TEF Year Four provider submission

Provider Context

St Nicholas Montessori Training Ltd (trading as Montessori Centre International or MCI) is a Private Company Limited by shares, wholly owned by the St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori method of Education Ltd, (aka Montessori St Nicholas charity or MSN). MSN also incorporates the Montessori Schools Association (MSA) and the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board (MEAB). The Trustees of the charity MSN are committed to supporting the training of students in the Montessori system and to do that via MCI. MCI is the largest UK Montessori training provider offering qualifications within both FE and HE frameworks, with an international reputation for quality training based on a heritage of pioneering innovation.

The College currently has 312 students, 47 of whom are studying within Higher Education on the Certificate in Higher Education or Foundation Degree in Montessori Early Childhood Practice validated by London Metropolitan University (LMU) and 265 are studying the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy awarded by Crossfields Institute/Cache.

MCI also offers CPD training courses, such as Integrating Montessori Practice, Introducing the Montessori Approach, a Childminders Course, a seminar programme for Montessori practitioners and is involved in Montessori parenting courses.

The organisational mission of the Charity is to:

- Provide and sustain national quality assured and accredited Montessori teacher training in the UK and abroad;
- Support charitable projects that help extend awareness of the benefits of Montessori education;
- Support schools and teachers in membership of the MSA through training and operational advice;
- Promote and extend the national accreditation system to Montessori schools across the UK;
- Conduct research into the effectiveness of Montessori education and evaluate all MSN services to ensure the highest levels of delivery;
- Encourage unity within a broad Montessori church, a unity that accepts difference but promotes similarities.

The key strategic objectives for MCI 2017 – 2020 are defined as:

- To maintain the international reputation of MCI as the leading training provider for the Montessori community and first choice for students;
- To support a growing global Montessori community of students, staff and employers who can make a vital impact on the lives of children and their families;
- To offer a transformative learning experience for MCI students.

In June 2018 the charity appointed a new Chief Executive to help achieve a sustainable organisation and ensure the right staff structure was put in place to support the new direction of the organisation. A five year business plan has been approved by the Board of Trustees and is being put into operation across the organisation.

MCI underwent QAA Higher Education Review (Alternative Provider), with a visit in November 2017. The report, published in January 2018 met the required standards for Higher Education with **a commendation** for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

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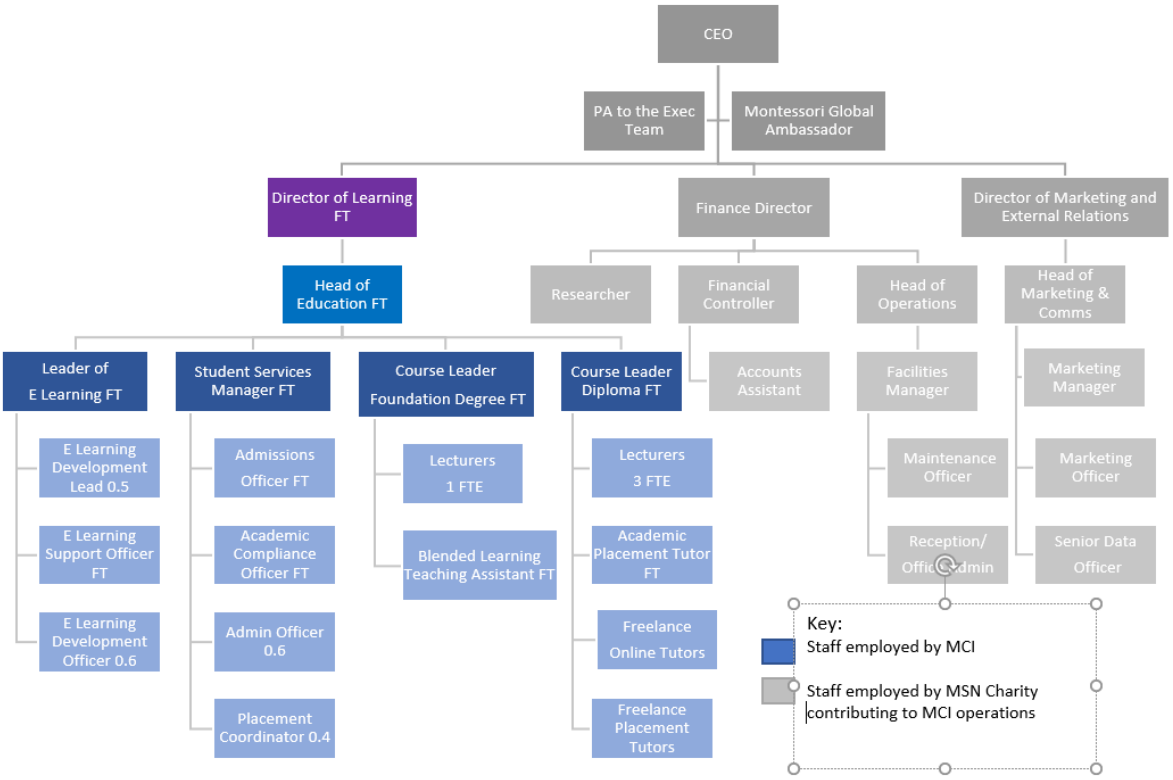
There were **seven identified aspects of good practice**:

- The extensive support offered to potential applicants, which ensures the effectiveness of the application and admissions process for students and the Centre.
- The integration of Montessori principles in the approach to teaching and learning, which significantly enhances the student learning experience.
- The wide-ranging and highly effective support mechanisms, which allow students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.
- The engagement of students as partners in processes for taking forward identified enhancement initiatives.
- The comprehensive and detailed support for placements, which enables students to put their learning into practice effectively in their professional environment.
- The translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation.
- The development and enhancement of the VLE which has significantly enhanced learning, teaching and support for students and provides a valuable resource for the Centre's academic community.

