

All tutors are experienced, practising clinicians, and all are either UKCP Registered or BACP Accredited psychotherapists or counsellors (this level of professional registration is not always common practice in training institutes). All are responsible for maintaining their professional CPD. 45% of staff have training either as a teaching or teaching adult learners, and 73% are trained clinical supervisors. We have a policy in place to pay 50% of the fees for any tutor who wishes to do the Post Grad Cert in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education; one tutor intends to do this next year. We also plan to join Advance HE this year to offer additional training for our tutors (the membership fee has been a barrier in the past).

Tutors teach across all year groups, so students experience various teaching styles and counselling modalities. Students also experience how very experienced practitioners have different models of integration. The modality of integration we teach is based on all counsellors practising differently. As well as students integrating the theories they learn, they also integrate within themselves; they write a coherent integrative philosophy as part of their final case study and go on to practice authentically from this process.

We take care to look after our staff as part of our commitment to working relationally. All teach part-time, and most live some distance away, as we only employ highly trained tutors. They come from London, Essex and Cambridgeshire, as well as Norfolk and Suffolk. We have a low turnover rate of staff, 7 of our 11 tutors have been here for more than four years, and we have taken on new staff in that time to replace tutors who have left our team – one retired, two moved location, one moved to an institute to teach at Doctoral level, and one very sadly died.

Matrix was shortlisted for the Independent Higher Education (IHE) Award for Transformative Staff Development in 2022. We reward staff by subsidising or sometimes offering free CPD training and supporting the cost of accommodation for those who need to stay overnight. The UKCP praised us for:

'Matrix's provision of free staff training and CPD opportunities.' (UKCP OMR report, 2021)

We introduced annual staff awards last year; these are based on outcomes and recognition of achievements throughout the year. Each member of staff (including the admin team) are recognised in this way. We do not have an overall 'winner' as that would go against our relational ethos; working as a team is very important to us.

We recently invited staff to answer some questions to find out more about their views on Matrix's institutional culture, as well as what they value about being a member of staff at the College. All responses were positive (Ref 6).

"Clear, boundaried, kind and supportive culture of academic excellence while giving primacy to the relational." (Yr 3 Programme Lead, 2023).

"The institutional culture at Matrix feels warm, robustly challenging at times, and held within a solid framework which is sufficiently flexible to allow difference and creativity." (Yr 2 Programme Lead, 2023)

"I value the opportunity to see the development of students across the year and am beginning to have an insight into the thought that has gone into the overall structure of the teaching across the three years." (Y1 Programme Lead, 2023)

"I value the workplace culture at Matrix, as it creates a learning environment for staff as well as students. The human experience is understood and worked with and policies and procedures are applied with a clear objective - to improve the student experience and help staff carry out their role to the best of their abilities. There is also a cohesive team experience which enables a sense of belonging." (Yr 2 Programme Lead, 2023)

The Operational Team have 'supervision' every two months. This is a two-hour supervision session run by our External Moderator. We use this time to discuss our working relationship and any issues that have, or may, come up. This is part of our commitment to working relationally but also to try and

manage potential power issues and any potential 'shadow' issues that may emerge and damage the proper functioning of the organisation.

We have a thorough induction programme for new staff, a mentor system and run bi-annual tutor observations, which feed into staff appraisals in March. Matrix believes that the staff observation policy is a crucial contribution to the maintenance and enhancement of standards in teaching. Comments from students at both End of Year evaluations and teaching unit evaluations show this (Ref 7).

Staff progression is possible, for instance, by applying to become a Programme Lead. When these roles become available, interested staff apply and are interviewed. In addition, we are currently recruiting internally for a Head of Curriculum, a newly created role.

One of our tutors has served a term on the Professional Conduct Committee of the UKCP, one is currently the Chair of the Ethics and Professional Practice Committee of the UK TA Association, and the Principal is the Chair of the UKCP PCIPC Assessment Committee. In this role, she manages all Organisation Member Review visits to other UKCP counselling training institutes in the UKCP Counselling section (the PCIPC). She has undertaken six of these reviews in the last five years. As well as ensuring training organisations are working in accordance with professional standards the visits are significant opportunities to discuss current good practices and new developments with other institute leaders.

