



**Council**  
**5 May 2016**  
**Communications and Engagement Strategy 2016-19**

<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Purpose</b>	For decision
<b>Issue</b>	This paper proposes a new Communications and Engagement Strategy to support the effective delivery of the GOsC Corporate Strategy 2016-19.
<b>Recommendation</b>	To agree the Communications and Engagement Strategy at the Annex.
<b>Financial and resourcing implications</b>	Activities to deliver the three-year Communications and Engagement Strategy will be detailed in the annual business plans and mapped against the available resources.
<b>Equality and diversity implications</b>	Communications and engagement activities are assessed as they are developed to identify and satisfy the requirements of all our stakeholders, and in relation to policy development projects, equality impact assessments will ensure we are cognisant of equality and diversity implications.
<b>Communications implications</b>	None beyond what is outlined in the Strategy.
<b>Annex</b>	GOsC Communications and Engagement Strategy 2016-19.
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## Background

1. The statutory duty of the GOsC is to 'develop and regulate the profession of osteopathy' in the United Kingdom in order to ensure public protection. The Council has agreed a new Corporate Strategy for the period 2016-19, building on three high-level objectives, which are:
  - To promote public and patient safety through patient-centred, proportionate, targeted and effective regulatory activity
  - To encourage and facilitate continuous improvement in the quality of osteopathic healthcare
  - To use our resources efficiently and effectively, while adapting and responding to change in the external environment.
2. Underpinning these objectives, our Corporate Strategy states the principle that: 'Partnership is at the heart of delivering our objectives; a regulator is not synonymous with the profession it regulates and we believe strongly that, where appropriate, we should work with others to achieve them.'<sup>1</sup>
3. The Annex to this paper proposes a Communications and Engagement Strategy to promote the core work of the GOsC and support the achievement of the objectives and priorities set out in our Corporate Strategy 2016-19.

## Discussion

4. The draft Communications and Engagement Strategy comprises four strategic objectives, each objective supported by a number of activity areas and mechanisms for evaluating progress over time; it is underpinned at operational level by a communications action plan
5. The strategy is shaped by evidence and intelligence arising from recently conducted GOsC research and stakeholder feedback, and account is taken also of the likely implications of wider healthcare regulatory developments and reforms.
6. Partnership working to advance the development of the profession has strengthened relations between osteopathic organisations in recent years and our 2016-19 Corporate and Communications Strategies build on this firm base. The success of much of our work depends on the willingness of others to support and work with us to shape, implement and deliver key projects. It is crucial that through our communications, others are able to see the value in our aims and have confidence in us as an organisation and in our regulatory services.

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<sup>1</sup> GOsC Corporate Strategy 2016-19: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/about-us/our-work/corporate-strategy/>

7. In the immediate future much of our work will focus around strategies for minimising professional isolation, which we recognise as a risk to patient safety. Two major projects – the introduction of an enhanced scheme of Continuing Professional Development for osteopaths and the implementation of revised osteopathic practice standards – offer the opportunity for working in partnership with others to promote the growth of communities of practice that provide peer support and encourage shared learning.

### **Conclusion**

8. Our Communications and Engagement Strategy should be regarded as a living document, as all plans should be flexible and responsive to the changing external environment and our evolving operational needs. As such, the Strategy and underpinning operational work plan will be kept under regular review, with progress indicated through the Business Plan monitoring process and annual update reports.

**Recommendation:** to agree the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2016-19 at the Annex.

### **GOsC Communications and Engagement Strategy 2016-19**

#### **Introduction**

It is the statutory duty of the General Osteopathic Council to 'develop and regulate the profession of osteopathy' in the UK, and the Council's Corporate Strategy for the period 2016-2019, agreed in February 2016, describes how the Council aims 'to protect public and patient safety through targeted and effective regulation, working actively and in partnership with others to ensure a high quality of patient experience and of osteopathic practice'.

This Communications and Engagement Strategy will serve to shape our relations with patients, the public, the osteopathic profession and anyone with an interest in our work. It is intended as a framework that guides how we listen, learn and react to the needs and concerns of stakeholders, how we influence behaviours to enhance the safety and quality of osteopathic practice, generate confidence and trust in osteopathic regulation, and target our resources to maximise efficiency, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.

In conjunction with annual Business Plans, this Communications and Engagement Strategy sets out the considerations and main activities that will support the delivery of the current GOsC Corporate Strategy. Its purpose is to ensure comprehensive and effective engagement with all who have an interest in our work and a role to play in helping us meet our statutory duties and informing what we do. Four high-level strategic objectives, with associated goals and processes for evaluating progress over time, are underpinned at the operational level by a communications action plan.