The College received an annual monitoring visit from the QAA in November 2018, triggered by the relocation of the College to new premises in St John's Wood. The report, recently published in January 2019 concludes that 'the Centre is making commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the November 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)'.

Organisation chart Montessori Centre International



MCI Pedagogical Philosophy

Montessori education has meant many things across a range of social, cultural and historical perspectives. MCI upholds its own cultural paradigm; a forward looking, responsive and reflexive interpretation of the conceptual core of Montessori philosophy and practice.

MCI aims to nurture open, reflective, creative practitioners, with a commitment to life-long learning. Students are encouraged to question and challenge practice and to continue to be engaged in contemporary discourse within the wider Early Years community. MCI is committed to drive Montessori practice forwards to maintain its contemporary relevance, to continue to meet the needs of children and to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented within the constantly evolving Early Years arena.

MCI is determined that Montessori education should not be the privilege of the few, in line with the organisational strategic aim of widening participation. Part of widening access to Montessori means widening access to its training, which has held a nuance of elitism in the past. MCI embraces the pioneering, experimental and creative approach towards education modelled by Maria Montessori herself. We are particularly proud of our Virtual Learning Environment, developed in 2014, which enables learners to communicate, reflect and collaborate together, establishing an international community of learners fit for the 21st Century. This embraces a global, inclusive approach to education, in line with Montessori's own views of education, "In education we are now concerned with the interests of the human race, which has only one nation: the world".

MCI training is based on a philosophical core set of values that establishes a sense of identity, purpose and integrity and inspires a dedication amongst the staff team. These core philosophical values become linked to skills through the curriculum, inspiration translated into practice. Central to Montessori philosophy is the focus on the unique potential of every child, which is translated into a focus on the human potential of every learner. We strive to know the students as unique individuals.

Overview of Qualifications delivered at MCI

The Level 3 & Level 4 **Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy** – birth to seven (Early Years Educator) is awarded by NCFE/Cache and Crossfields Institute and is regulated by Ofqual. NCFE/Cache is the UK's leading sector specialist for qualifications in the care and education industry. MCI worked collaboratively with Crossfields Institute as the lead development partner, providing subject expertise and content in the development of the qualification.

MCI has been delivering the **Foundation Degree in Montessori Early Childhood Practice** since 2009 in partnership with London Metropolitan University (LMU). The course was successfully revalidated in 2013 and 2018. MCI Level 4 Diploma graduates have a progression opportunity to gain direct entry to Level 5 of the Foundation Degree. The Level 4 Diploma has been mapped by LMU against Level 4 of their BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree and awarded 120 credits at Level 4. On successful completion of the Foundation Degree, MCI students gain automatic entry to Level 6 to top up to full BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies at LMU.

A business case to offer a Level 6 top up leading to the award of BA(Hons) Montessori Early Childhood Practice has recently been approved by the Pro Vice Chancellor at LMU subject to validation. It is hoped to be able to offer this from September 2019. There are also plans for a joint venture between LMU/MCI to develop an Early Childhood Masters Degree.

Following a restructuring of Level 4 of the FdA in 2014, a **Cert HE in Montessori Early Childhood Practice** has been offered as a standalone qualification since September 2015. The Cert HE is designated for student finance full-time and part-time. A mapping of learning outcomes across Level 4 was undertaken between LMU and MCI with a redistribution of curriculum content to allow an exit point at Level 4 that can confer a full and relevant qualification for the early years workplace.

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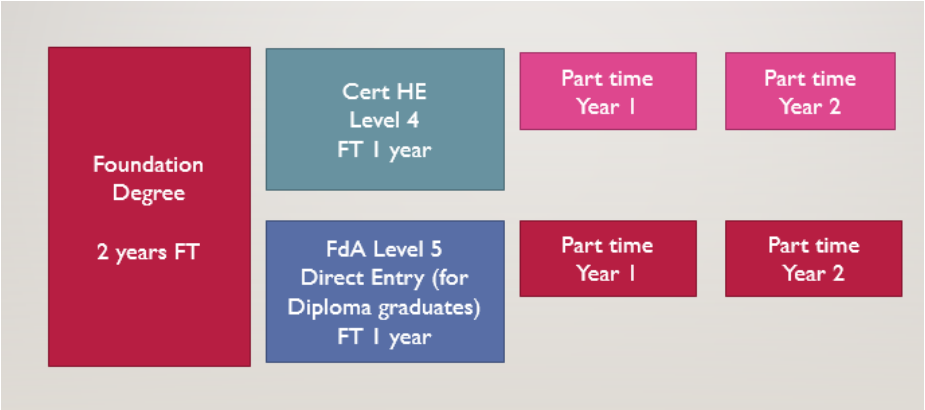
The diagram below indicates the how the Foundation Degree is currently broken down into:

- Students who enrol on the Foundation Degree, progressing from Level 4 to Level 5
- Students who enrol for one year at Level 4 to exit with a standalone Cert HE qualification
- MCI Diploma graduates who gain direct entry to Level 5 who study either 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time to gain the Foundation Degree



Student Progression and achievement

Foundation Degree

Retention, progression and completion rates on the Certificate of Higher Education or Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Practice are high, while entrance requirements on the FdA remain low in line with a strategic commitment to widening participation.