The complete NSS data for teaching shows that our commitment to developing a great staff team who enjoy teaching impacts students. Also, as our tutors all work with clients, they can demonstrate to students how their learning relates to clinical practice by giving examples from their own practice.

NSS scores for teaching:

Year		The teaching on my course	Staff are good at explaining things	Staff have made the subject interesting	The course is intellectually stimulating	My course has challenged me to achieve my best work
2018		98.3	100	100	100	93.3
2019		98.3	100	100	100	93.3
2020		95.5	88.2	100	100	94.1
2021		90.7	85.19	96.3	92.5	88.8

And for 2022 showing the equivalent sector scores:

2022		100	100	100	100	100
	Sector-wide % agree		84	78	82	76
	Divergence from Sector		+16	+22	+18	+24

Teaching Strategy

Students on the course are developing clinical skills alongside academic ones. The curriculum is designed to support their increasing knowledge in both areas (skills and practice) and promote an in-depth self-reflective capacity, which is essential in an effective counsellor. Student learning is

supported by the Student Handbook and the Codes and Procedures document, which lays out the expectations of both staff and students (Ref 8 & 9).

Matrix follows the UKCP Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy (PCIPC) Standards for Education and Training (SETS). The SETS inform the curriculum and course requirements (Ref 10). We map our curriculum to the SETS to ensure we meet all professional requirements (Ref 11). The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Counselling and Psychotherapy also informs the College's curriculum. Curriculum changes are made as a result of feedback from staff, students and clinical placements. The Academic Board, with input from the Programme Leads and student evaluations, oversees the curriculum's review and development. The Academic Board has two student members (Ref 12).

'The provider consistently draws on feedback from students (and responded by making appropriate changes to the programme)' (QSR Review, 2022)

We keep class sizes small (between 10-15 students), this is to ensure that all students can receive a high level of attention, as noted by the External Examiner in her report on the academic year 2021/22:

'This is a real strength as it means that each student has a high level of support and input.' (EE report, 2022)

Curriculum Development

Matrix College is responsible for the course's design and delivery, and Middlesex University oversees the provision. We pay great attention to creating a curriculum that meets the academic requirements of a BSc (Hons) but also enables the students to be fit for practice as counsellors. The curriculum was re-written before the Middlesex re-validation in 2018 to create more continuity between the three years and to ensure that each year laid the foundation for the next in academic and clinical work. Those changes aren't reflected in the National Student Survey results (NSS) as we think it is hard for the students to appreciate such subtle differences. Still, the External Examiner (EE) noted what we were trying to achieve:

'I can read the way students develop over the three years. This partly reflects moving into practice. I am confident this also reflects your programme and the quality of help and support staff give to students.' (EE report, 2020)

And also:

'Finally – and it is interesting I am writing about inequality, anti-discriminatory practice at the end. I can see some development of awareness of issues of power in the dissertations I read – these issues are not alluded to in those trained under the old guidelines and was in most of the current ones.'
(EE report, 2020)

She also notes in her 2021 report:

'I appreciate the well thought out design of the course and the way the curriculum is developing to keep it up to date. I particularly want to emphasise the way the modules build upon each other over the three years, appropriate both for academic development and as a preparation and support for counselling practice. It matches well the requirements of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy.' (EE report, 2021)

The Middlesex re validation report in 2018 (Ref 13) considered the Matrix curriculum to be:

'A well-considered and carefully balanced mixture of theory, skills-based and personal development which reflects the integrative model.'

Middlesex also commended the college for:

'The relational stance that is embedded in all aspects of the programme and modelled in the teaching, learning and assessment strategies.'