#### **Evidence informing this Strategy**

Evidence from research undertaken by the GOsC and partner organisations is the bedrock of our strategy and associated activities. We need to be confident we understand how others are affected by our work and we gauge accurately the understanding others have of our aims (and actions) and the relevance to them. By providing an opportunity always for feedback from stakeholders, we are able regularly to reassess the effectiveness of our work, and adjust our strategy to ensure the organisation maintains a good understanding of the sector, our aims remain relevant and fit for purpose, and we are alert and agile in the face of change or challenge.

Intelligence that has informed this Strategy arises from a range of sources, including:

- In 2015, a national survey<sup>2</sup> of public perceptions of the osteopathic profession, conducted for the GOsC by YouGov, increased our understanding of the influences on public confidence in health professionals, and identified the

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<sup>2</sup> [Public Perceptions Study – a report prepared for the General Osteopathic Council. YouGov, 2015](#)

information needs of patients and the public and factors that affect the therapeutic relationship.

- Independent researchers conducting a 2015 study<sup>3</sup> for the GOsC exploring the factors that influence and impede the effectiveness of osteopathic regulation, professionalism and compliance with standards, concluded:

*'Our research supports the work the GOsC is doing in reaching out, personally engaging and improving relations with the osteopathy profession. Our research suggests this is important in terms of staying in touch with osteopathic practice and the issues osteopaths are facing, demonstrating to osteopaths that the GOsC understands what they do and the challenges they face, and legitimating the GOsC and compliance with [the Osteopathic Practice Standards] within the osteopathy profession' (McGivern et al, p10).*

- Feedback arising from our 2015 public consultation on proposals for a revised system of continuing professional development for osteopaths<sup>4</sup> indicated that the proposed scheme was well-received but successful implementation will require work to support the development of peer networks and targeted learning resources, and close collaboration with our partner organisations.
- A census of the UK osteopathic profession, conducted in 2014 by the professional association, the Institute of Osteopathy, identified a need for more support for those new to practice and suggested that up to half the profession currently do not routinely engage with peers through local osteopathic groups.
- Feedback from the GOsC Public and Patient Involvement Group, and others, on a range of subjects and GOsC operations.
- Research and discourse in the wider regulatory field.

### **Political and regulatory influences**

Osteopathic regulation is shaped and subject to developments in the wider regulatory environment and our strategy both takes account of current thinking and is alive to the potential for considerable change in the healthcare regulatory landscape. Particularly relevant in this new strategy are:

- The evolving prospect of Government-driven regulatory reform, with its roots in the 2011 Government Command Paper, *Enabling Excellence*<sup>5</sup>, will over the forthcoming three years influence significantly our communications priorities and messages.

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<sup>3</sup> [Exploring and explaining the dynamics of osteopathic regulation, professionalism and compliance with standards in practice. McGivern et al, 2015](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Analysis of consultation data on a new scheme of CPD for osteopaths. Abi Masterson Consulting, Sept 2015](#)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Health Feb 2011 Command paper: [Enabling Excellence: Autonomy and Accountability for Healthcare Workers, Social Workers and Social Care Workers](#)

- Challenges posed by the Professional Standards Authority in their 2015 discussion paper, *Rethinking Regulation*<sup>6</sup>, have reinforced the GOsC's commitment to the effective reduction of risk by pro-actively identifying problem areas and underlying patterns of behaviour, and addressing this through early intervention, targeted action, and tailor-made solutions that prevent occurrence or recurrence.

Within a changing regulatory landscape, our focus is nevertheless to work with others to ensure patient safety and good quality care; our Communications and Engagement Strategy should help us to adjust our goals and activities as necessary in a changing environment.

### **GOsC principles and key drivers**

Our essential principles and intentions that underpin GOsC communications and engagement activities, include:

- *Commitment to partnership working* – Enhancing the quality of osteopathic care and ensuring patient safety is a function not just of the GOsC but also of osteopaths, educators and a range of other interested parties. We recognise and value partnerships between all those working to develop osteopathic education and practice. Mindful also of the range of health professionals involved in the patient journey, we will support and encourage inter-professional collaboration, where this leads to improvements in safety and quality.
- *Engagement, support and community* – It is our aim to develop a profession that actively and positively embraces activities that promote safe, high quality care. We will continue to apply innovative approaches that encourage engagement and produce tailored resources that support our registrants' professional development. Professional isolation can represent a risk to patient safety and we want to work closely with osteopaths and osteopathic organisations to develop and promote communities of practice that provide peer support and encourage shared learning.
- *Embracing diversity* – Recognising that every registrant has a vital role to play in driving up standards of care and (as far as possible) eliminating risk to patients, we expect to apply a range of approaches in an effort to reach and engage directly and meaningfully with all our registrants in all geographic locations and practice settings. We recognise also that the osteopathic profession is diverse in nature and practice and we would wish to respect and preserve this.
- *Public involvement* – Engaging the public in our work is essential to understanding and meeting needs, and ensuring patient safety and quality of care. The patient perspective should be the core around which we shape our work. While we recognise that for all health regulators it can be challenging to achieve the level of public involvement in our work that we would wish, we will maximise the opportunity for public involvement, ensuring that public opinion is

