



General  
Osteopathic  
Council

**Guidance for  
Applicants and  
Students with a  
Disability or Health  
Impairment**

# Contents

<b>SECTION 1: OSTEOPATHIC EDUCATION AND THE EQUALITY ACT</b>	<b>3</b>
WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?	3
WHAT DOES THE GENERAL OSTEOPATHIC COUNCIL DO?	3
WHAT IS OSTEOPATHY?	4
WHAT DO OSTEOPATHS DO?	4
HOW CAN I BECOME AN OSTEOPATH?	4
IF I HAVE A DISABILITY, CAN I BECOME AN OSTEOPATH?	5
WHAT RIGHTS DOES THE EQUALITY ACT GIVE A DISABLED PERSON?	5
HOW DOES THE EQUALITY ACT APPLY TO THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF OSTEOPATHY STUDENTS?	6
HAVE THERE BEEN ANY OSTEOPATHIC STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES OR HEALTH CONDITIONS BEFORE?	6
WHO SHOULD I TALK TO IF I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO BE AN OSTEOPATH?	6
<b>SECTION 2: APPLYING FOR AN OSTEOPATHIC COURSE</b>	<b>8</b>
WHICH OSTEOPATHIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION SHOULD I APPLY TO?	8
SHOULD I DISCLOSE MY DISABILITY ON THE APPLICATION FORM?	8
HOW WILL MY APPLICATION BE CONSIDERED?	8
WHAT IS MEANT BY REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS?	9
ARE THERE ANY DISABILITIES THAT HAVE PREVENTED PEOPLE TRAINING IN OSTEOPATHY?	10
HOW CAN I GET THE HELP I NEED?	11
WHAT IF I THINK I HAVE BEEN TREATED UNFAIRLY DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS?	11
<b>SECTION 3: DURING THE PROGRAMME</b>	<b>12</b>
IF I GET A PLACE, WILL I BE SUPPORTED DURING MY OSTEOPATHY DEGREE PROGRAMME?	12
WHAT REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS CAN BE MADE TO HELP ME COMPLETE THE PROGRAMME?	12
WILL I NEED TO CHANGE THE WAY I MANAGE MY DISABILITY?	13
HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO STUDENT FITNESS TO PRACTISE?	14
WHAT HAPPENS IF A DISABILITY OR HEALTH CONDITION STARTS OR COMES TO LIGHT AFTER I START THE COURSE?	14
IF I PASS MY DEGREE PROGRAMME, WILL I BE REGISTERED AS AN OSTEOPATH BY THE GOSC?	14
WHAT HAPPENS ONCE I HAVE QUALIFIED?	15
WILL I BE ABLE TO EARN A LIVING AS AN OSTEOPATH?	15
<b>SECTION 4: GETTING MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT</b>	<b>16</b>
HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?	16

# Section 1: Osteopathic education and the Equality Act

## Who is this document for?

- 1 The General Osteopathic Council regulates the practice of osteopathy in the United Kingdom. As a regulatory body we are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants and students of osteopathy.
- 2 If you are considering a career in osteopathy and are disabled or have a long-term health condition, this guidance booklet will help you decide whether osteopathic education and training is right for you.
- 3 It explains the nature of the work that osteopaths do, the education and training you will need to undertake to become an osteopath, and the help you can expect if you enter osteopathic education and training. You should read this guidance in association with our guidance about student fitness to practise and professional behaviours<sup>1</sup>.
- 4 Section 2 of this guidance describes the process of applying for an osteopathic course and the actions that Osteopathic Educational Institutions (OEl)s will take when considering your application.
- 5 Section 3 describes the help and support you can expect during training and what happens after graduation.
- 6 Section 4 provides other sources of information.

## What does the General Osteopathic Council do?

- 7 The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) regulates the practice of osteopathy in the UK<sup>2</sup>. We do this by:
  - > Keeping the Register of all those permitted to practise osteopathy in the UK.
  - > Working with the public and the osteopathic profession to promote patient safety by:
    - Setting and monitoring the maintenance and development of standards of osteopathic training, practice and conduct.
    - Assuring the quality of osteopathic education and ensuring that osteopaths undertake continuing professional development.
    - Helping patients with any concerns or complaints about an osteopath, with the power to remove from the Register any osteopaths who are unfit to practise.
- 8 By law osteopaths must be registered with us in order to practise in the UK.
- 9 We are one of nine health professions regulators established by law to ensure the safety and wellbeing of patients and the general public<sup>3</sup>.
- 10 Patients expect that healthcare professionals will be competent to do their job, will treat them properly and will behave ethically. Our job is to ensure that this happens and to take action if an osteopath's practice falls below our standards.

