

## Policy and Education Committee

10 October 2024

### Registrant and Stakeholder Perceptions Survey: next steps

<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Purpose</b>	For discussion
<b>Issue</b>	Publication of the Registration Survey and consideration of next steps in relation to the report's recommendations.
<b>Recommendation</b>	To consider the content of the report and provide feedback on next steps
<b>Financial and resourcing implications</b>	Activities are being undertaken within the existing budget envelopes.
<b>Diversity implications</b>	The report shows a diverse range of views in relation to perceptions of how GOsC could, should and does perform in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. There are qualitative comments in the report that suggest that the GOsC may not give sufficient focus to disabled or black registrants. There is acknowledgement that some osteopaths are fearful of declaring disability to the GOsC which fits with our own findings. Of the 6% of respondents who declared a disability in the report; a significant proportion reported either being neurodiverse (sometimes described as a difference rather than a disability) or having dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia. Consequently, we have incorporated a specific focus on the accessibility of our communications, recruiting a group of expert osteopaths to support us in this area. We will also be undertaking an equality impact assessment in relation to our actions to ensure that we have captured the findings fully as part of our assessment.
<b>Communications implications</b>	The Report was published on 1 October 2024 and there is a plan in place to promote the findings and our actions in response.
<b>Annex</b>	<a href="#">General Osteopathic Council: Perceptions Research (2024) by DJS</a>
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## **Key messages**

- We have published our Registrant and Perceptions Survey 2024 undertaken by DJS.
- Topline findings include: 64% of respondents have a negative perception of GOsC. The most common words associated with GOsC are 'necessary' and 'fear'. There are patchy levels of understanding and some clear misconceptions regarding our role; the most common misconception is that GOsC lobbies the government on behalf of osteopaths and this misunderstanding is significant as analysis shows that respondents with a better understanding of GOsC's core functions have significantly more positive perceptions.
- Actions to address the recommendations in the report have started with actions being implemented from launch. There is an action plan in place to make progress on the recommendations from the report in the short, medium and long term.
- The Committee is asked to consider and reflect on the recommendations from the research and next steps to inform the further development of the GOsC's action plan.

## **Background**

1. We commissioned an independent research company, DJS Research, to explore how osteopaths, students, educators and partner organisations perceive GOsC, including how we perform our role as regulator.
2. We wanted to know the extent to which the profession understands our role, and how they think we are performing as the regulator, to identify where we need to focus our resources, and where we need to make changes.
3. We put strengthening trust at the heart of our Strategy for 2024 to 2030. We wanted to be able to measure how much the profession trusts us now and their views of us, to help us improve and measure the impact of our ongoing work.
4. The research, carried out between January and June 2024, involved a survey for osteopaths and students, in-depth interviews with osteopaths, students and educators, and focus groups with partner organisations. The survey received 629 responses in total (from osteopaths and 11 responses from students), and 24 people took part in the interviews. In addition focus groups and in-depth interviews were carried out with key partner organisations and educators.

## **Discussion**

5. Overall, the findings showed:
  - Individuals with a clearer understanding of our role and remit tend to be more positive than those who have a lower level of understanding.

- The majority of respondents to the survey had negative perceptions of the GOsC (64%), around a quarter (24%) were neutral, and 11% were positive.
- 'Fear' and 'necessary' were the two most common words associated with GOsC.
- A third of those that responded to the survey (33%) said they have some trust in the GOsC or trust the GOsC completely; a fifth (19%) neither trust nor distrust the GOsC and almost half (46%) don't trust the GOsC at all or have little trust in the GOsC.
- There were common misconceptions among osteopaths, students and educators about our role. The most common belief was that GOsC lobbies the government on behalf of osteopaths (59%), followed by advocating or educating the public on the benefits of osteopathy (50%).
- Those with positive views of GOsC tended to have more direct experiences with the organisation, whereas those with negative views tended to be influenced more by the experiences of others in the profession.
- There is a general lack of awareness of some of the work GOsC is doing to support and engage with the profession, for example attending regional group events and visiting students during their education.

6. As a result of these findings, the report recommends that GOsC:

- Consider developing communication and education campaigns to improve understanding of the GOsC's core functions, addressing common misconceptions directly. This should include clear, accessible explanations of what the GOsC does and does not do.
- Continue and expand efforts to engage directly with osteopaths and students, such as attending regional meetings and visiting universities. Ensure these activities are well-publicised to increase awareness.
- Work to rebuild trust by being transparent about decision-making processes and the rationale behind regulatory actions. Highlight positive outcomes and case studies where possible.
- Review and adjust the tone of communications (eg insurance, registration, fitness to practise). Specifically in relation to Registration cases, to take into account cases which could involve genuine mistakes or extenuating circumstances where appropriate. In addition provide more information and clarity on process and timelines for the fitness to practise process which can be a very stressful time for osteopaths.
- Increase awareness of the [Independent Support Service](#) and other resources available to osteopaths during the fitness to practise process. Ensuring that osteopaths know about and can easily access these services may mitigate some of the fear associated with fitness to practise.

- Explain more clearly how decisions to remove osteopaths support the reputation of the osteopathic profession; consider providing additional resources to help osteopaths undergoing investigation to understand the process, where they are and any next steps.
7. These recommendations will inform the work we are doing in response to the findings, including short and longer term plans to help us build trust, reduce fear and tackle the misconceptions held about our role. In our response we are focused on being clear about what we can and cannot do, making sure our communications and guidance is clear, helpful and informative, and making sure those who want to contact us can do so quickly and easily.

## **Next steps**

8. One of our key messages is that we want osteopaths, students and educators to know that while our primary role is to protect patients, we want to support osteopaths to be able to provide high quality care, and to protect the reputation of the profession so that members of the public and patients can feel confident in seeking out osteopathic treatment.
9. We shared the findings with stakeholder organisations to get their feedback to inform our next steps and to seek their feedback and look for opportunities to collaborate. We have also written individually to each osteopath about the findings and our actions to improve. We have received some responses which relate to limited understanding of our role, our fitness to practise process and our finances and we will be responding to these individually and including that feedback and key messaging in our overarching action plan.
10. Work has already begun across the organisation to make changes in response to the research findings, including:
  - Reviewing and making improvements to the way our phone system operates, to make it easier for callers to reach the right person
  - Reviewing and updating information on our website about how to contact us
  - Making it clearer what our role is on all our channels and the type of queries we can answer or provide support with
  - Reviewing and updating some of our standard correspondence on issues such as registration renewal, to make sure we are doing our best to be supportive and informative when contacting osteopaths about the important actions they need to take
  - Increasing the ways that osteopaths and students can contact us by providing alternative methods for the profession to talk to us and ask us questions, for example: by video call or WhatsApp; by attending our new weekly Chat with GOsC online drop in sessions for osteopaths
11. We have an action plan which outlines actions that we can take in the short, medium and longer term in order to make progress in implementing the recommendations and we intend to report back on the actions that we take at

regular intervals.

12. We are interested in responses to the recommendations from all Committee members and will continue to report on progress as our action plan is rolled out.

**Recommendation:** To consider the content of the report and provide feedback on next steps