Student Numbers Foundation Degree				
	2015/16	**2016/17**	**2017/18**	**2018/19**
Foundation Degree (incl. Cert HE) Level 4	10	14	6	27
Foundation Degree Level 5 (incl. Direct Entry)	27	18	22	22
	37	**32**	**28**	**49**

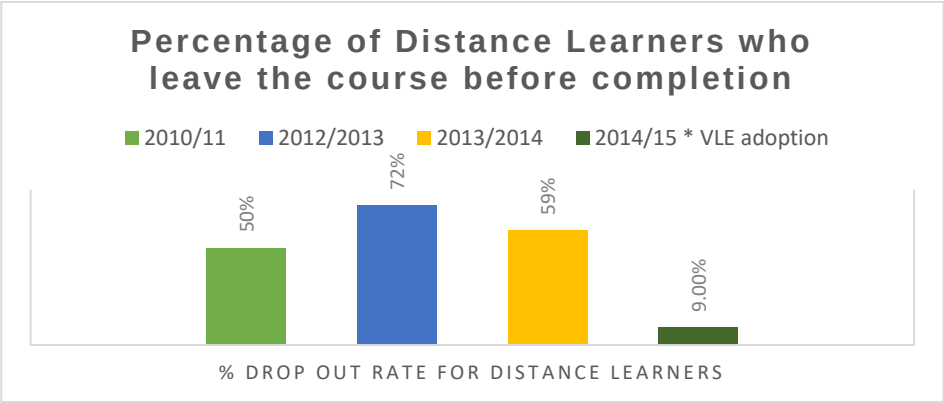
Student Progression/Completion Foundation Degree				
	2014/15	**2015/16**	**2016/17**	**2017/18**
Progression Rate Level 4 – Level 5	**100%**	**88%** (7 out of 8 students)	**100%**	**83%** (5 out of 6 students)
Completion Rate Level 5	**100%**	**96%** (26 out of 27 students)	**100%**	**100%**

The QAA review team, in the 2018 HER(AP) report, considered that *'The high levels of success are in part attributable to the extensive support mechanisms in place. The team considers as a feature of **good practice** the wide-ranging and highly effective support mechanisms, which allow students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential'.*

Diploma (EYE)

The number of students enrolled on the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy was 202 in 2015/16, 159 in 2016/17, 105 in 2017/18 and 151 in 2018/19. Retention rate for the 2015/16 cohort was 78% and 85% for 2016/17, students on subsequent cohorts have not all completed the course, retention rates are currently 97.5% for the 2017/18 cohort.

The introduction of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) in 2014 has had a transformative effect across the centre. Student retention and completion rates on the Diploma (EYE) for distance learners significantly increased following the introduction of the VLE as indicated below. A 'tool kit' of procedures has been put in place to enable students who are failing to make progress to successfully complete the programme including cause for concern procedures and exceptional circumstance course extension process (for Diploma students).



Commentary on TEF Year 4 core metrics

The TEF Year 4 core metrics show 90.5% of full-time Foundation Degree students to be in employment or further study which has an indicator value in the bottom 10% of absolute performance. 85.7% of full-time Foundation Degree students were in highly skilled employment or further study which has an indicator value in the top 10% of absolute performance. 100% of part-time students were in employment or further study which also has an indicator value in the top 10% of absolute performance. Normalisation through the Z-score has led to these statistics generating neither positive or negative flags.

For context, the majority of FdA students progress to top up on the BA(Hons) Early Childhood at London Metropolitan University or an alternative BA top up programme, while a minority choose not to progress to BA and either enter or remain in the workforce. A significant majority of students will combine further study with professional work as early years practitioners.

At level 5, students progressing from year one of the Foundation Degree are joined by MCI Level 4 Diploma graduates who enter directly into Level 5. The proportion of students studying at Level 5 in recent years has been shifting towards more direct entry students, from 56% in 2016/17 to 66% in 2017/18 and due to a very small Level 4 intake in 2017 the proportion of direct entry students is currently 86% in the 2018/19 Level 5 group.

Direct entry students are more likely to be mature students with professional work experience, often looking to progress their careers by working towards a Degree level qualification. They are often already in senior positions in the workplace, such as Nursery Manager or Room Leader.

Teaching Quality

The quality of teaching was commented on in the recently published (2019) annual monitoring report from the QAA, '*The Centre's strategic approach to the integration of Montessori principles into teaching and learning is set out in the Framework for Teaching and Learning. Plans are underway to embed the principles within the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with focus placed upon the development of soft skills. Initiatives include establishing a Montessori Centre International (MCI) Training Hub and workshops for Trainers. A nursery is currently under*

construction and scheduled to open in 2021 and will provide additional opportunities for integrating Montessori principles into the students' learning environment.'