We appreciate the support and guidance we receive from both Middlesex University and our External Examiner. We have made other alterations in response to the External Examiner's suggestions (Ref 14); one such change was her suggestion that students demonstrate more socio-political awareness in their essays. We have introduced more time for discussing this in the teaching. We have also introduced it explicitly as a criterion to be included in each essay (Ref 15). The EE notes that:

'The staff have been very open to and interested in any suggestions I have made and I have felt involved in changes they have made'. (EE report, 2021)

The assessors at our most recent OMR review said:

"The OMR assessors were very impressed with the rigour and thoroughness of the training." (UKCP OMR review, 2021)

Assessment

Procedures for assessment are laid out in Assessment and Internal Verification Policy. We use a variety of assessment methods, both formative and summative, to enable the students to demonstrate all their learning outcomes. The learning outcomes and assessment criteria are written in line with requirements for Middlesex University, the UKCP and the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement. The assessment criteria are laid out clearly in the Handbook and Assignment Handbook. The recent UKCP OMR review praised us for our adherence to the standards:

'The programme uses a range of assessment methods and provides comprehensive formative and summative feedback to students at all stages, covering theoretical application, skills development and reflective practice. Assessments are pass/fail and there is clear information in the course handbook about requirements for progression between years. The assessors wondered whether it would be clear for students if all details about each assessment were presented together (assignment guidelines, marking categories and criteria, level,

credits) as currently these are provided in different places.’ (UKCP OMR review, 2021)

We appreciated that feedback and introduced Assignment Handbooks for each year in September 2021(Ref 15).

We continually look at ways to support students with the course’s academic requirements, especially for those who have not been in formal education for many years and those who enter the course without formal qualifications. Enabling students to achieve the academic standards required and improve existing skills means we pay close attention to teaching essay writing skills. In addition, the weekend timetable in Year 1 is structured to allow for specific study skills teaching. Essay Writing training days are delivered in October each year (in addition to the curriculum); we always use the External Examiner’s comments as a teaching point. In addition, the library includes books on study skills and essay writing.

From 2021 we have, as well as the essay writing days, introduced four additional zoom sessions covering the basics of grammar, punctuation and referencing. We invested in Turnitin (anti-plagiarism software) in 2018 as an add-on to Moodle to detect plagiarism. Essay marking guidelines are available to students on Moodle. The Principal and Head of Clinical Practice do not mark essays. The Principal undertakes the internal verification, and both she and the Head of Clinical Practice are available to support marking tutors and arbitrate difficult decisions.

As well as essay submissions, students are encouraged to reflect on their learning needs and personal learning process in their reflective journals (4000 words per term). They are given feedback on their specific learning processes through their use of this journal by their Programme Lead. Students also receive feedback from their placements and clinical supervisors on their clinical practice.

Continuous Improvement

We recognise that there will always be areas we can improve on and are willing to take any recommendations and constructive feedback on board. Being a small provider gives the benefit that we can be swift in taking action to improve following such feedback. Our involvement with the QAA since 2014 has transformed what we do at the College; it has given us a framework to be able to develop and improve upon our policies and procedures to better service our students. Matrix College undertook the UKCP OMR in January 2021(Ref 16); we received six commendations and a very small number (compared with other organisations) of recommendations and requirements. All the requirements and recommendations have been completed. The rigorous UKCP monitoring process ensures that professional standards are maintained.

We had a QAA QSR visit which the OfS requested as part of our application for Approved (fee cap) in January 2022 (Ref 17). We passed the review with high confidence in most areas. We have addressed all areas of low or moderate confidence by altering wording on policies, our Memorandum of Cooperation with Middlesex University evidence and have almost completed the review of the complaints procedure.

