



## **Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy**

### **1. Widening Access and Participation Statement**

Matrix College is a leading regional provider of higher education training for psychotherapeutic counsellors. We are passionate about enhancing access and participation to our courses for all students who have the personal characteristics, academic ability and skills potential, necessary to be a psychotherapeutic counsellor. Our belief is that counsellors should serve all communities without discrimination, requiring a diverse and representative student population. We will seek to overcome any barriers that are in place that reduce the access and participation on our courses from students who suffer any form (implicit or explicit) of societal discrimination.

### **2. Representing our communities**

Delivery of a robust integrative relational approach towards therapy means that our students are highly sought after by organisations looking for student counsellors to provide low-cost counselling services to their communities. From the second year of training, our students gain clinical experience by working with clients from all walks of life and who may normally face many barriers in accessing psychological or emotional support. This embodied experience inculcates an appreciation in our students of counselling as a service to all and especially to the vulnerable and marginalised.

All our students are mature students; one of the pre-requisites for counselling training is sufficient life experience. The average age of our students is 42yrs, 72.7% of our students are accessing higher education for the first time, having had a range of life experiences prior to training to be a counsellor that equip them with the skills they need to hold integrity, compassion, humility and a commitment to recognise explicit and implicit biases and overcome these in the interests of furthering connection and promoting wellbeing.

### **3. Our Training Programme**

The training we provide is a triumvirate of academic, self-reflective and skills-based learning. We enable our students to be self-motivated and take responsibility for their learning and personal development and provide comprehensive support to facilitate this. We have an experienced staff team and protocols in place to ensure that students are supported throughout their journey and beyond, as they re-join Matrix as part of our Members community. All of the course training staff and the operational team at Matrix are

psychotherapists working in private practice; actively working with a diverse population of clients and championing access to mental and emotional wellbeing support and services.

Our degree programme interweaves academic rigour with practical skills to ensure that our students are highly sought after by volunteer placements. Because all our students are mature students, we have crafted our teaching programme to enable the maximal opportunities for access and participation. Training is delivered across weekends and this year, for the first time in our 20-year history, we are also delivering a midweek training programme to widen our access and increase participation in response to enquiries from applicants for our courses. Students engage in a mixture of didactic, experiential and self-directed study, while also gaining clinical experience working in placement from the second year of the degree onwards.

We expect students to gain the professional skills necessary to flourish in private practice once their training is completed and they have gained the necessary clinical practice experience of 450 client hours. This means that students are expected and supported to secure their own training placements and clinical supervision.

To support students considering counselling as a career and Matrix as a training provider, we deliver short Introduction to Counselling Skills courses throughout each academic year. This is an 8-week short course that is experiential and provides an introduction to the theory and practice of counselling, as well as an opportunity to experience the learning environment at Matrix College.

We deliver high quality CPD for our graduate members and wider professional community, with nationally recognised and well-respected clinicians and theorists. To encourage access and participation from BAME counsellors and psychotherapists we offer discounted places onto CPD. This approach is intended to communicate our commitment to prospective students as well as BAME counselling professionals of increasing access and participation in all that we do at Matrix.

#### **4. Matrix Access and Participation Ambitions**

An ambition of ours is to encourage more applications from prospective BAME students and also to continue to enhance the representation on our courses of men. We are committed to supporting students with barriers to learning because of disability and seek to make adjustments and provide additional support wherever this is possible to improve access, participation, completion and progression. Currently 3.4% of students are BAME (although this number is low it is broadly representative of the BAME population in Norfolk), 22% are men, this is at the higher end of the national representation for men entering into counselling (16-24%), and 20.45% of our students have disclosed a disability or medical condition, which is above the national average and demonstrates our inclusive and personalised approach to supporting the individual circumstances of our student population.

Demonstrating the progression of graduates into graduate-level employment or further training is complicated by the requirement for students to gain a further 200 hours post

qualification before they have their professional registration. A graduate outcome survey that tracks students from 12-36 months after completion of their BSc Integrative Counselling award is being piloted this year, our intention is that this survey will support our student data on progression after training.

