

## TEF Student Submission

Provider: Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy (Matrix) UKPRN: 10023453

Submitted: 24th January 2023

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### Section 1 - Approach to Evidence Gathering

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I volunteered to be the TEF Student Contact. I am a mature student with a corporate background in Learning and Development which means I have experience in monitoring standards of delivery and analysis of feedback, hence my acceptance of this temporary role (N.B. I have no experience in the education sector). As a final-year student, I felt I would have enough knowledge of the college and staff to facilitate a good process.

#### Background

Matrix is a small college based in East Anglia. It delivers one course: full-time BSc (Hons) in Integrative Counselling (with the option of a Diploma qualification in year 2). It has a current cohort of 90 students and 34 additional students who have finished their studies and are in the process of completing clinical hours/final case studies to be able to graduate.

#### Survey Responders

Distribution of Student Numbers per year

Year 1	34
Year 2	25
Year 3	31
Total	90

As a main focus of the TEF is 'teaching excellence', I chose to focus the survey on precisely those students who are *currently* experiencing teaching at Matrix.

I also made the decision to only include information on Student Experience. Student Outcomes, from a small specialist college such as Matrix, are very varied and cannot be compartmentalised in quite the same way as standard graduate outcomes from larger institutions with a wider variety of courses.

The experience a student takes from the Matrix journey, both personal and academic, can be taken into many different environments, to great positive effect given their immersion and focus on deep relational and empathic skills. There is no one path that makes a graduate 'successful' in their outcomes from Matrix. Some volunteer exclusively for charities, so one cannot assess their 'outcomes' by salary or salary increase for mature students. Some gain paid work but not necessarily straight into direct counselling employment or private practice, so one cannot assess their 'outcomes' on the basis that they 'follow' the subject of their specialist degree.

It's also important to note that many who *do* follow a 'counselling' career path from graduation, often develop a portfolio of work across many employers, charities and indeed

job types over time. None of this can be easily quantified with standard expectations/data (particularly those used by larger providers) but that doesn't make the Matrix graduates' contribution to communities or society as a whole any less important or successful.

For these reasons, I felt that any attempt to summarise Student Outcomes was unlikely to cover the full picture in a way that would be seen as aligned with 'normal' quantitative assessment. In order to do so, I would have to exceed the document restrictions to make a fair attempt. Thus, I chose to focus on Teaching Excellence and experience with current students.

### **Timing**

It was decided that the best timing for the questionnaire would be the beginning of the second term of the 2022/23 academic year (January) as all students would have completed at least one full term and their first term assignment would have been submitted.

### **Survey Type**

A number of options were considered. An online questionnaire was chosen mainly for the following reasons:

- 1) Matrix does not have students present on a campus full time - students only visit the location specifically for 2-day teaching units which happen every 3 weeks and those groups are staggered across different times. Therefore a face to face interview would be too time-consuming to conduct (and impossible to get a wide enough response). To ensure we had some qualitative data, there was a free text area at the end of the survey for further comments.
- 2) Students who study at Matrix are generally computer literate (e.g. essay submittals, unit pre-reading requirements etc. are through Moodle) so it was deemed likely that students would be able to access and complete an online questionnaire. Those who have educational needs already receive support from Matrix and the survey would be created through SurveyMonkey, a system the student population is well used to.

### **Anonymous Responses**

Generally, surveys (for example at the end of teaching units) are not anonymous because the college operates 'relationally', in line with the integrative psychotherapeutic approach it teaches. This allows tutors and programme leads to be proactive with students when responding to feedback from teaching units, and at the end of the year. I decided that specifically for the TEF survey, and on the basis that the report would be read alongside the provider submission, an anonymised approach would offer a truly independent voice of the student population.

### **Design of questions**

I assessed guidelines available from TEF and the OfS as well as some general research on the education sector. I also accessed information on statistical guidelines using the NSS as my example, see here: [Questions about the NSS data - Office for Students](#). I balanced the ideal amount of data with the need for a high enough response rate for accurate trends - the learner population is 100% mature students and most have jobs, families and other

commitments so I considered this during the design. Generally speaking, Matrix provides an open and frequent feedback culture so the students are good at giving feedback under any circumstance.

