



Policy and Education Committee

7 March 2024

Student Health and Disability Guidance update

Classification	Public
Purpose	For discussion
Issue	Plans to review and update: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guidance for Applicants and Students with a Disability or Health Condition• Students with a Disability or Health Condition – Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions
Recommendations	To consider the draft updated guidance documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annex A: Studying osteopathy with a disability or health conditions: guidance for applicants and students• Annex B: Students with a disability or health condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Providers And to provide feedback as set out in paragraph 14.
Financial and resourcing implications	The review of the guidance is undertaken in house. We have sought external expert equality diversity and inclusion advice which was costed at c £150.
Equality and diversity implications	The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that osteopathic educational institutions and students can have positive conversations about how to support students with a health condition or a disability to succeed as osteopathic graduates. We have sought expert advice from students and graduates with health conditions and disability with lived and learned experience and an equality expert. This has suggested that we develop the guidance in a different way to improve accessibility and we are acting on this. The consultation strategy will also focus on ensuring further expert input in due course.
Communications implications	A final draft for approval will be reported to Committee with a consultation strategy including a communications plan.



General
Osteopathic
Council

3

Annex

Annex A: Studying osteopathy with a disability or health conditions: guidance for applicants and students (draft)
Annex B: Students with a disability or health condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Providers (draft)

Author

Steven Bettles

Key messages

- This paper is presented as an update about engagement so far on the health and disability guidance and plans for further development.
- Members are asked to provide feedback on the approach to date and planned. Members may find it helpful to reflect on the questions outlined in paragraph 13.

Background

1. We publish guidance for students and education providers in relation to [health and disability issues](#). The Committee agreed plans to commence a review of this and other guidance (including Student Fitness to Practise Guidance) at its October 2022 meeting.
2. The plan originally was to commence the review of both the Student Fitness to Practise guidance and Health and Disability guidance in tandem. In fact, the emphasis became focused more on the Student Fitness to Practise Guidance which is now subject to consultation.
3. The Health and Disability guidance relates to a number of current strategies – for example, it supports osteopathic educational institutions and students in the implementation of Standards for Education and Training (through which equality diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues are threaded); it contributes to the development of the GOsC strategic plan with its emphasis on inclusivity, and it impacts on wider issues such as the general downturn in student recruitment by emphasising the accessibility of osteopathy.
4. This paper updates the Committee on current progress, and seeks feedback to help shape final consultation drafts to be considered at its June 2024 meeting.

Discussion

5. We sought feedback from students and educators in an initial survey in 2023 to gather insights around the current guidance, and how this might be enhanced. Feedback was limited (16) but raised helpful points about the language used, and how further reference might be made to mental health and well-being.
6. We sought initial feedback, also, from an EDI consultant. Key points arising from this included:
 - Case examples. There is a case for using “they” for many of the case studies as the pronoun for these case studies. Not just from a gender inclusive perspective but because the sex of the student is irrelevant and the use of the third person neutral pronoun makes sense in that context.
 - Language could be considered – perhaps “applicants and students with a disability, long-term health condition or neurodivergence” emphasises the breadth of experiences covered?

- The framing of the document within the social model of disability is positive.
 - The reason for the variation in terms from disabled people to people with disabilities is not clear. The document has already recognises that people are entitled to use the language that they prefer to describe themselves and their experiences so maybe stick with one? If “disabled people”, then the formulation “impairments, long-term health conditions and neurodivergence” can be helpful to reflect the language of the Equality Act and to describe the breadth of relevant experiences.
 -neurodivergent traits, sometimes with diagnoses such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and ADHD, may require specific reference, linked to what constitutes safe and effective practice and the relevance/eligibility for reasonable adjustments.
 - Suggest that this statement could appear in all documents: “The General Osteopathic Council is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, to ensure that the osteopathic profession reflects the society that it serves. We encourage anyone who has the potential to become independent osteopathic practitioners to consider a career in osteopathy, and this includes people with disabilities and long-term health conditions.”
7. We also reviewed guidance published by other regulators in this area, and the way disabled students and those with health conditions are supported – for example, the GMC [Guidance on supporting students with mental health conditions](#). The Office for Students now also publishes a range of [resources](#), and further resources are available from the organisation [TASO](#), funded by the Office for Students, which provide a student mental health hub. we have provided links to these in the guidance.
8. Since the publication of the current guidance in 2017, we have introduced specific Standards for Education and Training which include a range of standards across several themes relating to aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion.
9. Updated guidance has been drafted adapted to include the above comments, and is attached as:
- Annex A: Studying osteopathy with a disability or health conditions: guidance for applicants and students
 - Annex B: Students with a disability or health condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Providers
10. To gain further insight, we held a focus group in February 2024 with osteopathic students with a particular interest, insight or experience of health conditions and disabilities. We asked about their knowledge of the current guidance, how helpful and accessible they found it, and what could be enhanced. Interestingly, none of the seven students who took part in the focus group knew that the guidance existed. All but one had a health condition or neurodiversity that needed specific support from their institution, and were surprised that they were not made aware of the guidance.

11. In terms of the current guidance, they were thus looking at this for the first time. The consensus was that though the fact that it was available was positive, most found this quite hard to engage with, describing it as 'wordy' and 'overwhelming'. This was specifically from students who had been diagnosed with some form of neurodiversity, including ADHD and/or dyslexia, and who would therefore be very much the target audience.
12. Our reflection, then, is on how we balance the need for provision of sufficient information in each case (to students and to educators), with the need for it to be accessible, understandable and genuinely helpful.
13. We are exploring the possibility of an [easy read](#) version, and having the drafts reviewed from a [plain English](#) perspective to address some of these issues. We are also considering how we present, promote and support the use of the guidance ultimately with its specific target audiences. This might include, for example, separate resources – case studies and scenarios in different formats such as videos, stories from actual students or former students, or osteopaths practising and managing a neurodiversity or health condition effectively. In this way, the core guidance need not be overwhelmed with more and more information, but set out the key aspects and then supplement this with resources/case studies etc, which help to celebrate and exemplify good practice and success in this area, and which might be reviewed and updated more regularly than the guidance itself.
14. In the meantime, we are keen to seek feedback from the Committee on the included drafts in Annex A and B to further inform the review process. In particular:
 - Have we picked up all the key issues relevant in our context and in the health context? Is anything missing? What might be enhanced? Anything else?
 - Has the development of the updated guidance been consistent with our values of being collaborative, influential, respectful and evidence informed?
 - Is level of engagement and the detail of the update sufficient to enable members to be confident that the guidance is proceeding in the right direction and that future plans are appropriate?
 - Are there any improvements that can be suggested in line with our values and strategic aims of trust, innovation and inclusivity ahead of Council publishing the guidance?

Next steps

15. Our planned next steps are
 - to explore with the Plain English Campaign and Easy Read how to draw out the key aspects and to develop further consultation drafts based on this.
 - to develop a comprehensive implementation and awareness plan as part of the consultation.

Recommendations:

To consider the draft updated guidance documents:

- Studying osteopathy with a disability or health conditions: guidance for applicants and students
- Annex B: Students with a disability or health condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Providers

And to provide feedback as set out in paragraph 14.