**Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute Ltd**

**Access and Participation Statement**

**Introduction**

The Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute (SPTI) is a leading Midlands-based provider of counselling and psychotherapy training. Our mission is to provide a wide range of courses, all of which combine academic rigour with high standards for clinical practice. We are committed to high quality training in terms of professional and ethical standards, research and innovation; and to providing opportunities for learning that will enable both our students and our graduates to further their personal growth, professional development and healthy engagement with society, allowing them to play a significant role in enhancing the lives of their clients.

We aim to equip our trainees to become life-long learners who will not only continue to be at the forefront/cutting edge of the development of knowledge in the counselling and psychotherapy profession but also have a positive impact on the wellbeing of society. We have a commitment to high standards in interpersonal relationships, characterised by mutual respect, collaboration, appropriate boundary and the celebration of difference.

We offer a full range of courses, from introductory taster courses to Masters level training. Our Higher Education courses are validated by Staffordshire University, with whom we have a strong partnership. Our engagement with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies continues to be at the centre of our training. Our Higher Education courses are professionally accredited by the leading organisations in counselling and psychotherapy, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) respectively.

**Supporting students: commitment to the learning journey and beyond**

Our higher education student population is not typical of that of the overall sector. Our total population of 217 higher education students (based on 2017-18 HESA return) comprises 85 (39%) undergraduate and 132 (61%) postgraduate students. The gender ratio is 78.3% female to 21.7% male (170: 47). Half our students fall in the 36-50 age band (113), with approximately a quarter in the age bands on either side (22-35: 48 students, 51+: 56 students).

Many of our students access higher education for the first time as mature students. Some return to study to establish a second career. Our students often have responsibilities other than study. The format of training is designed to offer students the opportunity to combine study with work and family life. We are committed to diversity in all aspects of the life of our organisation and see students as active partners in a collaborative learning journey. To this end, students are consulted on change frequently, are asked for feedback on all aspects of their training and are involved at every level of the organisation. These processes are cyclical and inform the quality assurance processes that drive our training.

*Supporting access*

We are committed to diversity in all aspects of the life of our organisation. Our introductory courses provide opportunities for those who come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds to enter professional training well-equipped for success. We commit to running introductory and bridging courses at various points in the academic year to enable students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education to access a training pathway that is designed to enable students to journey from no prior educational attainment up to Masters level if they wish.

Our individualised approach begins before students access our training. We hold regular information days and evenings, and our staff are available for guidance and discussion about all aspects of training, including financial matters, disability and concerns about workload. We offer a bursary system for those on low incomes and who identify as disabled.

Students who self-identify as disabled represent 24.4% of our student population (53 students). As a small organisation, we work closely with students, and with our university partner to enable students to access support via assessment and DSA application and to identify and provide reasonable adjustments, thus to ensure students are enabled to access training and succeed. To enhance this support, from November 2018 a role of Disability Support Officer will be created with a specific focus on supporting students and liaising with staff across the institute to ensure resources, support and reasonable adjustments are put into place.

Students identifying as belonging to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Intersex (LGBTQI) community make up at 11.5% of the total student population (25 students, 64% heterosexual (139 students), whilst 53 students (24.4%) prefer not to say). As these students are underrepresented in our organisation and the profession as a whole, we are seeking to consult with students on how any blocks to access to training can be removed.

We also specifically seek to increase participation of BAME students, as they are currently underrepresented in our student population (26 students, 12%), and the fields of counselling and psychotherapy in general. A student-led BAME group is being established at the moment and one of the functions of this group will be to advise on and feed back to the organisation on recruitment, retention and success of BAME students.

Students feedback their experiences frequently on an individual basis and as cohorts. Feedback loops are closed by communication about what has happened to student feedback, and cohorts are represented in twice yearly course meetings which are attended by programme leaders, senior management team and representatives from the Staffordshire university as the validation partner. These meetings also provide opportunities to brief students on developments and seek their views in consultation.

*Supporting success during training*

Applicants for our higher education courses are all interviewed to ensure suitability for the course as well as discussion about mutual expectations. This enables sound decision making on the parts of both organisation and students, so that entry into training is informed, additional needs are identified, and entry is based on solid motivation.

We have a range of support systems in place to enable students to succeed. Counselling and psychotherapy are challenging professions, and students need to be well-motivated and resilient to cope with the demands of the course, including those of the placements and personal development work. We have is a ‘low-threshold’ approach to students seeking help or support and operate from a principle of collaboration with students as mature learners.

Students are inducted in the organisation and their individual training course, as well as made aware of the resources available at SPTI and via the partner organisation, Staffordshire University. Students benefit from dedicated training spaces, student common rooms, an on-site library as well as online resources, Moodle (virtual learning environment), study spaces with computers.

In addition to tuition in small groups, students have regular tutorials with the programme leader or personal tutor, and benefit from being part of a small organisation with a close-knit community. Attendance and performance are monitored and discussed with students, so that any difficulties are identified early for best possible outcomes.

There are additional support resources available for those students who need further academic support, both web-based and via additional workshops. These focus on academic skills, such as referencing. We also have a dedicated placement officer who maintains and builds relationships with placement providers and liaises with students about opportunities. We organise placement fairs, and days for supervisors, placement providers and students. To support students to develop as consumers and producers of research we organise a ‘research showcase’ on a regular basis, which enables students to hear from recent graduates, established practitioners and outside speakers.

*Supporting progression and completion*

The support in place for students further enables them to identify needs at an early opportunity, either individually, through the personal therapy they undertake as part of course requirements, as a result of discussions with tutors, programme leaders, or placement supervisors. These needs can be expressed formally or informally. Students are assessed for readiness to practise in placement settings and discuss personal development goals and achievements with tutors in formal tutorials which take place at regular intervals. Our retention and progression rates are good.

Whilst employability skills and facilitation of access to information about placement and employment opportunities are part of student learning experiences, we expect students to be active participants in becoming reflexive practitioners with solid skills and experience. In increasing ways, students develop resilience, a well-thought out approach and responsibility for their own personal and professional development, in all aspects of their training and preparation to become a counsellor or psychotherapist. This allows graduates to be confident in their abilities to undertake challenging work in a variety of employment settings.

After graduation, practitioners are able to become part of a wide network of graduates, which enables networking, sharing of knowledge and experience and connection.