The QAA review team concluded in the 2019 report that '*The Centre's internal quality systems operate effectively to ensure that assessments are carried out with rigour and integrity and that student work is genuine. The Centre's processes for internal and external verification ensure that student work achieves the learning outcomes required, that marking is fair, and results are secure*.'

Student Engagement and Enhancement

Deliberate steps are taken to engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their academic experience. Students are engaged in the Centre's attempts to ensure and enhance their experience, which is set out in the MCI Strategic Plan: 'treating students as partners, actively engaged in improving the quality of their learning experience'. This is directly translated into the Operational Plan as an approach that includes listening to students' views through student representation, the use of student feedback survey, and discussing these at staff meetings especially organised for this purpose. The QAA review team, in their 2018 HER(AP) report, considered '*this translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation, to be a feature of **good practice'**.*

There is a system of student representation in place whereby at least one student per cohort is selected by their peers to voice suggestions raised by the student body and represent them on various deliberative committees. Student committee meetings are held once per semester, where student representatives and staff discuss student feedback. The Centre also collects student feedback through surveys and module evaluations and consults students on a number of issues through a dedicated forum on the Virtual Learning Environment.

Students are consulted and engaged in course development which is a standing item at Student Committee meetings. For example students were invited to contribute suggestions on the development of online curriculum materials for Level 5 modules, testing them and offering feedback. They also contributed views on extra audio and visuals for students with additional learning needs. Students are invited to attend Academic Committee and Education Committee meetings and their feedback and contributions have led to improvements to teaching, learning and assessments.

The QAA review team, in their 2018 HER(AP) report, stated that, '*In addition to established mechanisms for student engagement, the Centre demonstrates its strategic commitment to working with students as partners by regularly involving students in specific enhancement initiatives. Once it has identified an enhancement opportunity, the Centre brings together students and staff to collaborate on writing policy and shaping new approaches to learning, teaching and support. For example, staff and students have worked together on the development of the VLE, a pregnancy and maternity policy and a student engagement policy. The engagement of students as partners in processes for taking forward identified enhancement initiatives is **good practice'**.*

The enhancement of student learning opportunities was **commended** in the 2018 HER(AP) report.

> *'Overall, there is abundant evidence of the enhancement of learning opportunities through initiatives arising at all levels – from student representation and response to student evaluation, through analysis of module and course logs, external examiner reports etc. and onto internal annual monitoring and initiatives meant to enhance the quality of student experience (e.g. VLE development, maternity policy, and a special working party involving both staff and students, aimed to constantly improve student experience). This kind of initiative shows a commitment to systematically monitor and continuously enhance the provision at all levels, which is directly linked with the strategic aims of the institution, its ethos and culture.*
>
> *There are two areas of good practice in this area: the translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation and the*

development and enhancement of the VLE which has significantly enhanced learning, teaching and support for students and provides a valuable resource for the Centre's academic community.

The two examples of good practice identified recognise the highly effective approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. There is a strategic commitment to enhancement and this is being translated into implementation of enhancement initiatives. The commitment to enhancement is well embedded and there are plans for further development and enhancement of learning opportunities. The strategy for enhancement has a clear focus on improving the quality of student learning opportunities. As noted in Expectation B5, students are well supported and actively engaged in developing enhancement initiatives'.

Valuing Teaching

MCI sets out to facilitate student learning in a way that is compatible with Montessori values, establishing its own pedagogy of Montessori teacher training. MCI offers a unique pedagogy that combines an educational philosophy, a curriculum approach and specific learning materials that have been passed down relatively unchanged since their initial introduction over a hundred years ago. The development of the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy – Birth to Seven (Early Years Educator) in 2014 provided an enhancement opportunity, enabling a shared understanding of the Montessori philosophy and the unique ethos of teaching, learning and assessment to be embedded in the programmes. This significant 'paradigm shift' enabled a 'community of practice' to be developed.

Montessori practice can be considered as establishing and implementing a set of values. It is these values that provide a sense of identity, purpose and integrity for Montessori teachers worldwide. This requires a set of coherent set of values to be established across the curriculum, with conceptual links reinforced across modules and levels of study. Intellectual understanding of the core Montessori philosophy and pedagogy, child development, observation and contemporary early years best practice is combined with experiential learning on professional work placement. Students need to see theory illustrated in practice and to understand how practice informs theory. Core beliefs becoming linked to skills, inspiration being translated into practice.

Inspiration for establishing a pedagogy of Montessori teacher training come from Maria Montessori herself, *"It is my belief that the thing which we should cultivate in our teachers is more the spirit than the mechanical skill of the scientist; that is, the direction of the preparation should be towards the spirit rather than the mechanism."* (Montessori, [1946], 2012). The ethos at MCI, outlined in its strategic objective is for MCI training to be a transformative experience for students. Students need to 'feel it', as a way of being that becomes internalised and intuitive, not mechanically reproducing presentations of the Montessori materials, but that the spirit comes through the hands and connects with the child beside them.

"The real preparation for education is the study of one's self. The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit" (Montessori, [1946], 2012. So not the 'filling of the pail' but the 'lighting of the fire' (within). This quote is fore fronted in the Programme Specification for the Diploma (EYE).

"Education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences up on the environment." (Montessori, [1946], 2012). So an experiential approach that starts with active engagement and practical hands-on learning in the college classroom with the adults as guides and culminates in the nursery classroom with direct experience with the children as the teachers and experienced practitioners as mentors and guides.