Covid

We swiftly responded to the practical demands Covid placed on the College. For example, our adaptation to Covid for teaching and training our students to work online with clients was used as a case study by the QAA in a supporting resource publication for small and specialist providers (Ref 18 p. 32). The External Examiner also acknowledged this in her 2019/20 report:

'I want to acknowledge the sterling and I am sure exhausting work, Fiona Paul and her staff have done this year to make the necessary changes to manage the pandemic both with changes in their buildings and in the move to virtual teaching. I attended as an observer the Programme Voice Group which took place after the Examination Board and heard the students' appreciation of how this had been managed.' (EE report, 19/20)

We went entirely online very quickly at the start of the first lockdown as we didn't want the students to miss any teaching. We taught the tutors how to use Zoom in the evenings. We brought in robust policies regarding students finding a safe and confidential space in their houses to be on Zoom (as sometimes students may talk through their own trauma and also are required to be 'clients' using their own life experience in skills practice). We were careful to ensure the teaching and skills practice was manageable on Zoom; initially having shorter and altered days. However, we were able, within weeks, to create a system of teaching that meant the students were taught in an almost identical way to if they had been in the building. We also very quickly delivered specialist training on how to work online to all the students who were seeing clients in placement so that their client work was impacted as little as possible.

In the summer of 2020, we undertook building work in Wymondham to enlarge a training room to allow groups to return safely to face-to-face teaching in September for one of the two-day units (with the agreement of the local Directors of Public Health), the second day being on Zoom. In addition, we adjusted the timetable so the students did all the skills practice and experiential exercises on the day they were in college. We also purchased 4 HEPA air purifiers which enabled the students to return safely to fully face-to-face teaching in September 2021 with Covid protocols in place. We were committed to delivering the course in the best possible way for the students. Michelle Donelan, the Universities Minister, mentioned our swift adaptability to continue teaching during Covid during her speech at the 2020 Independent Higher Education conference.

We introduced an initiative during Covid called the 'Community Café'. We felt that students were missing the collegiate nature of the training and missing out on mixing with other year groups during break times. So, we introduced an online 2-hour session approximately every 2 - 3 months where we had a speaker (sometimes external, sometimes a tutor) talking about a particular topic with a session for the students to discuss the subject in mixed groups in breakout rooms with a final plenary at the end. These have proved so popular that we have continued them (online) post-Covid. Topics have included; mindfulness, working with the arts, talking about sex with clients, working cross-culturally, using storytelling and most recently, neurodiversity.

Student Placements

Developing high-quality practitioners is at the heart of the Matrix strategy. Therefore, students are required to undertake clinical placements during Years 2 and 3. Students work with vulnerable clients, and Matrix takes the responsibility of sending them to work with clients very seriously. Our

Readiness to Practice process for Year 2 students applying to placements is rigorous and thorough. We undertake assessments of their clinical skills, participation and ability to be self-reflective. We bring in extra tutors to observe triad practice on the first two teaching units so that the students are not held up in their ability to reach the required standard and start in placement.

The Head of Clinical Practice liaises with all existing and new placements. Placement evaluation questionnaires are issued annually to ensure that Matrix students are well-prepared for clinical work. In addition, during routine placement visits, the Head of Clinical Practice asks placement providers if there are any identified training needs for the student's clinical practice.

We regularly receive feedback from our placements, commenting on the high quality of our students.

"Having a meeting with yourself as JI tutor and the clinical lead was helpful in ensuring the placement was the right fit for all parties, in the past with placements from other institutes it has often been email correspondence only, which I feel is not as beneficial." (Big C, 2023)

"I can reiterate that we find Matrix students generally to have a high degree of professionalism in their commitment to a placement, to their clients and to their own boundaries and self-care." Time Norfolk, 2023)

"Course content is clearly robust and thorough- as is reflected in the student's practice." (4Cs, 2023)

"The volunteers we have taken on in recent years have delivered quality counselling support." (MTCIC, 2023)

"We currently have 2 excellent students on placement from Matrix. Their integrative approach & learning appears to suit working with clients with eating disorders. They are both engaged & thoughtful in supervision groups and are keen to learn." (, Eating Matters, 2023)

Matrix College students are well-trained and highly regarded in the professional community. It is common for Year 3 students who have opted to complete their Diploma in Integrative Counselling (following Year 2) to be offered paid work in their placement organisations. Students have also gained paid work in local wellbeing services and running placement organisations while in Year 3 working towards their BSc. This is evidence that the College's strategy to provide excellent counsellors is working.