1 General Osteopathic Council, 2012, *Guidance about Professional Behaviours and Fitness to Practice for Osteopathic Students*, London, GOsC.

2 The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) is a regulatory body established by the Osteopaths Act 1993.

3 Information about all of the nine health professional regulators can be found at: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/resources/publications/leaflets/](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/resources/publications/leaflets/).

## What is osteopathy?

- 11 Osteopathy is a system of diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of medical conditions. It works with the structure and function of the body, and is based on the principle that the wellbeing of an individual depends on the skeleton, muscles, ligaments and connective tissues functioning smoothly together.
- 12 To an osteopath, for your body to work well, its structure must also work well. So osteopaths work to restore your body to a state of balance, where possible without the use of drugs or surgery. Osteopaths use touch, physical manipulation, stretching and massage to increase the mobility of joints, to relieve muscle tension, to enhance the blood and nerve supply to tissues, and to help your body's own healing mechanisms. They may also provide advice on posture and exercise to aid recovery, promote health and prevent symptoms recurring.
- 16 Osteopaths' patients include the young, older people, manual workers, office professionals, pregnant women, children and sports people. Patients seek treatment for a wide variety of conditions, including back pain, repetitive strain injury, changes to posture in pregnancy, postural problems caused by driving or work strain, the pain of arthritis and minor sports injuries.
- 17 Most patients 'self refer' to an osteopath for treatment. Although referral by a GP is not necessary, patients are encouraged to keep both their GP and osteopath fully informed, so that their medical records are current and complete and the patient receives the best possible care from both healthcare practitioners. Osteopaths are skilled in diagnostic techniques and trained to identify when a patient needs to be referred to a GP.
- 18 There are more than 4,000 osteopaths registered with the GOsC. The profession attracts almost equal numbers of men and women. Some osteopaths have already qualified in another health profession such as medicine, nursing or physiotherapy.

## What do osteopaths do?

- 13 Osteopaths consider each person as an individual. On a patient's first visit the osteopath will spend time taking a detailed medical history, including information about their lifestyle and diet. Patients are normally asked to undress to their underwear and perform a series of simple movements.
- 14 Osteopaths use their hands to identify abnormalities in the structure and function of a body, and to assess areas of weakness, tenderness, restriction or strain. By this means, osteopaths make a full diagnosis and discuss with the patient the most appropriate treatment plan, estimating the likely number of sessions needed to treat their condition effectively. Then osteopaths work with the body's ability to heal itself. They usually start any treatment by releasing and relaxing muscles and stretching stiff joints, using gentle massage and rhythmic joint movements. The particular range of techniques an osteopath uses will depend on the individual patient's problem.
- 15 The first treatment generally lasts about 45 minutes (to allow for case history taking and diagnosis) and subsequent treatments tend to last around half an hour. Osteopaths also offer added exercises and health advice to help reduce the symptoms and improve health and quality of life.
- 19 Most osteopaths are self-employed and work in the private sector. Some work in multi-disciplinary environments within the NHS, or in occupational healthcare in public bodies and private companies. All osteopaths, wherever they work, must be registered with the GOSC.

## How can I become an osteopath?

- 20 In order to register with us and practise as an osteopath, you will need to achieve a Recognised Qualification (RQ). That is a qualification that we have approved which is awarded by an OEI.
- 21 We monitor standards of education and training of the courses that we have recognised in the OEIs through a process of annual reporting, and we also conduct full reviews on a regular basis, usually every three to five years. These are undertaken on our behalf by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Reviews are conducted with reference to our published standards and the Quality Assurance Agency's *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*, Gloucester, QAA, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Osteopathy07.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Osteopathy07.pdf).

- 22 Achieving an RQ means that you are capable of practising, without supervision, to the standard expected in our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*<sup>5</sup>. These standards are available on our website: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/>.
- 23 The RQ will entitle you to apply for registration. You will be expected to provide evidence of good health and good character, and to have met our conditions regarding the registration fee and confirmation of professional indemnity insurance before you commence in practice.
- 24 Our good health requirement means that you '*... must be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. It does not mean the absence of any disability or health condition. Many disabled people and those with long-term health conditions are able to practise with or without adjustments to support their practice.*'<sup>6</sup>

## If I have a disability, can I become an osteopath?

- 25 We are committed to the principles of equality and diversity and firmly believe that the profession and its patients benefit from having disabled practitioners in the profession. Disabled students and practitioners make a unique contribution to osteopathy. They bring direct experience of particular health conditions and impairments and are able to provide valuable insights for colleagues. Some patients recognise and appreciate a particular sensibility and sensitivity, and identify closely with disabled practitioners. Osteopathy can accommodate people with a range of backgrounds and capabilities, including people with disabilities and health conditions. We do not have a list of the disabilities and health conditions that would prevent someone from becoming an osteopath because we believe decisions should be made on an individual basis, taking full account of a person's ability to meet our standards and to practise safely. Indeed it would be against the law to discriminate against people on the grounds that they have a particular disability.
- 26 If we confirm that an individual meets all of our standards for registration as an osteopath and put them on our Register, they are legally entitled to practise without restriction. This means that when Osteopathic Education Institutions consider an applicant's suitability, they have to be confident that the individual is

likely to have the capacity and capability to meet all the demands of professional practice at the end of their programme of study. Once registered, osteopaths have a professional obligation to decide for themselves whether they continue to remain fit to practise. Self-monitoring is an important part of being a registered health professional.

