



General
Osteopathic
Council

Draft

**Guidance for applicants and students with a
disability or health impairment**

Consultation: 1 April-30 June 2016

Section 1: Osteopathic education and the Equality Act

1. The General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) regulates the practice of osteopathy in the United Kingdom. As a regulatory body we are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all applicants and students of osteopathy.

Who is this document for?

2. If you are considering a career in osteopathy and are disabled or have a long-term health condition, this guidance booklet will help you decide whether osteopathic education and training is right for you. For osteopathy students who have or develop a health condition or disability, this guidance is intended to highlight issues to be aware of and support measures available to you throughout your studies. Separate guidance is provided for osteopathic educational institutions: [*Students with a disability or health impairment: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions*¹](#).

What is covered in this guidance?

3. This guidance explains the nature of the work that osteopaths do, the education and training you will need to undertake to become an osteopath, and the help you can expect as an osteopathic student. You should read this guidance in conjunction with our guidance about student fitness to practise and professional behaviours².
4. Section 2 of this guidance describes the process of applying to join an osteopathic course and the action that osteopathic educational institutions will take when considering your application.
5. Section 3 describes the help and support you can expect during training and what happens after graduation.
6. Section 4 suggests other sources of relevant information.

Language

7. We understand that language around disability can be a sensitive subject. In this document we refer to 'disabled people' and 'disabled students', which terms have been informed by the social model of disability. This considers that barriers caused by attitudes in society can disable people, as well as environmental and organisational issues. We do, also, use the term 'people with a disability' or 'students with a disability' in some contexts. The definition of a disability as set out in the *Equality Act 2010* is described in paragraph 33.
8. Throughout this guidance, we refer to 'disabilities' or 'health conditions'. This acknowledges that not everyone considers themselves to be disabled, and some

¹ Available at: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/fitness-to-practise/oeis-disability-or-health-impairment-guidance/>

² Available at: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/publications/student-fitness-to-practise-guidance/>

health conditions are not classed as disabilities within the definition of the Equality Act. Where we refer to the legal protection which disabled people have by law, we use the words 'disabled' or 'disability'.

What does the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC) do?

9. As with all healthcare regulators, the overarching objective of the GOsC, in exercising its functions, is the protection of the public. This involves protecting, promoting and maintaining the health, safety and wellbeing of the public; the promotion and maintenance of public confidence in the profession of osteopathy; and promoting and maintaining proper professional standards and conduct for members of the profession³. We do this by:
 - Keeping the [Register](#) of all those permitted to practise osteopathy in the UK.
 - Working with the public and osteopathic profession to promote patient safety by:
 - Setting and monitoring the maintenance and development of [standards](#) of osteopathic training, practice and conduct
 - Assuring the quality of osteopathic education and ensuring that osteopaths undertake [continuing professional development](#)
 - Helping patients with any [concerns or complaints](#) about an osteopath, with the power to remove from the Register any osteopaths who are unfit to practise.
10. By law osteopaths must be registered with the GOsC in order to practise in the UK.
11. We are one of nine health professional regulators established by law to ensure the safety and wellbeing of patients and the general public⁴.
12. Patients expect that healthcare professionals will be competent to do their job, will treat patients properly and will behave ethically. It is the job of the GOsC to ensure that this happens and to take action if an osteopath's practice falls below our standards.

What is osteopathy?

13. Osteopathy is a manual form of diagnosis and treatment, and is utilised in the treatment of a wide range of disorders related to the body's structure, and the impact of this on an individual's health and wellbeing. It acknowledges, and works with, the relationship between body, mind and social perspectives

³ S3(1) *Osteopaths Act 1993*, as amended by the *Health and Social Care (Safety & Quality) Act 2015*

⁴ Information about all of the nine health professional regulators can be found at:
www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/publications/who-regulates-health-and-social-care-professionals-leaflet

influencing a person's health. The osteopathic approach to health and healing is underpinned by the concept of each human being as a dynamic functional unit, in which all parts and systems are interrelated, and which possesses self-regulatory and self-healing mechanisms.

What do osteopaths do?