### **Communication to the student body**

In order to gather interest and then commitment, there was a three-stage approach:

- 1) I drafted a message (sent, unedited, by the college to the whole student community) explaining the purpose of the survey and the opportunity it gave each student to provide anonymous feedback on the teaching and student experience at Matrix
- 2) A few days later, I sent personal messages to all Group Reps asking for their support to remind peers of the survey
- 3) Matrix then sent an additional email reminder through Moodle (from Matrix) to all students

### **Independence**

Throughout the whole process, I was given direct access, at any time I required, to the Principal, Head of Operations and the College Administrator through email and personal mobile telephone numbers. On the rare occasion when I have had a question, each individual has been helpful and respectful of the approach I wished to take. Throughout my experience, Matrix have shown complete respect and appreciation for the importance of independence in my report and the process overall. We agreed that I would see the draft Provider Submission prior to finalising the Student Submission but that the Student Submission would only contain data gathered independently from Matrix.

### **Information on response rate:**

There is an excellent distribution of responses across year groups and an overall response rate across the student cohort of 76%. I believe it is to be expected that the response rate would be lower for final-year students who have the heaviest workload.

Year	Total number of students	Number of responders per year group	% responses per year group cohort	% responses versus overall response
1	34	27	79%	40%
2	25	20	80%	29%
3	31	21	68%	31%
Total	90	68	76%	-

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## **Section 2 - Student Experience**

The data and student comments are only derived from the survey. Context includes the goal of the question and any useful information from Matrix that I have chosen to include.

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**Q1: How well does the teaching at Matrix support your adult learning experience?**

All students at Matrix are classed as Adult Learners (over 21 years old) and 88% are over 31 years old.

**The Data:**

- 97% of responses were positive
- Over a third of Matrix students responded with the highest possible answer 'Brilliantly' (34%)
- Half of the students said 'Really Well' (49%).
- 9 students (13%) answered 'well' to this question

**Student Comments:**

*"Coming from a non-academic background, I have never managed to get through the first few months of courses in the past. I feel the variety of teaching styles and the focus on not just delivering PowerPoint lectures has helped me to succeed and enjoy my learning experience, as I continue through my final year"*

*"I have been really pleased with the experience so far at Matrix. It has far exceeded my expectations."*

*My experience at Matrix has led me to feel, for the first time, that I shall be very sad for the course to be over. It has been a continuous and life-changing journey of learning and I feel encouraged to continue to explore this field of learning."*

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**Q2: How does the professional expertise (lived professional experience) of the tutors contribute to your academic experience?**

Matrix says that a crucial part of its strategy is to appoint, develop and retain high-quality staff who are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, motivating and skilled. All tutors are experienced, practicing 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). 45% of staff have training either as a teacher or teaching adult learners and 73% are trained clinical supervisors.

This question aimed to find out if the students *experienced* this as a contributor to their learning.

**The Data:**

- 99% of students responded 'A huge amount' or 'A lot'
- Only one student (1%) responded with 'Somewhat'

**Student Comments:**

*"Having trained with other institutions, I feel Matrix is a better university for counselling training. There is higher quality of tutors, who are practicing counsellors."*

*"The quality of the teaching has been excellent and I love the fact that the tutors differ each unit as they each bring a different approach."*

**Q3: Please rate this statement: I have the opportunity to *explore* ideas and concepts with peers and tutors** (ie, interactively encouraged on teaching weekends and seminars) Matrix says that they have small class sizes of between 10-15 to ensure that all students 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” This question sought information on the level of interactivity of the teaching units/seminars. As a ‘relational’ college teaching a relational integrative course, I wanted to see how the experience of the students matched that approach (as opposed to ‘listening’ to lectures, or viewing PowerPoint slides).

**The Data:**

- 99% of students responded positively
    - 72% of these gave the highest possible answer ‘Strongly agree’
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**Q4: Please rate this statement: I feel intellectually stimulated by the course content and tutors.**

Matrix says it’s responsible for the design and delivery of the course and Middlesex University oversee the provision. Students report to Matrix that the training has had an impact on their whole lives. Nevertheless, academic rigour is something Matrix values extremely highly as part of the student experience. Matrix follows the UKCP Psychotherapeutic Counselling and Intersubjective Psychotherapy (PCIPC) Standards for Education and Training (SETS). The SETS inform the curriculum and course requirements. The Academic Board, with input from the Programme Leads and from student evaluations, oversee the review and development of the curriculum.

As a population of mature students, some of whom left education at school age, others of whom are already educated to degree level, this question sought to understand whether a broad scope of students felt ‘stimulated’ intellectually by the course and tutors.