- 27 As a regulatory body we do not deal with matters of employment. Being on our register does not guarantee that you will find employment as an osteopath, or that if you choose self-employment you will attract a sufficient number of patients to make a living. Taking account of your disability or health condition and its prognosis, you will need to decide whether osteopathy is a good career choice for you and whether you will be able to earn a living practising as an osteopath.

## What rights does the Equality Act give a disabled person?

- 28 The Equality Act protects students from discrimination or harassment on the basis of a 'protected characteristic'<sup>7</sup>, and also from victimisation. Disability is a protected characteristic.
- 29 Unlawful discrimination includes:
- > Direct discrimination.
  - > Indirect discrimination.
  - > Discrimination arising from disability.
  - > Failure to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.
- 30 A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities<sup>8</sup>. 'Long-term' means that the impairment has lasted or is likely to last 12 months or more.

5 New *Osteopathic Practice Standards* take effect from 1 September 2012 and can be found at: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/osteopathic\\_practice\\_standards\\_public.pdf](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/osteopathic_practice_standards_public.pdf); they supersede: *Standard 2000 – Standard of Proficiency* and the *Code of Practice*, which can be found at: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/).

6 General Osteopathic Council, 2012, *Guidance about Professional Behaviours and Fitness to Practise for Osteopathic Students*, London, GOsC, p8.

7 Other protected characteristics that apply are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race, religion or belief (including lack of belief); sex; and sexual orientation.

8 This is the definition used in the Equality Act 2010.

- 31 An individual does not need to have a medical diagnosis of their impairment – the important factor is the effect of the impairment. Other factors may be relevant in determining whether a person is disabled under the terms of the Act. These are set out in Government guidance.<sup>9</sup>
- 32 Certain medical conditions – cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis – are specifically identified in the Act as a disability, as is a severe disfigurement. Progressive conditions and those with fluctuating or recurring effects, such as depression, are also included provided they meet the test of having a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The Act also protects people who have had a disability in the past.

### How does the Equality Act apply to the education and training of osteopathy students?

- 33 The Equality Act 2010 brought together and extended existing equality legislation. It applies in England, Scotland and Wales, so it covers all Osteopathic Education Institutions<sup>10</sup>.
- 34 Osteopathic Education Institutions are subject to the Equality Act provisions that apply to further and higher education institutions. These institutions are also subject to the public sector equality duty. This is a general duty which requires public bodies to take steps not only to eliminate unlawful discrimination, but also to actively promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people who share a particular protected characteristic and people who do not.
- 35 The Act prohibits education institutions from discriminating against, harassing or victimising applicants or students.
- 36 An applicant or a student who believes they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised by an education institution, can make a claim under the Equality Act.
- 37 Education institutions can decide how best to put in place their obligations under the Equality Act, so institutions will use different approaches to achieve the same ends dependent on their size, context and the nature of the institution.

### Have there been any osteopathic students with disabilities or health conditions before?

- 38 Yes. There have been a number of students with disabilities and health conditions who have successfully completed their course and gone on to practise osteopathy. Students who have undertaken osteopathic education and training have included those with learning difficulties (such as dyslexia), sensory impairments (both visual and auditory), physical disabilities (such as impaired mobility), health conditions (such as cancer), and a variety of long-term conditions (including diabetes, epilepsy and mental health conditions).

### Who should I talk to if I think I would like to be an osteopath?

- 39 Initially you should talk to as many people as possible – including family, friends and, if possible, osteopaths in your local area – about whether osteopathy would be a good career choice for you. This will help you to gain a range of opinions about the possible advantages and disadvantages of osteopathy as a career option for you. However, remember that not everyone will understand the skills and knowledge that are needed by an osteopath, and not everyone will be able to make an accurate judgment about your abilities.
- 40 You will probably also find it useful to read our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*<sup>11</sup> so that you can start to assess for yourself whether osteopathy might be a career for you.

9 See: Office for Disability Issues, May 2011, Equality Act 2010 Guidance: Guidance on matters to be taken into account in determining questions relating to the definition of disability, available at: <http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/docs/law/ea/ea-guide-2.pdf>.