14. Osteopaths consider each person as an individual. On a patient's first visit, the osteopath will spend time taking a detailed medical history, including information about their lifestyle and general health. The osteopath will carry out a physical examination (which may involve the patient undressing to their underwear). Patients are asked to carry out some basic movements in order for the osteopath to gauge their general mobility, as well as that of specific symptomatic areas. Specific examination of certain tissues and joints may be carried out to help inform diagnosis, as well as neurological and orthopaedic tests to gauge joint and nerve function.
15. Osteopaths use their hands to identify abnormalities in the structure and function of the body, and to assess areas of weakness, tenderness, restriction or strain. By this means, osteopaths make a working diagnosis and discuss with the patient the most appropriate treatment plan, estimating the likely number of sessions needed to treat their condition effectively.
16. Osteopaths use a wide range of manual techniques, including physical manipulation, stretching and massage to increase the mobility of joints and to relieve tension and restrictions within muscles and other tissues, to enhance the blood and nerve supply, and to encourage the body's own healing mechanisms. They may also provide advice and guidance on lifestyle, posture and exercise to aid recovery, promote health and prevent symptoms recurring. The osteopath's approach will depend on the nature of the individual patient's needs and preferences.
17. Initial treatments often last up to an hour (to allow for case history taking and a detailed examination), with subsequent treatments usually taking less time. Osteopaths also offer exercises and health advice that could help reduce the symptoms and improve health and quality of life.
18. Osteopaths' patients reflect all walks of society, including the young, older people, manual workers, office professionals, pregnant women, children and sports people. Patients seek treatment for a wide variety of conditions, including back pain, repetitive strain injury, changes to posture in pregnancy, postural problems caused by driving or work strain, the pain of arthritis and minor sports injuries.
19. Most patients self-refer to an osteopath for treatment. Although referral by a GP is not necessary, patients are encouraged to keep both their GP and osteopath fully informed, so that their medical records are current and complete and the patient receives the best possible care from both healthcare practitioners.

Osteopaths are skilled in diagnostic techniques and trained to identify when a patient needs to be referred to a GP.

20. There are more than 5,000 osteopaths registered with the General Osteopathic Council. The profession attracts almost equal numbers of men and women. Some osteopaths have already qualified in another health practice, such as medicine, nursing or physiotherapy.
21. Most osteopaths are self-employed and work in the private sector. Some work in multi-disciplinary environments within the NHS, or in occupational healthcare in public bodies and private companies. All UK osteopaths, wherever they work, must be registered with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC).

How can I become an osteopath?

22. In order to be registered to practise as an osteopath you will need to achieve a recognised qualification (RQ). That is a qualification that the GOsC has approved and is awarded by an osteopathic educational institution.
23. The GOsC monitors the standards of education and training provided by the osteopathic educational institution courses that we have recognised, through a process of annual reporting, and we also conduct full reviews on a regular basis, usually every three to five years. These are undertaken on our behalf by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Course reviews are conducted with reference to our published standards and the Quality Assurance Agency's [*Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*](#)⁵ and [*Guidance on Pre-Registration Osteopathic Education*](#)⁶.
24. Achieving a recognised qualification means that you are capable of practising, without supervision, to the standard expected in our [*Osteopathic Practice Standards*](#)⁷, and have met the outcomes set out in our *Guidance on Pre-Registration Osteopathic Education*.
25. The recognised qualification will entitle you to apply for registration. You will also be expected to provide evidence of good health and good character, and to have met our conditions regarding the registration fee and confirmation of professional indemnity insurance before you commence practice.
26. Our good health requirement means that you:

... must be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. It does not mean the absence of any disability or health condition. Many disabled people and

⁵ Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007, *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*, Gloucester, QAA, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-Osteopathy-15.pdf

⁶ www.osteopathy.org.uk/training-and-registration/becoming-an-osteopath/guidance-osteopathic-pre-registration-education

⁷ www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards

those with long-term health conditions are able to practise with or without adjustments to support their practice⁸.

If I have a disability, can I become an osteopath?

