



New Graduates' Preparedness for Practice

Interim Report
of a study commissioned by the
General Osteopathic Council

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Introduction

This study of the preparedness for practice of recent osteopathy graduates was commissioned by the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) and received ethical approval from Queen Mary University London (QMUL). Data collection commenced on 1st March 2011 and will continue into the autumn. The study will be complete by the end of 2011.

The study is examining perceptions of preparedness for practice among: final year osteopathy students in England; purposively selected staff at Osteopathic Education Institutions (OEIs); osteopaths who first registered with the GOsC in 2009 or 2010, termed 'new registrants'; finally, more experienced osteopaths (first registered before 2008) working in the same practices as the new registrants. The study is also examining literature concerning preparedness for practice, drawn from a range of healthcare professions. The study did not collect data from patients because work commissioned by GOsC during 2010 elicited patient perspectives.

Data from students and OEI staff have been collected through focus groups (see below), email questionnaires, and individual interviews: six OEIs contributed before the summer break and we currently expect two OEIs to contribute during the autumn term. New registrants and their colleagues were sent links to an on-line questionnaire (see details of these surveys below). A 10% representative sample of new registrants (50 in total) was invited to contribute follow-up telephone interviews. Only three new registrants volunteered and, to date, two interviews have been completed. A second call for volunteers is underway.

Discussions with final year osteopathy students

To date, six focus groups (~43 students) and two individual email interviews have been conducted with final year students from six OEI's. Key contacts at OEIs invited students to participate. The interviews have been transcribed and we are in the early stages of analysis, with key emergent themes developing through a Critical Discourse Analysis process. In interview, students were eloquent and critically constructive; choosing to critique and defend their institutions equally. Some provisional, early messages from discussions with students and OEI staff can be found below.

Interviews with OEI staff

Small group and individual telephone interviews were conducted with OEI faculty and clinic tutors (a total of 16 staff from six OEIs). We are in the early stages of analysing the interview transcripts. Group interviews were dependent on the availability of staff on the same day as the research fellow's visit to conduct a student focus group. Data analysis will not separate the views of clinic and non-clinic tutors, since group interviews were often mixed. Provisional, early messages include those in the next section.

Provisional, early messages from discussions with students and OEI staff

There is considerable duplication in themes arising from discussions with final year students and OEI staff. Therefore, we present a single list of provisional messages, derived from the data collection and analysis to date, and indicating when an item applies particularly to one group:

- At every OEI visited to date, we have become aware of a strength, or example of good practice that might be useful in other contexts.
- There was much discussion about ways to support learning about business and entrepreneurship: different OEIs have different provision, but there was widespread debate about identifying the (still-elusive) optimum timing, and achieving the correct focus and level for different years of the course.
- There was widespread support for developing mentorship arrangements for new registrants, and a sense of urgency for increasing the proportion of new registrants who receive mentorship. For some, this extended into support for the idea of a pre-registration year of supervised practice. However, a minority felt strongly that new graduates are deemed safe to practice, do not require further scrutiny and should be allowed to practice autonomously.
- Students' experiences in OEI clinics vary widely: for example, some clinics have a more diverse client base than others, supporting the development of a wider range of skills, and some OEIs involve students in all aspects of running the clinic, while elsewhere students focus on clinical consultations.
- There is a perception that experienced osteopaths are more willing to employ and/or mentor new registrants who trained at the same OEI as themselves. Such 'old school tie' behaviour can limit opportunities for some.
- It was reported that there has been a tradition of OEI's employing tutors who previously trained at that OEI. While this has some advantages, there are disadvantages too. Consequently, some OEIs are trying to diversify their staff.

Survey of new registrants

Five hundred and eighteen new registrants (2009 or 2010) were identified and sent a link to an on-line survey, which was open for four months from 18 April to 17 August. This yielded 127 responses (response rate 24.5%). Seven respondents (5.5%) reported themselves ineligible for the survey in relation to both the year of first registration and year of graduation (inclusion criterion: 2008-2010), while one questionnaire was blank. Thus eight were excluded from the analysis and 119 questionnaires were analysed.

The questionnaire addressed new registrants' confidence in their clinical knowledge, clinical skills, evidence-based practice, interpersonal and communication skills, business skills; their participation in continuing professional development (CPD) and experiences of mentorship. It also elicited demographic data and views on various aspects of undergraduate preparation for osteopathic practice. A selection of results from this survey will be presented for discussion during the meeting.

Survey of experienced osteopaths working at the same practices as the new registrants and mirror survey for others

Interrogation of the GOsC database identified 389 experienced osteopaths working at the same practice address as one or more of the new registrants. (Experienced was defined as registered in 2007 or an earlier year.) The experienced osteopaths were sent a link to an on-line survey on 10th August. This survey will remain open for responses until late autumn. It addresses similar areas to the New Registrants' Survey.

A separate web link to a mirror survey is available for any osteopath who has worked alongside new registrants and wishes to contribute to the study, but is not one of the experienced osteopaths identified as working at the same practice address as one of this study's new registrants.

<http://surveys.smd.qmul.ac.uk/osteopath>

Integration of empirical findings and learning from elsewhere

The discussions with students and OEI staff, individual interviews and questionnaire survey responses from new and experienced osteopaths are viewed as complementary data sets. In addition to noting the specific perceptions of particular stakeholder groups, we will search for threads that run across two or more of the complementary data sets; since one is likely to inform interpretation of the other, creating a more rounded or better nuanced understanding of prevalent themes. In parallel with the data collection and analysis, described above, we are reviewing the wider literatures on new entrants' preparedness for professional practice, ways of supporting inexperienced practitioners and ways of safeguarding patients and the profession's reputation. Messages from our empirical work and from the wider literatures will be integrated for the final study report.

Limitations of the study

Osteopathy graduates who did not register with the GOsC are excluded from the study.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to Alan Currie for extracting anonymous demographic data from the GOsC Register and completing the complex task of identifying potential study participants. This was time-consuming and required ingenuity to interrogate the Register in ways that could not be anticipated during its construction, but has enabled targeted invitations to participate. It will facilitate analyses to establish the extent to which study respondents have similar characteristics to the wider populations of new and experienced osteopaths.