10 Separate anti-discrimination law applies in Northern Ireland.

11 New *Osteopathic Practice Standards* take effect from 1 September 2012 and can be found at: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/osteopathic\\_practice\\_standards\\_public.pdf](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/uploads/osteopathic_practice_standards_public.pdf); they supersede *Standard 2000 – Standard of Proficiency* and the *Code of Practice*, which can be found at: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/).

- 41 As well as talking to people you know, it is essential that you talk to people in Osteopathic Educational Institutions (OEs). They have experience of helping students with a wide range of disabilities. You should contact OEs before you make a firm application to find out what the programme involves, what it is like to work as an osteopath, and to hear about how other students have managed. OEs will be able to give you examples of the types of support that other students with disabilities have received and how they have adjusted to challenges such as leaving home and having to establish new support networks.
- 42 You can be reassured that initial contact of this sort will not influence your application, should you decide to make one. The OE will not use this initial contact to assess you as a potential applicant, but will use the opportunity to help you think through the implications of undertaking osteopathic education and training and embarking on a career in osteopathy.
- 43 When you contact an OE, ask about their equality policy, the support they provide for students with disabilities, and whether you can talk to their disability or learning support service. This will give you a good indication of the institution's commitment to equality and to their experience of admitting and supporting disabled students.
- 44 A number of OEs offer open days for prospective students. These provide an excellent opportunity to gain an insight into what osteopathy is and what osteopathic education and training involves. There will often be a chance for you to talk to students on the course and to observe or participate in clinic room practical sessions. This should help you better understand the physical and psychological demands of osteopathy. It will also help you to assess whether the level of support that will be available is likely to be sufficient for you.

## Section 2:

# Applying for an osteopathic course

### Which Osteopathic Educational Institution should I apply to?

- 45 It is not possible for us to advise you on which OEI might best meet your needs. All of the courses that we have approved have met our standards and have been recognised as leading to the award of a Recognised Qualification. It is up to you to decide which RQ in which institution is likely to best meet your needs. You might wish to consider factors such as: the OEI's proximity to your friends, family and healthcare services so that you can get their continued support; the size and location of the OEI; the nature and philosophy of the course; whether the OEI can offer suitable student accommodation; and the disability support services that would be available to you.
- 46 You might also want to think about whether the institution appears to welcome applications from disabled people in its marketing materials, and the help and support you received when you first made contact.

### Should I disclose my disability on the application form?

- 47 It is in your interest to disclose your disability or health condition as early as possible in the applications process. However, you are not obliged to do this. We advise you to disclose this information because it gives an OEI the best chance of trying to meet your needs and of arranging support before the course starts. You can be reassured that if you do disclose this information, it is unlawful for an OEI to discriminate against you because you have a disability.
- 48 If you apply to an OEI through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, you will be invited to indicate whether or not you have a disability, special need or medical condition (from a list of options), or to indicate that you do not want to provide the information. If you

disclose information about a disability or health impairment, it will be held in confidence by the OEI(s) concerned.

- 49 OEIs should consider your disability, and any reasonable adjustments that can be made to help you meet the requirements of the course, separately from considering whether you have the knowledge, skill and attributes required for entry to the course.
- 50 OEIs, like any other educational institution, have the right to set entry criteria and to conduct a selection process for entry to their programmes. This is because it is not in anybody's interest to admit a student – whether disabled or non-disabled – who has less than a good chance of completing the course.
- 51 OEIs also have a duty of care to all the students they enrol. They do not want anyone who starts the programme to fail to complete it, or to waste an individual's time and money on a programme the individual has little likelihood of completing.
- 52 OEIs must also consider patient safety. Osteopathy is a form of vocational education – students acquire their skills through clinic room practice. OEIs have to be sure that students have the capability to learn osteopathy without putting patients at risk.

### How will my application be considered?

- 53 Each OEI assesses all its applications against the same entry criteria. By law, all OEIs are obliged to take all reasonable steps to make adjustments to accommodate disabled students, but they are not required to vary any competence standard required for entry to their course. However, OEIs do need to ensure that the entry criteria, and the way in which they are applied, do not discriminate (directly or indirectly) against disabled applicants. Entry criteria should be justifiable as genuine and necessary requirements for the course.