27. We are committed to the principles of equality and diversity and firmly believe that the profession and its patients benefit from having disabled practitioners in the profession. Disabled students and practitioners make a unique contribution to osteopathy, bringing direct experience of particular health conditions and impairments and ability to provide valuable insight. Some patients recognise and appreciate a particular sensibility and sensitivity, and identify closely with disabled practitioners. Osteopathy can accommodate people with a range of backgrounds and capabilities, including those with disabilities and health conditions. We do not have a list of the disabilities and health conditions that would prevent someone from becoming an osteopath because decisions should be made on an individual basis, taking full account of a person's ability to meet our standards and to practise safely. Indeed it would be against the law to discriminate against people on the grounds that they have a particular disability.
28. If we confirm that an individual meets all of our standards for registration as an osteopath and we put them on our Register, they are legally entitled to practise without restriction. This means that when individual osteopathic educational institutions consider an applicant's suitability, they have to be confident that the individual is likely to have the capacity and capability to meet all the demands of professional practice at the end of their programme of training. Once registered, osteopaths have a professional obligation to decide for themselves whether they continue to be fit to practise. Self-monitoring is an important part of being a registered health professional.
29. As a regulatory body we do not deal with matters of employment. Being on our Register does not guarantee that you will find employment as an osteopath, or that if you choose self-employment you will attract a sufficient number of patients to make a living. Taking account of your disability or health condition and its prognosis, you will need to decide whether osteopathy is a good career choice for you and whether you will be able to earn a living practising as an osteopath.

What rights does the *Equality Act 2010* give a disabled person?

30. The *Equality Act 2010* (the Act) protects students from discrimination or harassment on the basis of a 'protected characteristic'⁹, and also from victimisation. Disability is a protected characteristic.

⁸ GOsC *Guidance about Professional Behaviours and Fitness to Practise for Osteopathic Students*, available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/fitness-to-practise/student-fitness-to-practise-guidance-about-professional

⁹ Other protected characteristics that apply are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race, religion or belief (including lack of belief); sex; and sexual orientation.

31. Unlawful discrimination includes:

- direct discrimination
- indirect discrimination
- discrimination arising from disability
- failure to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people.

32. A person has a disability if they have a *physical or mental* impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities¹⁰. 'Long-term' means that the impairment has lasted or is likely to last 12 months or more.

33. An individual does not need to have a medical diagnosis of their impairment – the important factor is the effect of the impairment. Other factors may be relevant in determining whether a person is disabled under the terms of the Act. These are set out in Government guidance.¹¹

34. Certain medical conditions – cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis – are specifically identified in the Act as a disability, as is a severe disfigurement. Progressive conditions and those with fluctuating or recurring effects, including mental health conditions such as depression, are also included provided they meet the test of having a substantial and long-term negative effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. The Act also protects people who have had a disability in the past.

35. Further detail regarding the different types of discrimination can be found in [*Students with a disability of health impairment: Guidance for osteopathic educational institutions*](#)¹².

How does the Equality Act apply to the education and training of osteopathy students?

36. Osteopathic educational institutions are subject to the Equality Act (the Act) provisions that apply to further and higher education institutions¹³. They are also subject to the public sector equality duty¹⁴. This is a general duty which requires public bodies to take steps not only to eliminate unlawful discrimination, but also

¹⁰ This is the definition used in the *Equality Act 2010* available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpga_20100015_en.pdf, or in easy read format: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85012/easy-read.pdf

¹¹ See: Office for Disability Issues, May 2011, *Equality Act 2010 Guidance: Guidance on matters to be taken into account in determining questions relating to the definition of disability*, available at: <http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/docs/law/ea/ea-guide-2.pdf>

¹² Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/fitness-to-practise/oeis-disability-or-health-impairment-guidance

¹³ The Equality Act applies in England, Scotland and Wales, separate anti-discrimination law applies in Northern Ireland.

¹⁴ See the Equality and Human Rights Commission website: www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/public-sector-providers/public-sector-equality-duty

to actively promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people who share a particular protected characteristic and people who do not.