We work closely with our regional placement partners to ensure that student placements are supportive and structured, to optimise the student learning experience and benefits to our placement partners.

Students are active partners in the development and delivery of an exceptional learning environment at Matrix. Two Student Representatives are nominated by each training group each year and they represent their group throughout the year providing a conduit for the flow of information from students to Matrix operations team and from the operations team to the students. Student consultations take place in circumstances where changes are proposed to the programme of learning and student representative are involved annually in reviewing and updating policies and procedures related to their learning experience. Students give us feedback that they feel highly valued and involved in these processes and that it has been affirming for them when they see their suggestions incorporated into our policies and practices.

Increasing diversity in our staff team is an ambition that we are also taking direct action on by speaking with the Black and Asian Therapist network and advertising for staff on their forums.

## **5. Admissions**

We have a rigorous application and admissions process to ensure that applicants with the personal characteristics, academic ability and skills potential are selected. Students have to submit two personal statements as part of their application; one statement about their motivation and another statement about the skills and personal resources that they will draw from as part of their training. Two senior psychotherapists will interview each applicant for an hour to ensure that we are not enrolling students who will not be able to complete the training and progress into further training or employment on completion. Our admissions approach is inclusive and not solely based on academic ability or performance.

Over the 20 years of delivering training, we have developed the expertise and experience of managing diverse experiences within groups to optimise learning for individuals alongside the group experience, for instance we have students who have completed doctorate level studies alongside students who are accessing higher education for the first time. Our small class sizes of 12 – 15 students enable an optimal learning environment and combination of a diverse group and individualised support. As a small college we went to great lengths to gain registration with Office for Students due to our ambition to continue to widen and prioritise access and participation on our courses by being able to offer student loans for eligible applicants.

Our 8-week Introduction to Counselling Skills programme is delivered periodically throughout each year for prospective students who have an interest in applying for the BSc

Integrative Counselling. It is also accessible for the general public who are looking to gain the relational skills to perform better at work, built deeper and enduring relationships with others and to develop their self-enquiry and sense of purpose in their lives. We also have links with local colleges for foundation learning to improve access on to our courses.

## **6. Enabling access and participation during training**

We provide a multi-layered support structure for our students to ensure that they have the optimal support needed as they embark, progress and complete their studies at Matrix. The learning environment requires students to gain a proficiency in academic work to access and critically analyse counselling theory whilst also ensuring that self-reflective awareness and technique and relational skills are given equal balance. Our assessment criteria incorporate the different learning domains, not just focussing on academic assessment, and we balance formal academic essay writing, with skills observations, reflective journals, self-reflective group processing and clinical experience as part of the progression requirements for each student. Students are encouraged from the beginning of their training to take responsibility for their self-directed learning and supporting one another; study groups are routinely created by students in each year group to consolidated and embed the teaching syllabus as well as providing an informal support network to one another. Counselling training is demanding in each of these domains and students are able to take a consolidation year away from the academic programme between the first and second, and second and third year, to ensure that they are able to complete their studies alongside developing the necessary skills and experience to progress after training.

Each student has a Programme Lead for each year of their training, including students who take a consolidation year. The Programme Lead meets students for termly tutorials to monitor and support their development and to provide individual support where required. If required Programme Leads are able to provide more frequent tutorials to support students who are facing unexpected challenges during their studies.

A Learning Support Tutor is available for students with additional learning needs like dyslexia. The Learning Support tutor will work with students to devise and implement support plans to assist with essay writing or other aspects of the training. We use different modes of assessment to support and embed learning across the different domains required during the training and we incorporate the development of professional skills and, skills for the future, to ensure our students are prepared for progression after they have completed their studies. All subject tutors report to the Programme Lead team who regularly monitor the progress of every student at Matrix.

Developing agency is a crucial part of counselling training and we give our students repeated opportunities to express their needs and be involved in the workings of the college. Student representatives attend meetings with our external validator and external examiner and are able to directly influence elements of the student experience and learning environment at Matrix.