'The provider has developed comprehensive systems for the effective approval of placement settings and the management and monitoring of students on placement, having regard to the requirements and expectations of the PSRB and the University as well as to the needs of the students.' (QSR report, 2022)

Student Support

We take deliberate steps to ensure our students feel supported, given the nature of the course. Each cohort has a Programme Lead who is the main point of contact for each student; they are the first port of call for any pastoral or learning issues the student may have. Students have a one-hour tutorial per term and can request more if needed. The tutorial support offered gives an opportunity to help them develop their academic skills and supports their academic and personal development.

Students are required to have personal counselling, so we do not have a specific student support service; as all staff are trained counsellors and psychotherapists, we can offer extra support when needed. As well as students receiving support from the Tutor Team and their Programme Leads, Matrix has a designated Learning Support Tutor who provides specialist learning support for students who require it. We pay attention to his feedback every year and adjust learning requirements accordingly. For example, he suggested we add additional Zoom study skill sessions, which we did in 2020/2021, and we altered the teaching on the essay writing day to include more basic study skills.

Following feedback from one student in 2021/2022 we have altered how we note and pass on information within the teaching team about additional needs. In the past, additional needs were discussed in the first teaching unit and further discussed and noted in tutorials. We have, from September 2022, introduced a specific individual meeting with all students that declare a need on their application form before the start of the course. Their needs are noted and passed on to the teaching tutor.

We also think of additional needs before the start of the course and make any adjustments necessary, as noted by the QSR team:

'This included how students with additional needs are considered in the application process through the provision of reasonable adjustments, with one example being that a student was provided with the interview questions in advance to enable them to prepare sufficiently'. (QSR report, 2022)

Matrix is involved in a mentoring project offering peer-to-peer mentoring. 'Many Hands' is an Office for Students funded collaborative project led by Independent Higher Education (IHE) <https://www.manyhandsproject.uk>. Along with six other providers, we have developed the peer-to-peer mentoring programme specifically to meet the needs of the students of our institutions; mature students, students from Black, Asian or ethnic minorities, or students studying a creative subject.

The Principal and a Matrix tutor were instrumental in designing the programme, and a Matrix tutor delivers all the mentor training. At present, we have three students who are mentors on the project. Interestingly we are the only members of the collaboration for whom students have yet to access the programme as a mentee (despite advertising the service). We attribute this to our students having enough pastoral support in place at the College and that they have weekly counselling where they can address their concerns.

Teaching Resources

Middlesex University reviews our resources and facilities to ensure they are appropriate to meet students' needs at each validation event and again when we have added new buildings. We now

have the required physical space; large rooms for teaching and small private rooms for group and triad (counselling skills practice) work. We also have a common café area for students to mix with other year groups. A system of student custodians enables the staff to concentrate on their teaching as the custodian sets up the venue for the teaching units. This has allowed us to offer some students paid work, which they can put towards the cost of their personal counselling or supervision.

Discussions about facilities and resources are generally taken within the Operations Team. Being a small and dynamic team means we can respond to any changes and improvements that are deemed necessary without delay. Recent examples include acting on feedback from student evaluations where they found the building too cold; we purchased additional portable heaters in time for the following teaching unit and programmed the central heating to be on for more extended periods. Due to the emotionally challenging nature of the course, we recognise how vital students' physical comfort is during their time at Matrix. Other student feedback has included some students' physical discomfort at the bright lights in the training rooms; work is scheduled to replace all the ceiling lights this term with new fixtures that will emit warmer, less harsh lighting.

Over the last three years, we have taken deliberate steps to increase the number of books in our library, and we now have 1,181 books. We have also made a concerted effort to buy back any books from graduate students they no longer want, as well as facilitating a scheme via Moodle where students and graduates can sell books directly to each other. As well as improving our library resources, this also goes towards assisting clients with the cost of living crisis.