Lillard (1972) suggests that "*Montessori would not have wanted her teaching methods to be frozen, she seemed alert to the danger that, teachers might memorize certain techniques and procedures and mechanically reproduce them with children"* going against Montessori's own concept of education as a living process. At MCI we are preparing Montessori teachers for the future not blindly reproducing the past.

Key ideas from Montessori pedagogy:

- Active learning – hands-on engagement
- Developing reflective thinking/practice
- Linking theory with practice
- Focus on unique potential
- Child/student centred approach
- Intrinsic motivation
- Creating a favourable learning environment
- Autonomy

As part of becoming reflective practitioners able to engage in contemporary early years discourse MCI tutors are encouraged to be provocative, introduce alternative points of view and encourage critical debate. They encourage the students to ask 'why?' to explore ideas, foster divergent thinking. Our aim is to develop reflective learners; 'experience is what happens to a student, reflective thinking is what the student does with what happens to them'. Students are offered a a repertoire of reflective questions to promote reflective thinking and active learning. Their learning journey starts at MCI where Tutors 'hold their hands', they then take ownership of their knowledge and understanding on placement and develop more fully in their continued professional practice and development throughout their careers - from 'knowing' to 'feeling' to 'doing' to 'sharing with others'.

Within Montessori philosophy the focus is on the unique potential of every child, which is translated into a focus on the unique potential of every student. It is important to know the students as individuals and the starting points for their own journeys. All our students are adults who have chosen to come on the course with a clear objective of training to work with children within a Montessori ethos. They want to learn and bring energy and enthusiasm with them when they start the course. A key Montessori idea is to 'follow the child' which is interpreted against 'follow the student'. The philosophy talks about trusting the inner motivation of the child and we do the same with our adult learners.

Students need to experience sense of success, progressing according to their starting point. Montessori practice does not buy in to the rewards/punishment system. Our assessment strategy drawns on the trust in the intrinsic reward offered by the activities we set students, which are authentic, meaningful, relevant and engaging. We have developed our own 'favourable environment' physically and emotionally that supports learning. We provide the tools that will enable students to take charge of their own learning and develop autonomy We let students take initiative and avoid the 'spoon-feeding' approach. Support is gradually removed (scaffolding through the zone of proximal development) so that we promote the ability for students to think independently.

Deep v surface learning

Threshold concepts (small amounts of learning that have a transformative impact) or key ideas are introduced to students which they need to understand before they can move on to other areas, for example understanding the horme or absorbent mind in philosophy, or understanding economy of movement in presentations. These concepts are then revisited at a higher level in line with the spiral curriculum.

There is a focus on deep-level not surface level learning, which is reflected in our assessment strategy. Surface learning is about memorising information, learning facts without a meaningful

framework. We put ideas into context. It is our responsibility to ensure that our teaching, the curriculum and our assessments go beyond 'absorbing large quantities of factual knowledge' or 'a mastery of steps' to take students into more stretching areas such as critical thinking and creativity. Students may sometimes feel more comfortable with the surface approach 'feed me' rather than with more interactive sessions, 'picking up the spoon', but tutors are skilled to engage with this.

Rigour and Stretch

MCI training has a reputation for rigour in its training. This goes back to the roots of Montessori education with Maria Montessori considering that the "*education of young children should be regarded as something of such importance that it is not entrusted to just any person…. but to people who are very specially qualified*" (Montessori, [1946], 2012), she considered it 'utterly ridiculous' that the teaching of children was not considered significant and she demanded a scrupulous training. MCI builds on a long tradition of 'scrupulous' and rigorous training with a sense of lineage and initiation, establishing a community of practice. For MCI students their training goes beyond 'knowing', to become an internalised and intuitive way of being.

This is confirmed by External Examiner feedback in the 2017/18 report: '*MCI and LMU retain very strong and rigorous systems to manage the academic health of the Montessori courses. The breath and depth of student assessment remains very effective and fair with strong systems of quality assurance. The wide range of assessment across the courses remains inclusive, rigorous and fair. MCI remains highly professional reflective and rigorous in the consistency and clarity of its internal making. The expectations for students remains high but is based on a rich, individual and highly supportive ethos to provide for unique individuals. Standards remain high in term of expectations for students and performance results continue to be of high quality.Those who take up the challenges and opportunities presented by MCI flourish and grow. Those who chose not to take advantage of the guidance, support and pedagogical foundation are the ones who do not do well. There is no complacency at MCI. Every year I have seen ongoing progress in course effectiveness and student assessment.'*

In her concluding remarks she commented: *'I was very pleased to congratulate the team at MCI on their continued success and hard work. MCI continues to be rigorous, thorough and empathetic in its work with students who are on pathways to careers working with young children and families.Every student I moderated was given genuine and helpful guidance to address and develop their skills. There is really rich and in-depth Montessorian philosophical understanding and knowledge to be gained on these courses which again should be celebrated as it underpins the high quality of the courses and its alumni. It has again been an honour and pleasure to work for these five years with this wise yet empathetic team of tutors whose professional rigor enables the students they teach become the very best practitioners for young children. Long may this continue.'*

Within our FE provision, the External Qaulity Assurer from Crossfields Insitute commented on the following aspects of good practice on the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy in her annual report in December 2018:

- Excellent opportunities for the development of student's reflective practice skills in assessments and workplace practice
- Good use of peer-assessment to support learning and professional practice, using the RISE model
- Comprehensive assessor feedback for student placement observations including evidence of dialogue between the student/assessor/placement mentor and actions for the student to develop their professional and personal practice
- Very well developed learning resources on the VLE
- Robust quality assurance process, including the student records accessible in a secure environment on the VLE (for assessors, IQA and EQA)

MCI is described by the EQA as ‘a beacon centre of good practice’ in its quality assurance processes and assessment practice.