37. The Act prohibits osteopathic educational institutions from discriminating against, harassing or victimising applicants or students.
38. An applicant or a student who believes they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised by an education institution, can make a claim under the Act.
39. Educational institutions can decide how best to put in place their obligations under the Act, so institutions will use different approaches to achieve the same ends dependent on their size, and the nature of the institution.

Have there been any osteopathic students with disabilities or health conditions before?

40. Yes. There have been many students with disabilities and health conditions who have successfully completed their course and gone on to practise osteopathy. Students who have undertaken osteopathic education and training have included those with learning difficulties (such as dyslexia), sensory impairments (both visual and auditory), physical disabilities (such as impaired mobility), health conditions (such as cancer), a variety of long-term illnesses (including diabetes, epilepsy) and mental health conditions (including depression, generalised anxiety disorders and panic disorder).

Who should I talk to if I think I would like to be an osteopath?

41. Initially you should talk to as many people as possible – including family, friends and, if possible, osteopaths in your local area – about whether osteopathy would be a good career choice for you. This will help you to gain a range of opinions about the possible advantages and disadvantages of osteopathy as a career option for you.
42. You will probably also find it useful to read our [*Osteopathic Practice Standards*](#)¹⁵ and [*Guidance on Pre-registration Osteopathic Education*](#)¹⁶, so that you can start to assess for yourself whether osteopathy might be a career for you.
43. As well as talking to people you know, it is essential that you talk to people in osteopathic educational institutions. They have experience of helping students with a wide range of disabilities. You should contact training providers before you make a firm application to find out what the programme involves, what it is like to work as an osteopath, and to learn more about how other students have managed. Osteopathic educational institutions will be able to give you examples of the types of support that other students with disabilities or health conditions

¹⁵ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards

¹⁶ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/training-and-registration/becoming-an-osteopath/guidance-osteopathic-pre-registration-education

have received, and how they have adjusted to challenges, such as leaving home and having to establish new support networks.

44. You can be reassured that initial contact of this sort will not influence your application, should you decide to make one. The osteopathic educational institutions will not use this initial contact to assess you as a potential applicant, but will use the opportunity to help you think through the implications of undertaking osteopathic education and training and embarking on a career in osteopathy.
45. When you contact an osteopathic educational institution, ask about their equality policy, the support they provide for students with health conditions or disabilities, and whether you can talk to their disability or learning support service. This will give you a good indication of the institution's commitment to equality and of their experience of admitting and supporting disabled students.
46. A number of osteopathic educational institutions offer open days for prospective students. These provide an excellent opportunity to gain an insight into what osteopathy is and what osteopathic education and training involves. There will often be a chance for you to talk to students on the course and to observe or participate in lectures and practical sessions. This should help you better understand the physical and psychological demands of osteopathy. It will also help you to assess whether the level of support that will be available is likely to be sufficient for you.

Section 2: Applying for an osteopathic course

Which osteopathic educational institution should I apply to?

47. It is not possible for us to advise you on which osteopathic educational institution might best meet your needs. All of the courses that we have approved have met our standards and have been recognised as leading to the award of a recognised qualification. It is up to you to decide which training institution is likely to best meet your needs. You might wish to consider factors such as: the osteopathic educational institution's proximity to your family, friends and healthcare services, so that you can get their continued support; its size and location; the nature and philosophy of the course; whether the institution can offer or help you find suitable student accommodation; and the disability support services that would be available to you.
48. You might also want to think about whether in its marketing materials the institution appears to welcome applications from disabled people, and the help and support you received when you first made contact.

Should I disclose my disability on the application form?

49. It is in your interest to disclose your disability or health condition as early as possible in the applications process¹⁷, however you are not obliged to do this. We advise you to disclose this information because it gives an osteopathic educational institution the best chance of trying to meet your needs and of arranging support before the course starts. You can be reassured that if you do disclose this information, it is unlawful for an educational institution to discriminate against you because you have a disability.
50. If you apply to an osteopathic educational institution through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), you will be invited to indicate whether or not you have a disability, special need or medical condition (from a list of options), or to indicate that you do not want to give this information. If you disclose information about a disability or health impairment it will be held in confidence by the institution.
51. Osteopathic educational institutions should consider your disability, and any reasonable adjustments that can be made to help you meet the requirements of the course, separately from considering whether you have the knowledge, skill and attributes required for entry to the course.
52. Osteopathic educational institutions, like any other educational institution, have the right to set entry criteria and to conduct a selection process for entry to their programmes. This is because it is not in anybody's interest to admit a student – whether disabled or not – who does not have a good chance of completing the course.
53. Osteopathic educational institutions also have a duty of care to all the students they enrol. They do not want anyone who starts the programme to fail to