- 54 Most OELs interview applicants to assess their suitability for entry to osteopathy education and training. Before interviews take place, the institution should check with you (and all other applicants) whether you have any specific requirements to enable you to access and participate fully in the interview process.
- 55 Interviews will mainly focus on whether or not you have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed to take part in osteopathic education and training. Generally, OELs will not consider your disability or health condition at this point, although the Equality Act does not prohibit such questions. In particular, it is likely to be appropriate to ask questions concerning your requirement for reasonable adjustments or your ability to meet the competence standards of the course. However, you are free to raise your disability in an interview and use the opportunity to explore how this might affect your education and training experience.
- 56 OELs will base their assessment of your suitability for the course on the assumption that they will be able to make any reasonable adjustments that will be required. This ensures that your suitability is judged on your merits as an applicant, and ignores any disability or health condition you may have. Detailed assessment of what adjustments will be needed, and consideration of whether they can reasonably be put in place, occurs only after a decision has been made about your suitability for entry to the course.
- 59 OELs are expected to plan ahead and to anticipate the requirements of people with different kinds of disability (for example, people whose vision or mobility is impaired), as well as to respond to the specific needs of disabled applicants and students on an individual basis. The requirement is to make adjustments that are reasonable.
- 60 Some examples of general adjustments that OELs have made are included in the box below.

### General adjustments made by OELs include:

- > Providing information about the course in alternative formats.
- > Making adjustments to ensure that general and emergency access routes to and from buildings are accessible to people with restricted mobility.
- > Ensuring that core facilities – such as toilets, common rooms, libraries and catering facilities – are well lit, properly signposted and easily accessed by disabled students.
- > Reviewing and adjusting learning and assessment policies and practices to ensure that they do not inherently discriminate against disabled students.
- > Ensuring that lecture notes and other learning resources are available in electronic format for use by, for example, visually impaired students and those with specific learning difficulties who use assistive computer software.
- > Installing loop systems to assist students with hearing impairments.
- > Ensuring that staff are sufficiently well informed about their responsibilities to help eliminate disability discrimination and to provide suitable adjustments and support.

## What is meant by reasonable adjustments?

- 57 The Equality Act 2010 imposes a duty on OELs to make reasonable adjustments – that is to take positive steps to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in the education and other benefits, facilities and services that are provided for other students.
- 58 This means that OELs have to take reasonable steps to ensure that nothing they provide or do, including the physical features of their premises, puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage (i.e. it is more than minor or trivial), and are obliged to provide auxiliary aids or services – such as special equipment, computer software, or extra assistance from staff – where, without them, disabled students would be put at a substantial disadvantage.

- 61 Examples of actions that OELs have taken to help individual students are included in Section 3 (see page 12).

## Are there any disabilities that have prevented people training in osteopathy?

- 62 Osteopathy is a physically, intellectually and emotionally demanding profession. Some people may have disabilities which prevent them from acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills or from practising safely in accordance with our standards, but each person is assessed on an individual basis. Neither the GOsC nor the OEIs hold a list of disabilities or health conditions which automatically disbar certain applicants from entering training or becoming an osteopath – indeed it would be illegal to do so. We consider it essential that each applicant is considered on an individual basis.
- 63 When considering your application, each OEI will take into account the fact that:
- ‘the primary aim of an osteopathic education provider is to educate students to become safe and effective osteopaths who are fully capable of working autonomously in a variety of clinical settings as primary contact healthcare practitioners.’<sup>12</sup>*
- 64 An OEI will therefore assess whether you have the knowledge, skills and attributes for entry to the course, the capacity and capability to enable you to meet the competence standards at the end of the programme (allowing for any reasonable adjustments during training to help you do so), and the potential to enter unsupervised independent practice.
- 65 You should recognise that there will be instances when an OEI concludes that reasonable adjustments will be insufficient to enable an applicant to demonstrate achievement of the competence standard for entry to the profession. Some of the competence standards which OEIs have to take into account when assessing an applicant’s potential are set out in the box on the right.

### By the end of the course the student will need to:

- > Treat patients safely and effectively, drawing upon an extensive range of osteopathic manual and other techniques (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s physical abilities to develop and apply this range*).
- > Make an appropriate risk analysis in determining the most effective and appropriate therapeutic interventions for the benefit of the patient (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s ability to assess risk derived from observations that require sensory acuity*).
- > Determine fine static and dynamic changes in tissues and joint movement by the appropriate use of observation, palpation and motion analysis (*as above*).
- > Identify relative and absolute contraindications to osteopathic treatment (*as above*).
- > Sensitively conduct relevant medical and osteopathic clinical examination to assist in the assessment of an individual’s physical and mental state (*as above*).
- > Draw on a range of verbal and non-verbal skills to relate to patients empathetically (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s communication skills*).
- > Manage appropriately their own health and schedule so it does not impact adversely on patient care (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s self-awareness*).
- > Communicate effectively by written, electronic and oral means with patients, colleagues and other healthcare practitioners (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s information communication skills*).
- > Gather, interpret and prioritise effectively large amounts of information, and formulate effective plans and act decisively as a result (*leading to consideration of an applicant’s information handling skills*).