Feedback

Established procedures are in place to collect student progression, achievement and satisfaction data at module level which feeds into Course Level Annual Monitoring. Students consistently give positive feedback around the levels of student support available, especially the pastoral support offered by staff. Curriculum, Area Leaders (CAL) coordinate student feedback from modules and statistics across all cohorts in the module logs which feed into the annual course monitoring log. Action is taken in response, for example the production of a pregnancy and maternity policy, increased use of video and audio on the Virtual Learning Environment and the development of a student engagement policy.

Feedback from External Examiner for the FdA in the 2017/18 report commented that: ‘*Students are very well supported in terms of feedback and guidance if they choose to take and follow it. The MCI team are very experienced, professional and focused on high quality provision for their students.*

Reflective practice is a key feature of the philosophy and pedagogy of Montessori practice enacted through the maintenance by students of an online portfolio, and the use of module checklists. Peer feedback is a key learning tool. The introduction of formative feedback has impacted positively on attainment, evidenced through significantly improved grades and decrease in late submissions. Students ‘critically self-reflect’ on their practice and critically observe professional placement practitioners to encourage academic debate. The positive impact of formative feedback has been evidenced through attainment, student feedback and external examiner feedback. Student Peer monitoring was introduced in Sept 2016 and has been modified and developed to embrace the concept of ‘critical friends’, this is introduced and practiced at Level 4 and assessed at Level 5.

Learning Environment

Physical Resources

In April 2018 the organisation moved into new premises in St John’s Wood, having acquired the freehold in January 2018. The new site was approved by London Metropolitan University and offers an improved learning environment for students. There are plans to develop an onsite nursery to become a lab school offering observation and research opportunities for students and staff.

A range of physical resources support students’ academic and professional development including classroom teaching spaces which replicate a Montessori early years setting, enabling students to gain hands-on experience of putting Montessori principles into practice. Online students attend apparatus workshops at the College to gain practical experience using the Montessori materials.

The college houses a library containing specialist Montessori and early childhood books & journals and a Montessori archive. This is supplemented by online resources provided on virtual learning environment. MCI subscribes to EBSCO eBook Education Collection which offers access to more than 3,600 titles and Education Research Complete full-text database more than 1,300 journals as well as full text for numerous education-related conference papers, books and monographs. This provides an accessible additional learning resource for all students, including those who study online.

MCI students have the physical resources expected within a learning environment including a student common room, access to computers and independent study spaces. A student tutorial room is also used as a multi-faith prayer and breast feeding room. The physical environment includes a large garden which facilitates the integration of outdoor learning into the curriculum.

Online Resources

In 2018, substantial progress has been made in the use of technology, particularly in respect of extending webinar and blended learning capabilities and learning opportunities for staff and students. Objectives are based upon the College's Blended Learning Pedagogy Strategy. Inclusive approaches to blended learning have increased prospects for positive interactions between online students and students attending classes, by facilitating learning in synchronous whole group blended sessions and small group seminars. Webinars are used to host meetings for tutors, professional placement tutors and freelance staff. To provide students with additional technical support, a Blended Learning Teaching Assistant has recently been appointed**.**

The 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Provider) Report commented that**, '***The detailed and systematic approach to the development of the VLE, as a vehicle for teaching and learning, and support for learning, enables staff, students and other stakeholders, to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices at the Centre. Through the Centre's learning and teaching practice, all students are enabled to develop as independent learners, and to enhance their capacity for analytical, creative and creative thinking. The team considers the integration of Montessori principles in the approach to teaching and learning, which significantly enhances the student learning experience, to be* ***good practice'.***

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice

Academic lecturers are appropriately qualified and all hold Montessori qualifications and are working at least one academic level above delivery, holding either Bachelor or Masters Degrees. Lecturers publish articles regularly in Montessori and early years publications, attend early years conferences and give conference papers.

2 members of the academic team currently hold Fellowship status of Advance HE and a PG Cert Teaching & Learning in HE, with a third member of staff due gain Fellowship in 2019. It is an expectation for newly appointed academic lecturers on permanent contract to complete the Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Level 7 module and gain associate status of Advance HE. 3 lecturers currently hold Masters Degrees, 2 are due to complete Masters Degrees by 2020 and another lecturer is due to start a Masters degree in 2019.

All academic lecturers also have relevant professional experience in Montessori practice. Part-time and visiting lecturers are experienced professional practitioners who are able to contextualise theory and link to practice. Freelance tutors attend a two week trainer's workshop and shadow an experienced tutor prior to delivering a subject. They attend the annaul International Professional Development Conference, which has been running for 20 years, and are part of the academic community with access to a dedicated tutor area and tutor forum on the Virtual Learning Environment.