¹⁷ There is a useful guide available at: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/telling-people-you%E2%80%99re-disabled-clear-and-easy-guide-students

complete it, or to waste their time and money on a programme that they have little likelihood of completing.

54. Osteopathic educational institutions must also consider patient safety. Osteopathy is a form of vocational education: students develop their skills and knowledge through clinical practice. Educational institutions have to be sure that students have the capability to learn osteopathy without putting patients at risk.
55. Being open and trustworthy is an important element within the [*Osteopathic Practice Standards*](#) (OPS). Standard D10 of the OPS states that you must '*ensure that any problems with your own health do not affect your patients*'. It is important to develop this self-awareness at an early stage.
56. A student should understand that health conditions may affect their ability to study. Where students acknowledge this, and seek appropriate help and support, their health condition is far less likely to affect their progression.

How will my application be considered?

57. An osteopathic educational institution will assess all entry applications against the same entry criteria. By law all educational institutions are obliged to take reasonable steps and make adjustments to accommodate disabled students, but they are not required to vary any competence standard required for entry to their course. However, they must ensure that course entry criteria, and the way in which this is applied, does not discriminate (directly or indirectly) against disabled applicants. Entry criteria must be genuine and necessary requirements for the course.
58. Most osteopathic educational institutions interview applicants to assess their suitability for entry to osteopathy education and training. Before interviews take place, the institution should check with you (and all other applicants) whether you have any specific requirements to enable you to access and participate fully in the interview process.
59. Interviews will mainly focus on whether or not you have the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for osteopathic education and training. Generally, educational institutions will not consider your disability or health condition at this point, although the Equality Act does not prohibit such questions. It is likely that the course provider may ask questions concerning your requirement for reasonable adjustments or your ability to meet the competence standards of the course. However, you are free to discuss your disability at interview and use the opportunity to explore how this might affect your education and training experience.
60. Osteopathic educational institutions will base their assessment of your suitability for the course on the assumption that they are able to make the required reasonable adjustments. This ensures that your suitability is judged on your merits as an applicant, regardless of any disability or health condition you may have. Detailed assessment of what adjustments will be needed, and consideration of whether they can reasonably be put in place, occurs only after a decision has been made about your suitability for entry to the course.

What is meant by 'make reasonable adjustments'?

61. The *Equality Act 2010* (the Act) imposes a duty on educational institutions to make reasonable adjustments – that is, to take positive steps to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in the education and other benefits, facilities and services that are provided for other students.
62. This means that osteopathic educational institutions have to take reasonable steps to ensure that nothing they provide or do – including the physical features of their premises – puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage (i.e. it is more than minor or trivial). They are also obliged to provide auxiliary aids or services – such as special equipment, computer software, or extra assistance from staff – where, without them, disabled students would be put at a substantial disadvantage.
63. Osteopathic educational institutions are expected to plan ahead and to anticipate the requirements of people with different kinds of disability (for example, people whose vision or mobility is impaired), as well as to respond to the individual specific needs of disabled applicants and students. The requirement is to make adjustments that are reasonable. Various factors will determine whether an adjustment is reasonable, including:
 - whether the change is likely to be effective
 - its practicality
 - the cost
 - the organisation's resources and size
 - the availability of financial support.
64. Long-term mental health conditions are considered to be disabilities under the Act. Educational institutions, therefore, have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for students with long-term mental health conditions. Even in cases where a student's mental health is not covered by the Act, it would still be considered best practice to make reasonable adjustments.