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<sup>6</sup> [Rethinking regulation. Professional Standards Authority, August 2015](#)

both at the heart of the GOsC's policy development and their needs and preferences are well understood by all who provide patient care.

- *Innovation and agility* – We aim to practise effective regulation: our communication and engagement strategies will be determined at the outset by clear outcomes, will seek to be innovative and agile, and will be targeted to address risk, promote development and drive up the quality of care. We will embrace emerging digital technologies and web-based engagement where this helps to extend our public reach, increase our accessibility, and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of our regulatory services.
- *Transparency and accountability* – As an organisation we want to be open about our processes and decisions, and ensure accountability is clear. We aim to offer information and services that are accessible, understandable and available in formats that meet the widest needs. In the process of forming policy, we make every effort to be inclusive, encouraging stakeholder involvement where and when this is most effective and applying the highest standards of consultation.

### **Our main stakeholders**

Our stakeholders can be defined as those bodies, groups or individuals that have an interest or concern in the work of the GOsC, and this represents a wide and diverse audience with varied needs:

- Members of the public, patients, patient representative groups
- Registrants: existing and prospective
- Osteopathic professional organisations
- Osteopathic education providers
- UK health regulators and the Professional Standards Authority
- Government departments, the Privy Council and Parliament
- Other healthcare professions
- GOsC Council, other non-executives and staff.

### **Strategic objectives, primary goals and key activities**

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy is constructed on four high level strategic objectives to be pursued over the life of the current GOsC Corporate Strategy (2016-19), with resources and timeframes factored into the annual Business Plans.

#### **Strategic Objective 1 – To promote continuous improvement in the quality of osteopathic healthcare and patient safety, through targeted and effective communications.**

##### **Goals:**

- To achieve high levels of awareness and engagement in the implementation of a new scheme of Continuing Professional Development for osteopaths.
- To support and promote the development and implementation of new osteopathic practice standards and supplementary guidance, and to achieve a high level of understanding, application and compliance in practice.
- To increase registrant awareness of the responsibilities and expectations of regulated health professionals, promoting professionalism and a culture of patient-centred care.

##### **Activities:**

- Programme of engagement with osteopaths, osteopathic representative organisations, local osteopathic groups, and education providers to promote and implement the new CPD scheme. We will address factors and circumstances recognised as significant, including the 'hard to reach' or professionally isolated practitioner, regional variations, remote and rural practice, sole and group practices, etc.
- Development of an interactive, web-based infrastructure to support the new CPD scheme, including the provision of guidelines and online learning resources that assist registrants to meet CPD requirements.
- Undertake a comprehensive call for evidence as part of a review of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*; conduct a public consultation on proposed new standards.
- Communications and engagement programme to launch and promote new osteopathic practice standards to the profession and the public.
- Support implementation of new *Osteopathic Practice Standards* and application in practice by providing learning resources via the osteopathic media and online.
- Continue to engage with professional indemnity insurance providers, the professional association and osteopathic research and education community to



annually review complaints/claims data; identify trends and areas for improvement within education and practice, and disseminate advice.

- Support profession-wide efforts to increase research activity and awareness, evidence-informed practice, and the collection of patient reported data, with a view to improving the quality of care and patient experience.
- Disseminate to registrants information and guidance on wider regulatory issues relevant to osteopathic practice and patient safety.
- Student-focused communications programme to assist training outcomes, embed understanding of regulated practice and professionalism, and support graduate transition into practice. Expand GOsC engagement with education providers to embrace the wider community of staff and teaching faculty.

### **Strategic Objective 2 – To work with the profession to minimise practitioner isolation and promote the development of the osteopathic profession.**

#### **Goals:**

- To promote the development of communities of practice that support professional development and minimise practitioner isolation.
- Devise communication and consultation strategies that are perceived by osteopaths and others as engaging, have relevance to daily practice, and encourage a breadth and depth of input and involvement.
- To promote cooperation between the GOsC, osteopathic stakeholder organisations, regional osteopathic groups and other professional networks, to progress the profession's development agenda where this enhances the quality of care.
- To support the health and wellbeing of clinicians in the interests of patient safety.