The annual staff appraisal system identifies both subject specialist and teaching and learning CPD opportunities. Staff attend modules in teaching and learning, assessment and curriculum design, through LMU Centre for Enhancement in Learning and Teaching (CELT). The mentoring process for new tutors is described as 'well established' by the EQA for the Diploma (EYE). '*The IQAs offer sound advice and guidance with a reassuring approach and practical steps for assessors to develop their practice'*.

The academic team are reflective on their practice and engage actively in debate on developing teaching and learning strategies which are disseminated on the tutor forum, at academic team meetings and at the annual International Professional Development Conference, for example in the discussion of the role of the online tutor within active blended learning.

To support the strategic aim of developing a blended approach to learning across all courses, academic staff have attended CPD modules at Masters Level in Applying Learning Technologies

and Web Based Teaching and Learning through the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) at LMU. This has led directly to teaching initiatives in using the 'flipped classroom' and the use of online tools such as Padlet as collaborative resource boards.

Peer teaching observation is part of the annual staff appraisal process for academic staff to support lecturers in the development of their teaching practice and allows more experienced tutors to mentor and support tutors who are new to post. The dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning has been incorporated into our Trainers Course, MCI's own training programme for potential new tutors. The annual International Professional Development brings together all tutors who deliver, assess or moderate on MCI courses nationally and internationally and offers another opportunity to work together as a community to establish and disseminate good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

MCI is developing a research culture, with a commitment to practitioner enquiry and action research, which is introduced at Level 5 and will be further developed at Level 6 and incorporated as part of the Montessori School Accreditation scheme. The development of an on-site purpose built nursery as a lab school will further enhance research opportunities into Montessori practice, which is a strategic aim of the organisation.

MCI is currently supporting research into Montessori and dementia, through funding a PhD studentship and a scoping review. There are plans to develop a Montessori Memory Café at the College and to extend this into the sphere of intergenerational engagement and activities, which will develop alongside the development of the onsite nursery.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Employability and Further Study

There is strong demand within the UK and internationally for qualified Montessori practitioners and those able to manage and lead practice, making MCI students highly employable. Surveys carried out by the Montessori Schools Association show that 67% of Montessori Schools are currently finding it difficult to recruit Montessori trained staff. The stability and growth of the Montessori movement is dependent on trained practitioners who understand the philosophy and pedagogy and who also have the critical thinking and reflective skills to be able to apply their practice and keep it relevant, contemporary and forward looking.

Employment opportunities include national and international. A significant proportion of MCI students (30%) aspire to open their own Montessori settings in the UK or abroad. MCI is currently working in partnership with the CASS Business School to develop a leadership module.

A core strategic objective of MCI is a partnership with the Montessori Schools Association (MSA) to enhance graduate employment prospects. Employability is embedded in curriculum design and assessment, and the College has links with many employers (459 approved Professional Placement schools nationally and internationally). MCI actively consults with employers and carries out surveys through the Montessori Schools Association and the MEAB leadership conference to evaluate how employers view their graduates and whether their learning objectives meet employer expectations.

A key area of recent development has been the development and extension of the active blended approach to learning across MCI provision, first introduced on the Diploma (EYE) and now extended across the Foundation Degree at Levels 4 and 5 to offer flexible pathways for study. Level 4 graduates entering the FdA via direct entry now have progression routes which are more compatible with work based learning. Typically 60% of Level 4 Diploma students indicate that they would be interested in studying further with MCI after their course.

Positive Outcomes for All

The MCI Access and Participation Statement reflects the strategic aims outlined in Strategy for 2017-20 for the College to support a growing global community of students who can make a vital impact on the lives of children and their families. MCI sets out to offer a transformative learning experience to all who have the potential to benefit from training that is academically, personally and professionally challenging.

Strand 3 of the Strategy for 2017 – 20 document addresses the widening of participation to MCI training to ensure Montessori education had the widest possible reach, including those who may be disadvantaged or deterred from entering higher education due to affordability or their economic circumstances.

To achieve these strategic objectives, MCI operates a range of activities and initiatives to support and guide students at all stages of the student life cycle; prior to application, during the application process, during their studies and after completion. We believe that these activities and initiatives should be available to all and are therefore committed to an inclusive widening of participation to MCI provision, founded on a culture that recognises mutual respect and individuality.

MCI is proactive in extending outreach to selected FE Colleges, schools and careers events, with an aim to raise the aspirations of those who may not have considered studying in higher education.

Financial Support

MCI aims to attract students with the greatest potential and would not want financial considerations to deter suitable applicants.

The Montessori St Nicholas charity (MSN) supports a BIRTS bursary scheme to reduce the financial burden of tuition fees for applicants who present both financial need and merit during the application process. Bursaries are considered and awarded in July and March each year in advance of each new intake of students.

MCI recognises that circumstances change and that students may face challenges that prevent them from continuing with their course of study. In response to this, a hardship fund has been made available for students who encounter unexpected financial difficulty during their course of study, where it puts the completion of their studies under threat.