Some examples of general adjustments made by osteopathic educational institutions:

- providing course information in alternative formats
- making adjustments to ensure that general and emergency access routes to and from buildings are accessible to people with restricted mobility
- ensuring that core facilities – such as toilets, common rooms, libraries and catering facilities – are well lit, properly signposted and easily accessed by disabled students
- reviewing and adjusting learning and assessment policies and practices to ensure that they do not inherently discriminate against disabled students
- ensuring that lecture notes and other learning resources are available in electronic format for use by, for example, visually impaired students and those with specific learning difficulties who use assistive computer software
- providing loop systems to assist students with hearing impairments
- allowing students time away from studies to attend support appointments
- facilitating time away from the course for treatment for more serious health conditions
- providing extra time in written exams
- ensuring that staff are well informed about their responsibilities to eliminate disability discrimination and to provide suitable adjustments and support.

Case example¹⁸

An applicant to an osteopathic educational institution has multiple sclerosis. Although she is generally well and her symptoms are relatively mild, she reports that she does become fatigued very quickly, particularly with prolonged concentration. She asks whether she can be allowed rest breaks during the day, if needed, in addition to the scheduled breaks, on the basis that she will catch up on content afterwards. She also asks if her assessments can be spread out over several days, where possible. The educational institution considers her health problems, and has an open conversation with the applicant regarding the physical nature of the course and the demands this will place on her. They discuss also the nature of osteopathic practice, and how she feels she will cope with the pressures of the teaching clinic. The applicant assures them that if she is allowed to pace herself appropriately, she feels that she would be able to cope with the course. On this basis, the educational institution offers her a place. She will be able to take breaks when she feels the need, and teaching staff are informed of this. She is appointed a personal tutor, with whom she can liaise regularly, and is able to catch up on any missed material by speaking to lecturers after each session. She is given extra time in assessments to allow for a brief break when needed, and is not scheduled more than one assessment on any one day. On this basis, she successfully progresses through Year 1 of the course.

Are there any disabilities that have prevented people training in osteopathy?

65. Osteopathy is a physically, intellectually and emotionally demanding profession. Some people may have disabilities which prevent them from acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills or from practising safely in accordance with our standards, but there are no disabilities or health conditions that automatically preclude an individual from training to be an osteopath. Each applicant is considered on an individual basis.
66. When considering your application the osteopathic educational institution (OEI) will take into account their primary aim: providing a programme of education that enables students to develop into safe and effective osteopaths able to work autonomously and meet the requirements of the [Osteopathic Practice Standards](#)¹⁹.
67. You should recognise that there will be instances when an osteopathic educational institution concludes that reasonable adjustments will be insufficient to enable an applicant to demonstrate achievement of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*, the expectations of the [Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy](#)²⁰ or of the outcomes required of graduates at entry into the profession, as set out in the [Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration](#)

¹⁸ Case examples are used throughout this document to illustrate how the guidance might be applied in practice. These are fictional examples, and are not based on actual cases, individuals or osteopathic educational institutions.

¹⁹ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards

²⁰ Available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/SBS-Osteopathy-15.pdf

[Education](#)²¹. Some of these outcomes are shown, for illustration purposes, in the box below, with an indication of what an educational institution will need to consider in each case.

Graduate outcomes from Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-registration Education

(selected examples only – see Guidance for full outcomes)

- Perform an accurate and appropriate examination, including relevant clinical testing, observation, palpation and motion analysis to elicit all relevant physical, mental, and emotional signs.
- Undertake an osteopathic evaluation adequate to form the basis of a treatment and management plan, including an analysis of the aetiology and any predisposing or maintaining factors, in partnership with the patient, agree and use the most effective combination of care tailored to the expectations of the individual patient.
- Implement the treatment plan skilfully and appropriately.

Osteopathic educational institutions will consider an applicant's abilities to undertake an effective evaluation and assessment, and to implement a treatment plan using an appropriate range of osteopathic techniques.