We keep at least four core books per group so that every student can access each core book per module. The UKCP praised us for posting out library books to the students during the lockdowns. We invest in new books each year, and retiring professionals often donate them to us, so our library continues to grow substantially. In 2019 we improved the library by adding an electronic library system. The library system has enabled us to ensure that we can keep account of all the library books and lose few. We also have a CLA licence which allows us to scan chapters of books for our students. We have a printer in the library that the student can use for printing and copying; this is free of charge for students to use.

Library Investment:

Academic Year	Library Book Investment	Representative Spend per Student
2020/21	£3,577.52	£40
2021/2022	£794.26	£9
Sept 22 – Jan 23	£2391.49	£27

A recent discussion with students regarding the cost-of-living crisis has resulted in us leasing a new fast photocopier and printing all handouts for all students. We have also undertaken to print out all the pre-reading as students said that the cost of paper and printing had gone up considerably, and we wanted to ease the pressure on them.

Students are welcome to come and use the college library and study area when they are not attending their teaching units. We don't currently offer any IT resources at Matrix; however, it would be something we would consider investing in if we see an increase in student numbers requesting to access the College to study outside their teaching units.

The College introduced a VLE in 2016 (Moodle) to extend student learning opportunities. Training videos are uploaded to this forum and other online resources, including subject pre-reading, and unit teaching resources, for example, handouts and PowerPoints. In addition, there is a system of student information sheets on various pertinent subjects; they are stored on Moodle and easily accessible to all students. During Covid, we recorded a session on 'how to make your essay better' following the first essay submission, using the feedback from the markers. Using recorded videos was new, and we had good feedback (verbal) from students. Since then, we have added videos on case study preparation and also information for student reps. The UKCP team, who were able to see the content on Moodle, noted:

'The provision of information through Moodle – there is a great range of resources here and the information is well organised and easily accessible'. (OMR report, 2021)

The NSS data on learning resources differs from year to year. This is partly because some of the NSS questions don't really match what we do at Matrix; for instance, we don't have any IT resources. We have tried different ways to approach this with students, and for many years we suggested they use that question for Moodle and the course-specific resources for pre-reading and other resources tutors may send them. In 2021 we suggested to students that they ignore this question, but not all took that advice (Ref 19) hence the score being so low (47%) that year. We have reverted to our original way of asking them to consider the question, which we think accurately reflects the available resources.

Year		The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well	The library resources have supported my learning well	I have been able to access course specific resources
2022		87	88	91
	Sector-wide % agree	77	83	82
	Divergence from Sector	+10	+5	+9

The College is committed to developing the student's learning. As such, they are occasionally invited to external CPD days (at a discounted rate) when we consider the speakers integral to the curriculum. It also allows students to meet graduates and other professionals in the field. For example, in 2018, Matrix hosted (a leading existential clinician); 55 people attended. In 2020 Matrix hosted (Professor of Counselling Psychology). training was moved to online delivery in response to the Covid pandemic; 78 people attended. Both speakers feature books on the student's reading list.

Student Engagement

The College aims that the co-created relationship between students and the College will 'model' the relational psychotherapeutic practice taught. The students have a voice at Matrix and see their feedback creating change:

"The approach is strongly embedded in all of the provider's ways of working with students, which emphasises a relational approach to engaging students that enables critical discussion and feedback". (QSR report, 2022)

Matrix promotes and allows student involvement and engagement in every stage of their learning journey and values the contribution students make to the enhancement of the Programme. Matrix has an ethos of valuing all student contributions, formal and informal, and responding to their expressed needs with respect and due care. Student representation is carried out formally through the student rep process. Student reps are chosen by each group very early in the academic year, and they have training on the role.

Student reps attend the bi-annual Programme Voice Group meetings. At the meeting in March 2022, 10 students attended (12% of the total number students); in November 2022, 16 students were present (17% of the total students). These numbers are significant as the meetings are not held on days when teaching occurs, and almost all students have jobs and other commitments. We believe it shows the value they place on having their voices heard. Data shows that student rep attendance has generally increased since 2018 and has remained high. Since Covid, we offer students the option to attend on Zoom; data shows the majority of students prefer to attend in person.