Positive Action to promote a better gender balance

Student demographics reflect a national picture of underrepresentation of men within the early years profession. Currently 5% of MCI students are male, against a national picture of 2%. Positive action is being taken to encourage male students into Montessori training courses, this includes:

- a film promoting men in Montessori on the website and social media
- using images of male students on promotional and marketing materials
- the introduction of a BIRTS bursary for male applicants

Current Initiatives to Widen Participation

In line with the charitable objectives of Montessori St Nicholas and MCI strategic drive to widen participation, MCI is currently working on collaborative projects with Centrepoint and First Light Trust. MCI is offering 5 funded places to Centrepoint young people on its Level 3 Diploma which offers progression opportunities to Level 4. A team from MCI has visited the Dean Street Education Centre to promote Montessori education as a career option and 6 young people, including young parents have expressed a strong interest. This is being followed up with a workshop at MCI in February to meet tutors and talk to mentors who are ready to support the young people through their studies, including on professional placement. Training bursaries are

also being offered to veteran recoverers from post-traumatic stress disorder as part of a wider charitable initiative to support families of veterans in collaboration with First Light Trust.

A Student Services Manager was appointed in October 2018 with a remit to enhance the student journey from initial enquiry through to graduation and beyond. A restructuring of the Student Services team is currently underway and the creation of two new Student Relationships Officer positions will support the holistic individual needs of students and enhance their experience at MCI.

Student Support

MCI offers a holistic approach within its training that is student centered, reflecting core Montessori values. The MCI Operational Plan indicates that pastoral support systems are key to student achievement and completion. MCI is conscious of its responsibilities for the holistic well-being and mental health of its students and recognises the importance of managing the well-being of students during their course of study.

As a small institution, MCI is able to provide continued and personalised guidance to students through the duration of study. This is available to all students irrespective of background, but the MCI approach to student support is particularly effective for those who might have lower expectations of success in higher education. Students are offered assistance to ensure that their programme of study is sustainable and identify any on-going concerns that may prevent students from successfully completing their studies. Individualised support packages for students with disabilities and special educational needs are offered, including peer to peer tutoring, one-to-one tutorials and reasonable adjustments for assessment.

Developing and embedding academic skills

Key to student achievement and progression is the systematic development of academic skills, which are introduced at the start of the course in Study Skills. The unit lays out clearly the nature and ethos of the course, establishes contact and communication between the cohort across all modes and location of study and allows learners to prepare for their study. The unit sets out to foster active learning from the outset, promoting independent enquiry, reflection and discussion. The nature of blended learning is explained and technical skills are practised to allow learners to participate fully. Reflection and reflective practice are introduced, which underpin the ethos of the course. Peer feedback is outlined in the unit which is used as a strategy throughout the course. There is a strong emphasis on collaborative learning, group work and discussion. Feedback from learners suggests the unit is meeting the needs of our diverse learner body, which includes mature learners, learners with additional learning needs and learners with English as an additional language. Student feedback on the unit (from 2018) is very positive with 97% student satisfaction levels.

Students entering the Foundation Degree direct entry at Level 5 have a particular need to refresh and consolidate study skills. Level 5 online resources include a Study Hub which students can dip into throughout the course, drawing on resources compiled by MCI and LMU.

As the majority of part-time students are combining work and study, or have additional family commitments, the study time requirement is emphasised throughout the early stages of the course. The first assignment in Study Skills asks students to complete a weekly study plan, outlining their commitments and time available for study . Group tutors who assess this first assignment are then able to gain a clear view of the holistic picture of each individual student and their wider obligations. Time management skills are included in the Study Skills unit, which group tutors can refer students back to. This emphasis on realistic expectations of study time required has been put in place as a key measure to facilitate student completion.

Monitoring and evaluation

Retention and achievement rates of specific groups of students is monitored as part of the annual monitoring process, for example focusing on students with English as an additional language or

students with identified additional learning needs. Monitoring deferral rates, identified that pregnancy was a key cause of deferral, leading to the development of a comprehensive Pregnancy and Maternity Policy, developed by a working party that included students who were pregnant or new parents.

Data on student achievement has identified that many students with low entry qualifications make excellent progress through the Foundation Degree. As reported by our Academic Liaison Tutor, MCI FdA graduates go on to do very well when topping up to BA(Hons) Early Childhood at London Metropolitan University, achieving a high proportion of First or Upper Second Degrees.

A designated tutor has responsibility for coordinating support and contacts all students who have identified additional learning needs after enrolment to discuss strategies for effective learning and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. The External Examiner Report (2016/17) comments positively on this support, "*Students with unique needs and circumstances are given exemplary support and empathetic guidance in teaching and learning. All tutors know the students extremely well as individuals, and they guide, support and celebrate their progress alongside providing wise and sensitive guidance for those with unique needs and circumstances. This allows some students to resubmit at a later time, to gain assessments for the identification of needs such as dyslexia or extra time due to personal circumstances. The guidance remains strong, clear and yet empathetic*."

The coordinator for students with additional learning needs identified a shift from students needing additional learning support to students needing support with mental health issues. This led to the strategic aim to develop a Student Wellbeing Policy with a focus on supporting students with mental health issues. A Wellbeing working party and steering group have been established to promote wellbeing across the organisation, with a recognition that to support students, we need to support the wellbeing of staff. A qualified counsellor with expertise in supporting students with specific learning differences delivers regular workshops for students, some of which are webinar facilitated to reach online students. We are also able to offer 1:1 personal support and study skills sessions for students referred by their group tutors.

Progression Opportunities

MCI has developed a range of progression opportunities, including Level 3 to Level 4 and linking Further Education training to Higher Education through accreditation for prior learning and agreements with awarding organisations. This offers greater access to students with non-traditional educational backgrounds.