- Work in partnership with patients in an open and transparent manner, elicit and respect their perspective/views on their own treatment and treat patients as individuals.
- Communicate information effectively. This should be demonstrated, for example, by:
 - providing space for the patient to talk and the graduate to listen
 - demonstrating high quality interpersonal skills with patients and colleagues
 - demonstrating written and verbal communication skills to foster collaborative care
 - communicating sensitive information to patients, carers or relatives effectively and compassionately, providing support where appropriate
 - recognising situations which might lead to complaint or dissatisfaction and managing situations where patients' expectations are not being met
 - disclosing and apologising for things that have gone wrong, taking steps, in partnership with the patient, to minimise impact
 - encouraging and assisting patients to make decisions about their care.

Osteopathic educational institutions will consider an applicant's communication skills

²¹ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/training/guidance-for-osteopathic-pre-registration-education

- Recognise that fatigue and health problems in healthcare workers (including themselves) can compromise patient care and take action including seeking guidance from others, where appropriate, to reduce this risk.

Osteopathic educational institutions will consider an applicant's self-awareness regarding their own health issues.

How can I get the help I need?

68. Osteopathic educational institutions will have a support service for students with health conditions or disabilities, either within the institution itself or in its associated university. This service should be able to provide you with any advice and help during your course.
69. You may be entitled to receive financial support through the [Disabled Students Allowance](#)²², but you will need to have your eligibility confirmed. Your osteopathic educational institution will be able to advise you how to apply for this and about other potential financial support. There are also a number of charities that provide advice and support for students with different forms of disability and health conditions. We have listed some of these in Section 4, but you might also find it worthwhile to check out other organisations that you are already aware of, or to look at the [Direct Gov website](#)²³, to find help and support for your specific needs.

What if I think I have been treated unfairly during the application process?

70. If you have concerns that your disability or health condition has adversely affected how the educational institution has assessed your application, and you have made an honest self-assessment of your potential to meet the outcomes set out in the [Guidance for Pre-Registration Osteopathic Education](#)²⁴ and the [Osteopathic Practice Standards](#)²⁵, then you should contact the education provider and make a complaint through their complaints procedure. If you are not satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with properly, you may wish to contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (further details can be found in Section 4).

²² Available at: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/overview

²³ There are a range of resources at: www.gov.uk/browse/education

²⁴ Available at: hwww.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/training/guidance-for-osteopathic-pre-registration-education

²⁵ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards

Section 3: During the programme

If I get a place, will I be supported during my osteopathy degree programme?

71. As soon as you are offered a place, the osteopathic educational institution will want to work with you to agree the reasonable adjustments needed to support you. A member of staff will ask you for your views on the adjustments that you think would help you. The educational institution will recognise that you are most likely to know what has helped in the past and be able to offer suggestions about the necessary adjustments.
72. In some instances you might need to be assessed by an expert (for example an occupational health advisor or an educational psychologist) to ascertain what type and level of assistance will be required, or to provide formal confirmation of a specific learning difficulty. This might also be necessary if you are applying for financial help.
73. Occasionally there may be circumstances when, after due consideration of your disability or health condition and your specific needs, the course provider concludes that the adjustments required for you to undertake the course are not reasonable. The educational institution will explain their decision to you and with you explore possible alternative courses and career choices that you might wish to consider.

What reasonable adjustments can be made to help me complete the programme?

74. Osteopathic educational institutions will endeavour to put in place all of the reasonable adjustments that you need to ensure that you are not substantially disadvantaged in the learning, teaching and assessment of the course. They cannot change the competence standard (that is the learning outcomes that you need to achieve at the end of the course) as these relate to the requirements that you have to meet to register and practise as an osteopath.
75. It is important that adjustments to help you do not have a significant adverse impact on others. For example, the Equality Act does not override health and safety legislation, so neither you nor anyone else in the educational institution should be exposed to additional risks to their health or safety as a result of an adjustment.