#### **Activities:**

- To work with the profession and others to foster networks and learning communities that afford practitioners peer support, mentoring and learning opportunities, and mitigate the risks posed by practitioner isolation.
- Actively promote the value of peer learning, peer review and practitioner reflection among registrants. Conduct periodic surveys to test attitudes and understand patterns of peer interaction.
- Provide tailored resources around the *Osteopathic Practice Standards* to support and promote learning in a variety of osteopathic settings, e.g. regional groups, group practices, online communities.

- Continue to provide high quality information to support registrants' engagement with the GOsC, including through publication of *the osteopath*, regular news e-bulletins and fitness to practise bulletins, and use of social media. Expand the reach and accessibility of GOsC engagement, exploring and applying innovative new technologies, and offering a variety of media and formats. Periodically survey opinion to understand preferences and identify improvements.
- Work with our partners to encourage awareness of and engagement in projects that support the development of the profession, where this raises safety and quality standards.
- Work with osteopathic and wider healthcare organisations to develop information and support that supports the health and wellbeing of clinicians in the interests of patient safety. Identify/monitor circumstances that can impact negatively on registrants' health (e.g. disciplinary proceedings) and develop strategies and collaborative initiatives to reduce risk.

**Strategic Objective 3 – To ensure the GOsC understands what is important to the public and to osteopathic patients and that regulatory developments and our communications respond to their needs and expectations.**

### Goals

- To identify and address knowledge gaps and concerns/expectations of patients and the public.
- To assess GOsC policy development and processes at the outset to ascertain their patient involvement requirements; increase level of our direct patient engagement.
- To promote among practitioners an enhanced appreciation of patient-centred care.

### Activities:

- Use a range of survey and feedback mechanisms to gather public and patient opinion to identify potential improvements to GOsC policy, services and information; implement improvements as required.
- Expand the opportunity and options for patients, the public and other interested parties to input into our work, increasing face-to-face and web-based engagement.
- Continue to seek input to our policy development and projects from our Patient Partnership Group, refreshing and promoting membership, and engagement opportunities.
- Strengthen partnerships with patient groups across the UK, including Healthwatch England and equivalent networks in Scotland, Wales and Northern

Ireland, to expand GOsC access to patients and increase awareness of osteopathy as a regulated practice.

- Collaborate with other health regulators to increase the quality and scope of our public engagement.
- Promote among registrants, education providers and other osteopathic stakeholder organisations the value of patient involvement in their own work and the GOsC's, including encouraging use of patient feedback to inform improvements to practice and training.

### **Strategic Objective 4 – To ensure stakeholders understand, value and have confidence in osteopathic regulation and in the GOsC.**

#### **Goals**

- To promote understanding of the GOsC, our Register and the standards of osteopathic practice among all our stakeholders.
- To provide high quality information about osteopathic standards of training and practice.
- To demonstrate high standards of customer service in all areas of GOsC operations.
- To influence regulatory policy and innovation at a UK and international level.

#### **Activities:**

- Communications campaign that promotes public awareness of the Register, what registration means, and the importance of checking the registration status of an osteopath; continue to promote within the osteopathic profession the use of the GOsC registration mark. Monitor levels of usage.
- Publicise information on GOsC actions and decisions, thereby demonstrating transparency and improving understanding of GOsC duties and function. Monitor press and social media to assess opinion.
- Review regularly GOsC online and print information to ensure currency and accuracy and that content meets the needs of our stakeholders. Include mechanisms for feedback to identify improvements; track and analyse website traffic to identify and develop enhancements to web content and presentation.
- Provide communications that are diverse, targeted and effective, embracing technological developments, including digital and social media options, to increase accessibility and reach. Monitor usage.
- Build and maintain effective relationships across the four countries with key stakeholder organisations responsible for care standards and delivery to increase knowledge and understanding of osteopathic regulation.

- Use evidence, best practice and innovation to enhance our customer services, applying staff feedback and training, and embedding user feedback mechanisms widely in GOsC processes.
- Participate in and contribute to UK and international professional and regulatory fora and regulatory policy development initiatives, sharing expertise and good practice and identifying opportunities for joint activity.

### Monitoring and evaluation

By its nature, this must be regarded as a 'live' strategy, flexible and responsive to an ever-changing external environment and evolving operational needs. As such, not only is our strategy to be kept under regular review, but at an operational level we shall want to embed in all our communication channels and engagement plans, mechanisms for taking regular soundings of stakeholder opinion, to gauge the effectiveness – and cost-effectiveness – of our interaction with others.