<sup>12</sup> GOsC and the Quality Assurance Agency, 2007, *Subject Benchmark Statements for Osteopathy* (page 11)

## How can I get the help I need?

- 66 OEs will have a support service for students with disabilities either within the institution itself or in its associated university. This service should be able to provide you with any additional advice and help during your course.
- 67 You may be entitled to receive financial support through the Disabled Students Allowance, but you will need to have your eligibility confirmed. The disability support service will be able to advise you on how to apply for this and about other financial support you might be able to obtain.
- 68 There are also a number of charities which provide advice and support for students with different forms of disability and health conditions. We have listed the major ones in Section 4 of this document, but you might also find it worthwhile to check out other organisations that you are already aware of, or to look at the DirectGov website to find help and support for your specific needs.

## What if I think I have been treated unfairly during the application process?

- 69 If you have concerns that your disability or health condition has adversely affected how an OEI has assessed your application, and you have made an honest self-assessment of your potential to meet the osteopathy benchmark statements and our standards, then you should contact the education provider and take your complaint through their complaints procedure. If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with properly, you may wish to contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission (further details can be found in Section 4).
- 70 The organisation Disability Alliance provides a service to help disabled students – Skill at Disability Alliance (further details can be found in Section 4). In addition to providing online information and a telephone helpline, it has a number of publications, including *Making a Complaint*.

## Section 3: During the programme

### If I get a place, will I be supported during my osteopathy degree programme?

- 71 As soon as you are offered a place, the OEI will want to work with you to agree the reasonable adjustments that will be needed. A member of staff at the OEI will ask you for your views on the adjustments that you think would be helpful for you to overcome any disadvantage you experience because of your disability or health condition. The OEI will recognise that you are most likely to know what has helped in the past and to offer suggestions about the adjustments likely to be required.
- 72 In some instances you might need to be assessed by an expert (for example, an occupational health advisor or an educational psychologist) to establish precisely what type and level of assistance will be required, or to provide formal confirmation of a specific learning difficulty. This might also be necessary if you are applying for financial help.
- 73 A member of the OEI staff or its associated university will also tell you about the personal financial support that may be available to help you, such as the Access to Learning Fund or the Disabled Student Allowance.
- 74 Occasionally there may be circumstances when, after due consideration of your disability or health condition and your specific needs, the OEI concludes that the adjustments required for you to undertake the course are not reasonable. In such a situation the OEI will explain the decision to you and explore with you possible alternative courses and career choices that you might wish to consider.

### What reasonable adjustments can be made to help me complete the programme?

- 75 OEIs will endeavour to put in place all of the reasonable adjustments you need to ensure you are not substantially disadvantaged in the learning, teaching and assessment of the course. They cannot change the competence standard (that is the learning outcomes that you need to achieve at the end of the course) as these relate to the requirements that you have to meet to register and practise as an osteopath.
- 76 OEIs have experience of arranging a wide range of adjustments to meet the needs of students with disabilities and will consider what specific things you require to help you to complete the course. The OEI will determine what is necessary and reasonable to provide, considering issues such as:
- > How effective the adjustment will be in overcoming the difficulty.
  - > Whether it is practicable to make the adjustment.
  - > What financial and other costs are involved.
  - > The amount of disruption it will cause (for example to other students).
  - > The availability of financial or other assistance.
- 77 It is important that adjustments to help you do not have a significant adverse impact on others. For example, the Equality Act does not override health and safety legislation, so neither you nor anyone else in the OEI should be exposed to additional risks to their health or safety as a result of an adjustment.
- 78 In the past, OEIs have made a wide range of adjustments to meet the needs of disabled students, some of which are shown in the box on page 13.

### Examples of adjustments include:

- > To the physical environment, both internally and externally to improve access to and the use of facilities, and to features such as lighting and sound insulation.
- > To teaching and learning, including the provision of information in a variety of visual, audio and electronic formats together with the associated assistive technologies.
- > Human assistance, in the form of coaching and mentoring, additional tutorial support, and specific assistance with particular tasks such as proof-reading assignments.
- > Making allowances, for example by extending deadlines, permitting absences, providing breaks in teaching sessions, or by relaxing regulations (e.g. to allow a student to carry, store on site and administer necessary medication).
- > By providing equipment, for example to support computer assisted learning, voice recognition software and screen-readers, and in the form of laptops and handheld devices for note-taking.
- > By facilitating access to resources, for example for the purchase of textbooks to use at home to help combat the fatigue associated with frequent trips to the library, and for the use of taxis after specific healthcare treatments.
- > To examinations, for example in the design and presentation of exam papers, by providing extra time and allowing rest breaks, removing penalties for poor spelling, grammar and punctuation or allowing computers with spell-checkers, arranging for separate rooms and invigilation, and permitting the use of a reader or scribe.
- > To practical assessments, by allowing extra practice sessions, more time for the student to familiarise themselves with the setting or to interview, assess and record patient information, or to use a Dictaphone for subsequent transcription, by permitting adjustments to the physical arrangement and features of the examination and treatment area – such as additional space or special lighting – and allowing the use of aids to facilitate manipulations.
- > Providing additional support, for example in the form of one-to-one tutorials or extra clinic instruction, or by teaching special study skills and learning techniques, identifying a student 'buddy', or offering ongoing mentorship or course-long support from a personal tutor, student counsellor or disability officer.