**The Data:**

- 96% of students gave a positive response
    - 69% of those gave the highest possible answer ‘Strongly agree’
  - 4% responded with ‘neither agree nor disagree’
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**Q5: Please rate the opportunities you have to embed your learning through practice? (eg triads, group process, observed skills practice, practical exercises)**

Counselling and psychotherapy study is as much a vocation as it is an experiential, relational and intellectual process. Embedding of learning is vital to enable graduate counsellors into whatever career path they choose to follow at graduation.

**The Data:**

- 97% rated this aspect ‘Good’ or above
  - 59% of those gave the highest possible rating of ‘Excellent’
  - 38% of those have the next best answer of ‘Very Good’
- Overall 94% rated this aspect of Matrix as ‘Very Good’ or ‘Excellent’

**Student Comments:**

*"Matrix understands the need for personal development where as other universities do not. Finally, the requirement of experiential learning in respect of triads and group process, is fundamental for being a counsellor."*

*"The learning weekends are structured in a way to include valuable areas of learning including group process, theory and triads- these are mentally and emotionally stimulating but very worthwhile and I view these elements as a vital part of the training."*

*"I love the fact Matrix hold triads each afternoon which gets you straight into feeling comfortable with the experience. I also love the fact that we talk about our own personal experiences rather than read off scripts or role play."*

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**Q6: Do you feel that you are on a course designed to give you the opportunity to leave at a high professional standard?**

Regardless of whether a student wishes to graduate and move to a salaried counsellor position, private practice or further studies, this question was set to sense how well students felt prepared for whatever their future career paths may be.

**The Data:**

- **97%** answered this question positively ('Agree' or 'Strongly agree')
  - 74% of these answered the highest possible answer of 'Strongly agree'
- There were no negative responses and 2 people answered neither agree nor disagree.

**Student Comments:**

*"I feel Matrix is a prestigious college that is head and shoulders above other training programs and institutions- I am very happy to be training as a counsellor with Matrix."*

*"I love the environment at Matrix it is really relaxed and comfortable and does not feel as formal as a conventional college despite the learning being just as in depth if not more in depth."*

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**Q7: Can you see the UKCP professional standards demonstrated through the learning content and tutors at Matrix?**

The Matrix course is UKCP accredited and therefore aligns itself with the professional standards of the UKCP. This question aimed to see how aware the students were of these standards through the 'day-to-day' teaching and learning at the college.

**The Data:**

- **90%** of students answered positively
  - 60% of those answered with the highest possible 'Strongly agree'
  - 39% of those answered 'Agree'

**Q8: How supported do you feel in your learning?** (ie if you want or need support, do you think it is available)

Matrix say that as adult learners, students are encouraged to understand their responsibility to engage in their learning and to discuss any issues they may have with their Programme Lead. Each student has tutorials where they are encouraged to monitor their progress and consider the learning outcomes for the modules they are undertaking. Feedback is also given on their clinical practice on training seminar days and weekends. They also receive feedback from their peers in Group Process.

Matrix say they continually look at ways they can 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 to improve on existing skills means we pay close attention to teaching essay writing skills.

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 will adjust requirements accordingly.

**The Data:**

- **97%** of students responded positively to this question
  - 76% of these students answered that they feel they are 'well' or 'extremely well' supported
  - A further 15% of these students say they receive 'enough' support
- There were 2 students who felt they could benefit from further support

**Student Comments:**

*"I found the essay day super useful, the support from Admin, Tutors and Staff is amazing. I really am enjoying every moment. Thanks Matrix!"*

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**Q9: How do you feel Matrix has responded to the Covid pandemic to minimise impact on your learning?** (eg, online learning provision in lockdowns, updated policies re: testing requirements, placement hours policy changes, provision of safety equipment such as air filters)

The Covid pandemic naturally impacted the teaching at Matrix. Some students were transferred to online learning during lockdowns whereas others are experiencing Matrix measures post-lockdowns. Regardless of when the students joined Matrix, an overall sense of satisfaction with how Matrix handled/are handling it was sought.

**The Data:**

- **98%** of students say that Matrix have responded between 'Well' and 'Brilliantly' to the Covid pandemic
  - 1% of the cohort said that the response to the pandemic was 'Okay' and there were no negative responses
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#### **Q10: How relevant are the assessments to embedding your learning?**

##### **The Data:**

- **91%** of students commented that the assessments at Matrix helped them to embed their learning 'A lot' or 'A great deal' (and even split across those two responses)
- 6% of students responded with 'A moderate amount'

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#### **Q11: How well does the feedback from tutors inform you of areas for praise and for development?**

##### **The Data:**

- **93%** of students responded positively (more than 'Okay') to this question
  - 87% of those answered 'Really well' or 'Brilliantly'
  - 13% of those students answered 'Well'

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#### **Q12: Do you feel the approach to the assessment is fair and transparent?**

##### **The Data:**

- **85%** of students say that they 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree'
- 8% of students responded 'neither agree nor disagree'
- 6% of students disagreed

##### **Student Contact Comment:**

There were no further comments made regarding the fairness or transparency of the approach to assessment including from the students who disagreed meaning no further context can be offered.