Some of these monitoring mechanisms are indicated in the activities described above, and include, for example, accessible and easy-to-use feedback facilities within all the key areas of our websites, encouraging visitors to tell us where information or online services could be improved.

We further monitor the use and reach of our digital media using measures such as Google Analytics, notably to understand how our websites are used and could be improved, and to track social media trends and conversations. GOsC mentions in social media – and in public and professional print media – provide indicators of attitudes and understanding of GOsC work.

We track the volume and nature of enquiries to the GOsC, to inform improvements to our information provision, and we monitor our performance against our published [Customer Service Standards](#) to assess levels of 'customer' satisfaction with GOsC services, and to identify and address weaknesses. Analysing feedback from those involved in our fitness to practise proceedings is also central to developing necessary public and registrant information and support.

Similarly, we routinely seek participant feedback on all engagement events – e.g. patient and registrant focus groups, osteopathic regional network meetings, webinars, workshops and seminars – to adjust content, timing, location, promotion and follow-up. Correspondingly, we monitor the volume of stakeholder participation in events, and level and quality of engagement in GOsC consultations.

Periodically, we invite feedback on our various means of communications, for example, *the osteopath* magazine and e-bulletin readership surveys, on our routine registrant communications (e.g. standard letters, registration renewal and application forms, CPD audit feedback, etc.), and on the support we offer, such as witness support information, or osteopath learning resources.

Key to this is the aim to generate a corporate culture that stakeholders readily recognise as accessible and welcoming of views and suggestions for improving the services we provide and the delivery of our statutory functions.

Alongside this, we are conscious of the importance of showing how and where we have used feedback to improve our operations.

### *Systematic evaluation*

Ensuring that our communications and engagement strategies and activities maintain a high level of quality and effectiveness, and remain relevant and live to a changing environment, we will incorporate within our plans means of testing our operations to assess improvement (or not) over time.

Over the life of this Strategy and the Corporate Strategy, we would expect to conduct a range of more systematic appraisals of the effectiveness of our work:

- *Survey of key interest organisations in our sector* — to assess confidence in the GOsC and our regulation of osteopathic training and practice, familiarity with our roles and responsibilities, quality of the support we offer, quality of communications and services, and views on our values.
- *Survey of GOsC registrants and osteopathy students* – to gauge levels of understanding of the responsibilities of healthcare professionals; confidence in the GOsC and our regulation of osteopathic training and practice; level of familiarity with the GOsC; awareness of our roles and responsibilities; quality of the information, services and support we provide/gaps; quality of our communications and engagement; views on our values; views on the focus of our work. Also to measure level of osteopaths' engagement with the profession; views on professional duties (e.g. raising concerns about colleagues' performance and patient safety), etc. We will specifically evaluate the reach and use of GOsC media, including the **o** zone website, print and e-communications, and social media preferences.
- *Reach and use of learning resources provided by the GOsC to support the new CPD scheme and Osteopathic Practice Standards* – survey to also understand patterns of registrant engagement, attitudes to professional and practice development, and additional support needs.
- *Public and patient perception and attitude surveys* – we have recently conducted a variety of assessments of public-patient perceptions and expectations, testing levels of awareness and confidence in osteopathic regulation, which we can look to supplement and retest through established mechanisms such as the online patient and public panel operated by the General Dental Council and Community Research.
- *The Professional Standards Authority annual Performance Review* – provides us with an objective and informed assessment of our performance against sector standards and identifies areas and opportunities for new and novel approaches.

### *Promoting an innovation culture*

The success and effectiveness of our communication and engagement is inevitably influenced by changing social behaviours, technological development and regulatory need. Particularly in this area of our operations, we need to be innovative and agile, and we should be prepared to try new approaches and not be afraid to fail, where 'experimenting' generates new ideas that improve outcomes. This, of course, with the caveat of proper and prudent financial and other resource management.

### *In conclusion*

This Communications and Engagement Strategy is underpinned by a detailed operational action plan, specifying the scope, resources, timeframes and success indicators relating to each specific activity, so that progress can be regularly monitored and planning adapted where necessary to improve effectiveness.

The GOsC Business Plan Monitoring Report, reviewed at every meeting of the GOsC Council, and the GOsC Risk Register, regularly reviewed by the Senior Management Team and the Council, ensures governance oversight and provides a public progress report. A GOsC Communications and Engagement Strategy – Update Report is made to Council each year and is publicly available.