79 Some of the adjustments (in the box above) have become standard practice for OEs, which can be put in place quickly, especially for students who have a well-understood disability and where the adjustments are known to provide straightforward and immediate benefit. However other adjustments may take longer to work out and put in place because they need to be designed uniquely for a particular individual.

80 The reasonable adjustments that are needed by some students will vary over time due to changes in their disability or health condition. If you find this happens to you, you should contact the relevant member of staff and discuss the changes with them.

### Will I need to change the way I manage my disability?

81 You will need to think about how you have managed to live with your disability or health impairment in your home environment and how things are likely to change as an osteopathic student. This will include the people, such as family and friends, who have formed your support network and helped you live with your disability and the extent to which they will now be available and on hand to provide support. If you will be moving away to a new area, you will need to recognise that it will take time to develop a new support network and develop new friends.

82 Some disabled students have remarked that in addition to the challenges that all students encounter when starting osteopathic training, they have had to make even greater adjustments to accommodate tiring academic and social schedules, to establish new relationships and peer support networks, and to find an appropriate balance between the demands of study, a new social life and their continuing health and wellbeing.

### How does this relate to student fitness to practise?

83 We have issued separate guidance about what we call 'fitness to practise'. Our concern is that you should behave as a responsible professional throughout your training, whether you are disabled or not. However, there may be occasions when, as a student with a disability or health condition, your fitness to practise is called into question.

84 OEs are likely to be concerned if you show a lack of insight into the nature or impact of your disability, particularly if this affects patient care. An example would be a student whose insight was intermittently impaired because they failed to take maintenance medication routinely as prescribed.

85 If an OEI has concerns about how you are managing your condition, they will raise the concern with you and discuss what can be done to remedy the problem. If, despite adjustments and support, you still do not manage your condition effectively and put patients at risk, the question will arise as to your fitness to practise, which might lead to a formal fitness to practise investigation and could result in your exclusion from the course.

### What happens if a disability or health condition starts or comes to light after I start the course?

86 During the induction period, your OEI will try to ensure that the support you need has been put in place. It will also invite any students who have not disclosed a health condition or disability to do so. However, it is possible that you may not be aware that you have a disability because you have found ways to

manage it, or you assume that everyone has the same problems. For example, during induction some OEs have uncovered undetected cases of dyslexia – a specific form of learning difficulty – and have been able to put in place adjustments to help these individuals manage their difficulties throughout the remainder of the course, even though the students did not seek or expect this when they applied.

87 Some students become ill during their course, suffer an accident that affects their abilities, or find that the medication they have been using needs to be changed. OEs are usually very sympathetic to such changes and recognise that they can be difficult for students to manage. It is essential that you are open and honest and that you explain the difficulties you are experiencing. Reasonable adjustments can be altered during a course or be put in place later if your needs change. As at the start of the programme, the earlier you are able to tell your institution about any changes the better it is because it means there is more time to work with you to prevent any problems escalating.

### If I pass my degree programme, will I be registered as an osteopath by the GOSc?

88 If you are awarded a Recognised Qualification (RQ) it means the OEI has judged you capable of practising independently to the required standards as set out in our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. Once you are on the GOSc's Register, you will be required to practise in accordance with our published standards of competence and conduct.

89 An RQ will normally lead to registration, provided we are satisfied that you are:

- > **In good health** – that is you are capable of safe and effective practice without supervision, whether or not you have a disability or health condition. We require a health reference from a doctor, who has known you for four years, on first registration from all prospective registrants. If you are unable to obtain a reference from a doctor, you should seek advice from the GOSc.
- > **Of good character** – that is you are honest and trustworthy. Good character is based on a person's conduct, behaviour and attitudes. We take account of any convictions and

cautions that are not considered compatible with professional registration and that might bring the profession into disrepute. We require a character reference from a professional person (for example, an accountant, teacher, dentist or similar) who has known you for four years (and is not a relative) on first registration from all our prospective registrants.