Meeting Date	Student Rep Attendance
March 2018	5
November 2018	10
March 2019	7
November 2019	8
March 2020	7*
November 2020	15*
March 2021	13*
May 2021	9
November 2021	12 (4*)
March 2022	10 (2*)
November 2022	16 (5*)

*attended on Zoom

Student reps bring detailed reports of feedback from their peers to the meetings. All comments and feedback are listened to and then addressed in the meeting. Answers or explanations for topics raised are given to the reps in the meeting for passing on back to students. The External Examiner is often able to attend these meetings:

'I was able to attend the student / staff Programme Voice Group after the exam board in November and heard feedback from each training group. This confirmed for me the programme's strengths in collaboration, transparency and their openness to receiving and acting on feedback where appropriate. The students were very appreciative of the support given by all the staff.' (EE report, 21/22)

Examples of recent changes we have made as a result of student feedback at Programme Voice Meetings: (Ref 20)

1. Soundproofing rooms in the new building.

2. Having a speaker on neurodiversity at the community café in November 2022.
3. Improved intermediate lighting whilst we are waiting for new lights to be installed.
4. More core library books purchased.

Evaluation

Matrix monitors feedback to review approaches to learning. In addition to the Middlesex University annual monitoring evidence, we have our own annual monitoring processes (Ref 2) which help us to develop our action plan and improve our provision. Feedback includes:

- End of unit training evaluations.
- Student end-of-year evaluations.
- Informal feedback from alumni.
- Formal feedback from work placements.
- Retention statistics.
- Feedback from the external examiner and the external assessors.
- Past completion statistics.
- Feedback from the UKCP and Middlesex University.

Matrix is committed to maintaining our high-quality course and our commitment to regular monitoring and evaluation is paramount to what we do.

Student Outcomes

Continuation and Completion

We are proud of our student outcomes. Unfortunately, the published data do not reflect the achievements of our students because of the time it takes for students to complete their clinical hours and final pieces of work. Their final case study can only be written when the students have almost completed the required clinical hours.

Almost all students who start at Matrix leave with an exit award. The table below gives the accurate figures.

Year started	Number of entrants	BSc award	Exit Diploma award	Exit Cert award	Left with no award	BSc viva booked (March)	Still to complete BSc
2016/17	24						
2017/18	25	17					
2018/19	25						
2019/20	25						

Occasionally students get a defer in their final viva examination.

Between 2018 and 2022, 95.8% of students passed their BSc viva on their 1st attempt.

We know all our students well. Whenever a student leaves without gaining the BSc we discuss it with the Programme Lead team what may have led to that. We cannot always manage the difficulties in life our students have, but we can and do try and intervene early if we see a problem developing. This proactive approach is shown in the decreasing numbers who leave with a Certificate or no award.

Our continuation rates are testament to both the application process and the pastoral and academic support we offer to students.

'The assessment team concludes that the provider's approach to student support, along with the embedded requirements for students' professional accreditation, facilitates students' achievement of successful academic and professional outcomes'. (QSR report, 2021)

Progression

There is no progression data as the numbers responding to the survey are so small.

We offer a What's Next? Seminar Day in the Autumn term for students who have left after completing Yr 3 in July (free of charge). This day gives the students information about finding paid employment, setting up in private practice, and other important information they will need as they embark on their professional careers.

As there is no progression data, we have chosen to complete our own research, picking one student cohort at random to see what they are up to following graduation. We looked at the Student Cohort 2016-2017, of the total number of students who graduated (students) (Ref 21). 94.1% of graduates are working as counsellors. 68.8% of graduates working in the profession are either UCKP registered or BACP accredited. Of the remaining 31.2%, 50% are working towards UKCP registration, and 50% are BACP registered. 100% of graduates working as counsellors are in paid employment. 87.5% of graduates working in the profession are in private practice. The remaining 12.5% are in full-time employment as counsellors within the NHS.