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#### **Q13: Please rate this statement: it is clear what I have to do to reach the required standards of assessments and the course overall**

Matrix says that procedures for assessment are laid out in Assessment and Internal Verification Policy which is available to the students on Moodle. 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 Framework. The assessment criteria are laid out clearly in the Handbook and Assignment Handbook. The last UKCP Report praised us for our adherence to the standards.

There is a high level of continuous assessment of skills, and application of theory to skills, throughout the programme. Each training day has a session of skills practice where the tutor monitors progress and reports back to the staff team. Matrix tutors aim to have an open adult-to-adult relationship with their students so that they will always be aware of how Matrix views their progress.



**The Data:**

- **91%** said they 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' with the statement
- 3% said they 'Neither agree nor disagree'
- 6% said they 'Disagreed' with the statement

**Student Contact Comment:**

As above, there were no further comments made regarding this question including from the students who disagreed, meaning no further context can be offered.

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**Q14: How do you rate the resources available at Matrix for your learning** (eg, library of core books, availability of additional reading, library systems etc.)

Matrix says that over the last three years, the library has grown considerably. The UKCP praised the college for posting out library books to the students during Covid lockdowns. The college invests in new books each year, and retiring professionals often donate their books to us, so the library continues to grow substantially.

Students are welcome to come and use the college library and study area when they are not attending their teaching units. They don't currently offer any IT resources at Matrix; however, it would be something they would consider investing in as demand increased.

**The Data:**

- **96%** of students reported that they rated the resources from 'Good' to 'Excellent'.
  - 42% of those rated 'Very Good'
  - 35% of those rated 'Good'
  - 23% of those rated 'Excellent'
- There were no negative responses

**Student Comments:**

*"It would be helpful to access the university library. It would be helpful to be able to renew library books online"*

*"Think there could be more support accessing online resources like journals from the university. Think books should be ordered in some system in the library, very hard to find books."*

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**Q15: Does the Student Handbook provide helpful information** (eg, course requirements, assessments, placements, appeals etc)

**The Data:**

- **97%** of student 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' that the Student Handbook provides helpful information
- 3% said they 'Neither agree nor disagree'

**Student Comment:**

*"The guidance and expectations are clearly set out in the handbook and if there are any questions I have found my prog lead and tutors approachable and attentive and helpful in their response."*

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**Q16: Do you think that Matrix values student opinions?** (eg do you feel you have the opportunity to give feedback, to suggest topics for Community Cafes, or give feedback on academic content from weekends?)

Matrix say that being a small provider means they have agility in responding to needs and they have clear examples of changes being made to the curriculum, to unit timetables and to additional curricular events such as 'Community Cafes' - a learning opportunity on specific topics outside the teaching units and seminars. All curriculum change requests are considered by the Academic Board and all proposed alterations are submitted to Middlesex University for approval.

Matrix say they promote and allow student involvement and engagement in every stage of their learning journey and value 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 receive training for the role.

**The Data:**

- **90%** 'Agree' or 'Strongly agree' that this is the case
- 6 people said 'neither agree nor disagree'
- 1 person disagreed

**Student Contact Comment:**

There were no further comments made regarding this topic including no further information from the one person who disagreed so no further context can be provided.

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**Q17: How confident are you in the quality of the learning at Matrix to help you to get to the next stage in your chosen career path?**

**The Data:**

- **91%** of students are either 'Very confident' or 'Extremely confident'
  - Of those responses, 57% were extremely confident
- 9% of students reported that they were 'somewhat confident'

**Student Comment:**

*"It has been a fantastic learning experience - I only wish they provided further qualifications such as a Masters as I wouldn't hesitate to stay on."*

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**Conclusion**

Overall, this process has been an excellent experience of yet again, witnessing the college live and breathe its beliefs and culture through its actions. The data and comments stand for themselves - no further information is necessary to show the opinions of current students, anonymously and independently gathered, and how they feel about their Matrix experience. No questionnaire responses were omitted for this report. All data received is included.