- > **Fit to practise** – that is you have the skills, knowledge, good health and good character to do your job safely and effectively. Your fitness to practise as a student will be assessed throughout your pre-registration programme by the OEI. We consider it to have been judged satisfactory if you are awarded a Recognised Qualification.

## What happens once I have qualified?

- 90 Registration confers unrestricted practice rights. If you are disabled or have a health condition, we do not hold this information on our Register, nor do we place any restrictions on the manner in which you practise osteopathy as a registrant.
- 91 When you become one of our registrants you commit to practising in accordance with the standards set out in our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. You will be personally responsible for maintaining professional standards of practice.
- 92 If your condition worsens or you develop a health impairment or disability when you are on the Register, it is your responsibility to make any necessary changes to the way you work. This might include, for example, working in a group practice where colleagues can provide support or substitution, restricting your practice to a more limited approach, or paying for specific forms of support (such as signing or administrative support) to help you maintain the standards. The majority of osteopaths are self-employed, but if you are employed, your employer has a duty to make reasonable adjustments if they know or should know about your disability.

- 93 Deciding whether you are – and remain – fit to practise and able to continue to ensure the safety of patients and the public is a core professional responsibility and a matter for you to determine, exactly as it is for every registrant.

- 94 Once you are registered, you will be expected to undertake continuing professional development (CPD), and to retain a folder of evidence to support your submission of a CPD Annual Summary Form before each re-registration. Continuing professional development guidelines are available on our website: [www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/continuing-professional-development/](http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/practice/standards-of-practice/continuing-professional-development/).

## Will I be able to earn a living as an osteopath?

- 95 Our responsibility is public protection. We cannot say whether you – or any other registrant – will be able to earn a living as an osteopath. Each individual needs to assess for themselves their fitness to practise and their ability to earn a living from osteopathy. It is important to understand that being on the register does not guarantee that you will have patients who wish to use your services.

## Section 4: Getting more information and support

### How can I find out more?

Sources of further information and guidance are listed below.

#### Action on Hearing Loss

Action on Hearing Loss is the trading name of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID).  
19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL  
Tel: 0808 808 0123  
Text phone: 0808 808 9000  
Email: [informationline@hearingloss.org.uk](mailto:informationline@hearingloss.org.uk)  
[www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/?gclid=CPzFwbSUn6oCFYpA4QodFhHW5Q](http://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/?gclid=CPzFwbSUn6oCFYpA4QodFhHW5Q)

#### British Dyslexia Association

Unit 8 Bracknell Beeches,  
Old Bracknell Lane, Bracknell RG12 7BW  
Tel: 0845 251 9003  
National Helpline: 0845 251 9002  
[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/)

#### Directgov

For information about the Disabled Student Allowance:  
[www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG\\_10034898](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898)

#### Disability Alliance

Disability Alliance (DA) is providing support and information for disabled students through its agreement with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, following the closure of Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. The Skill Helpline can give advice on education, training and employment.  
Tel: 0800 328 5050  
Email: [skill4disabledstudents@disabilityalliance.org](mailto:skill4disabledstudents@disabilityalliance.org)

#### Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has a statutory remit to promote and monitor human rights and to protect, enforce and promote equality across the protected characteristics.  
[www.equalityhumanrights.com/](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/)

#### EHRC England

3 More London, Riverside  
Tooley Street, London SE1 2RG  
Tel: 0845 604 6610  
Text phone: 0845 604 6620  
Email: [englandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:englandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com)

#### EHRC Scotland

The Optima Building,  
58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DU  
Tel: 0845 604 5510  
Text phone: 0845 604 5520  
Email: [scotlandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:scotlandhelpline@equalityhumanrights.com)

#### EHRC Wales

3rd floor, 3 Callaghan Square,  
Cardiff CF10 5BT  
Tel: 0845 604 8810  
Text phone: 0845 604 8820  
Email: [waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:waleshelpline@equalityhumanrights.com)

#### General Osteopathic Council

176 Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 3LU  
Tel: 020 7357 6655  
Email: [contactus@osteopathy.org.uk](mailto:contactus@osteopathy.org.uk)  
<http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/>

#### Government Equalities Office

The Government Equalities Office (located in the Home Office) has responsibility across government for equality strategy and legislation  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/)

#### Legislation

##### The Equality Act 2010

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

##### Explanatory notes to the Equality Act 2010

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/notes/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/notes/contents)

##### The Osteopaths Act 1993

[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/21/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/21/contents)

#### Mind

15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London E15 4BQ  
Tel: 020 8519 2122  
Fax: 020 8522 1725  
Email: [contact@mind.org.uk](mailto:contact@mind.org.uk)  
<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

#### Royal National Institute of Blind People

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE  
Tel: 020 7388 1266  
Fax: 020 7388 2034  
Helpline: 0303 123 9999  
[www.rnib.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.rnib.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx)





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