Educational Gain

Counselling training is a vocation, and students report that the training impacts their whole lives. Our students recognise that our course is more than a formal qualification; it is about personal gain, as well as educational and professional. We understand our students are different; they are on a journey of personal growth that allows them to positively impact others through understanding the value of genuine connection and meaningful relationships. Students often describe our course as “*life-changing*”.

In a recent video for the website, students (picked randomly from the students that were here that day) were asked to describe the training and what they valued about it. These are some of the responses:

“I like the style of teaching and how you get to see lots of different tutors so you get lots of different attitudes and ways of working.”

(Student, 2023)

“What I value the most is the different elements of the way the course is structured...The fact that Matrix has provided that has created an experience you would never get anywhere else. It’s a real privilege to be able to be part of that.”

(Student, 2023)

“I think the ethical teaching is brilliant and the knowledge we are learning, it’s so about us and about how we are going to be good counsellors by all of the good self-exploration and understanding around our own selves.”

(Student, 2023)

In order to show what happens after the course we asked two graduates to describe their experience:

“When I first enrolled in Matrix I came

I started with very little confidence; I did not belong in the world of academia and I did not think that this was something I could potentially accomplish myself. But, from the very first interview with Matrix I found the encouragement that I got, that someone saw the potential in me and fostered that from the beginning...I was always championed to do my best....

I found the academic work and the way that it is structured really helpful... It (the training) has allowed me to trust myself and trust others around me, and I have found the whole experience to be reparative. I am an academic person, and I can achieve more than I know”. graduated)

“... I am not academic but what I liked about the course is that it brought in lots of other ways of learning and understanding on our weekends that helped me that weren’t all book based. Although I did a lot of reading, and I enjoyed it, what I got from the course was the fundamentals to enable me to develop my reading skills and to develop my understanding. I always thought it was a good grounding and that the tutors were academic, but they put it across in such a way that was accessible to pupils who were not necessarily academic...I think the other thing

that was remarkable about it was the small sizes of the class. They were large enough that you were part of a bigger group with different experiences but small enough that you couldn't hide... I went to _____ and I think this is very rewarding. I was well prepared for it as its dealing with deep trauma. I feel the trauma work we did and the surrounding work around that was valuable. I am in a role where I think I am hopefully making a difference to some women's lives, obviously not every woman I come across, because that's impossible..." (_____, graduated _____)

The Future

We are adding to our professional training for graduates by running a one-year Clinical Supervision course for those who are at least four years post-qualification, starting in September 2023.

We also have plans to introduce a Masters award. We have support for this from Middlesex University and are in a provisional discussion with them about our plans.

Conclusion

'The assessment team concludes that the provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience. This is because the provider's site is the culmination of a long-term strategic vision on the provider's part, with ongoing plans for development and improvement in terms of facilities, learning resources and student support (for example the leasing and fit-out of a second, adjacent building to the same high standards in response to growth in numbers). The provider's governors and operational team demonstrated to the assessment team that there is a unity of purpose and shared understanding of responsibilities within the provider's organisation and continued planning for further improvements'.
(QSR report, 2022)

We are a very small specialist provider working very hard to fit into a regulatory environment that hasn't been designed for the way we work. We hope we have been able to demonstrate to you what it is that we do at Matrix that is so highly valued by our staff and students.

We are committed to training high-quality counsellors with broad theoretical knowledge who are excellent clinicians. Our students need to be well equipped to work with such clinically vulnerable clients they work with in their voluntary placements as students and counselling agencies and private practice once they have qualified.

References

1. Matrix Governance Handbook
2. Annual Evaluatory reports
3. Additional Costs
4. RPL Policy
5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
6. Staff Feedback
7. End of Year Evaluations

8. Student Handbook
9. Codes and Procedures
10. UKCP Adult Psychotherapeutic Counselling SETS
11. Mapping against UKCP SETS
12. Academic Board Terms of Ref
13. Middlesex Review of BSc Integrative Counselling
14. EE reports
15. Assignment Handbooks
16. Matrix OMR Report 2021.
17. QAA QSR report
18. QAA Case Study
19. NSS Letter to Students
20. Programme Voice Minutes
21. Graduate jobs