



Policy Advisory Committee
18 October 2018
Assuring applicant qualifications

Classification	Public
Purpose	For discussion
Issue	<p>This paper seeks early input from the Policy Advisory Committee as the Executive considers mechanisms to enhance how GOSc is assured over the qualifications of applicants applying for registration from:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. UK qualified applicants2. Internationally qualified applicants.
Recommendation	To consider the content of the paper.
Financial and resourcing implications	None arising
Equality and diversity implications	None identified at this stage.
Communications implications	Depending on the policy direction of this paper, a consultation with relevant parties may be required.
Annexes	None
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Background

1. Ensuring the integrity of the statutory Register of Osteopaths is an essential component of public protection, with entry to the Register achieved in two ways:
 - a. Individuals who qualified in the UK with a Recognised Qualification
 - b. Individuals who qualified internationally and have successfully been through an assessment pathway to ensure equivalency with UK standards.
2. The Director of Registration is considering ways of enhancing the integrity of the statutory Register of Osteopaths and has identified the verification of qualifications as an area which could be further strengthened.
3. This paper seeks early input from the Policy Advisory Committee as the Executive explores mechanisms for being assured over the credentials of the qualification(s) of applicants wanting to join the Register.

Discussion

What is the issue?

4. There has been a significant increase in the number of bogus 'degree mills' which have seen the purchase of fake degrees become a multi-million pound industry. With a wide variety of institutions and organisations in different countries awarding qualifications and, as it becomes easier to replicate genuine qualifications with fraudulent information, it is becoming more difficult to identify genuine qualifications and it is now a specialist area.
5. The risk of registering someone with a qualification that is not genuine has increased and consequently, this paper is exploring ways of mitigating the risks arising. This can be applied to UK and international applicants.

UK graduates

6. Individuals who graduate with a UK Recognised Qualification (RQ) may make an application for registration with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC). The starting principle for the Registration team when considering a registration application is not to look behind the award of the RQ. However, it is suggested that GOsC should be assured that individuals joining a UK osteopathic course, who can obtain an RQ, have been sufficiently vetted.
7. The assurance that an Osteopathic Education Institution (OEI) might provide could be confirmation to the GOsC that the credentials of a qualification were verified through the use of the University and College Admission Service (UCAS) or through the use of primary source verification (PSV). Further information on PSV is provided later in the paper.

8. How the OEI determines whether to use UCAS or PSV would be a matter for the OEI based upon its own risk assessment of the applicants joining their course.

International applicants

9. International applicants need to go through a registration assessment pathway which currently depends on whether the individual is an EU/EEA qualified applicant or a Non-EU/EEA qualified applicant. This may change post-EU Exit.
10. Our current processes and procedures for checking qualifications from international applicants, involve sampling checks on qualifications using internet searches, liaison with competent authorities or liaison with institutions.
11. It is suggested that the Executive would be able to risk assess the applications received from international applicants and where it was not possible to verify the credentials of qualifications itself, would use a PSV service.

What is primary source verification (PSV)?

12. PSV is the background screening and checking of the credentials of qualifications held by an individual by an independent organisation. It either provides assurance that the qualifications an individual claims to hold are authentic or confirmation that the qualifications are not genuine.
13. Other regulators, such as the General Medical Council and the General Dental Council, employ an independent organisation to undertake PSV on their behalf, such as when receiving initial applications or when needing to verify information at a fitness to practise hearing.
14. PSV can be used for different purposes such as an individual wanting to join a specific course; an individual seeking employment or an individual applying for registration, and the approach can be tailored to the needs of the organisation requesting the check.
15. The cost of PSV can be paid for by the organisation requiring the check or it can be borne by the individual. The cost is typically c. £200-£250 per check.
16. For the purpose of this paper, there are two occasions where we might expect to see the benefits of PSV.

An individual wanting to join a UK osteopathic course	PSV employed by the OEI
An international applicant applying directly to join the Register	PSV employed by the GOsC

17. A paper outlining the concept of PSV was presented to the Council of Osteopathic Educational Institutions (COEI) in July 2018. There appeared to be a

broad sense of agreement that PSV could be beneficial as the issue was around the integrity of the applicant applying to join an osteopathic course. It was noted that UCAS may be able to flag up individuals who claim to have A-levels that they do not have. However, there are other circumstances in which individuals enrol with an osteopathic educational institution where the verification of A-levels by UCAS is not a relevant consideration.

18. It is suggested that there may be circumstances in which obtaining a PSV report about the validity of their qualifications of an international applicant may be helpful. However, the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) is asked to note that how this might operate and at what point in the registration process, have not been fully worked through.

Policy Advisory Committee input

19. The purpose of this paper is for Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to have early insight into the policy thinking and to offer comments/advice to the Executive.
20. No policy decisions are being taken at this meeting.

Recommendation: to consider the content of the paper.