Osteopathy students with disabilities have benefitted from a wide range of adjustments made by training providers, examples include:

- adjustments to the *physical environment*, both internally and externally to improve access to and the use of facilities, and to features such as lighting and sound insulation.
- adjustments to *teaching and learning*, including the provision of information in a variety of visual, audio and electronic formats together with the associated assistive technologies.
- *human assistance*, in the form of coaching and mentoring, additional tutorial support, and specific assistance with particular tasks, such as proof-reading assignments.
- *making allowances*, for example by extending deadlines, permitting absences, providing breaks in teaching sessions, or by relaxing regulations (e.g. to allow a student to carry, store on site and administer necessary medication).
- by providing *equipment*, for example to support computer assisted learning, voice recognition software and screen-readers, and in the form of laptops and handheld devices for note-taking.
- by facilitating access to *resources*, for example for the purchase of textbooks to use at home to help combat the fatigue associated with frequent trips to the library, and for the use of taxis after specific healthcare treatments.
- to *examinations*, for example in the design and presentation of exam papers, by providing extra time and allowing rest breaks, removing penalties for poor spelling, grammar and punctuation or allowing computers with spell-checkers, arranging for separate rooms and invigilation, and permitting the use of a reader or scribe.
- to *practical assessments*, by allowing extra practice sessions, more time for the student to familiarise themselves with the setting or to interview, assess and record patient information, or to use a recording device for subsequent transcription, by permitting adjustments to the physical arrangement and features of the examination and treatment area – such as additional space or special lighting – and allowing the use of aids to facilitate manipulations.
- providing *additional support*, for example in the form of one-to-one tutorials or extra clinic instruction, or by teaching special study skills and learning techniques, identifying a student 'buddy', or offering on-going mentorship or course-long support from a personal tutor, student counsellor or disability officer.

76. Some adjustments (examples in the box above) have become standard practice for education providers and can be put in place quickly, especially for students who have a well-understood disability and where the adjustments are known to provide straightforward and immediate benefit. Other adjustments may take longer to work out and implement because they need to be designed uniquely for a particular student.
77. The reasonable adjustments that are needed by some students will vary over time because their disability or health condition changes. If you find this happens to you, you should contact the relevant member of staff and discuss the changes with them.

Case example

A student undergoes a routine test for dyslexia in year 1, which is offered to all students. This reveals that he does have dyslexia, something he was unaware of until now but accounts for some of the challenges he has faced during his earlier education. The student is referred to the student support team, who draw up a learning support plan. The student is offered extra time in assessments, and, because he finds it easier to write with a laptop, can use a computer in written assessments.

Will I need to change the way I manage my disability?

78. You will need to think about how you have managed your disability or health impairment in your home environment and how things are likely to change as an osteopathic student. Consider your existing support network, such as the family and friends who have helped you live with your disability, and the extent to which they will in future be available and on hand to provide support. If you intend moving away to a new area to undertake your studies, you will need to recognise that it will take time to develop a new support network.
79. Some disabled students and those with health conditions have remarked that in addition to the challenges that all students encounter when starting osteopathic training, they have had to make even greater effort to accommodate tiring academic and social schedules, to establish new relationships and peer support networks, and to find an appropriate balance between the demands of study, a new social life and their continuing health and wellbeing.

How does this relate to student fitness to practise?

80. 'Fitness to practise' is a term used in healthcare which relates to someone having the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice safely in accordance with prescribed standards. There are expectations of students in this regard as well. You should behave as a responsible professional throughout your training, whether or not you are disabled. You can read more about this in our *Student Fitness to Practise guidance*. However there may be occasions when as a student with a disability or health condition your fitness to practise is called into question, *because of* the disability or health condition.

81. Osteopathic educational institutions are likely to be concerned if you show a lack of insight into the nature or impact of your disability, particularly if this affects patient care. An example would be a student whose insight was intermittently impaired because they failed to take maintenance medication as prescribed.

Case example

A mature student performs well in Year 1 of an osteopathy programme, but in the second year becomes withdrawn and uncommunicative, and his attendance at lectures starts to fall off. The situation is reported by teaching staff to the student welfare officer, who arranges a meeting with the student. The student reports that he is feeling stressed and is struggling to cope with part-time work, family life and his studies. Under the osteopathic educational institution's Fitness to Study policy, the student welfare officer and a personal tutor meet with the student to help him find ways of better planning his studies, and the multiple demands on him. It is agreed that they will meet with the student regularly to monitor progress. Two months later, the student's behaviour has worsened and become more erratic. He is reported for speaking in an aggressive manner with a patient in the teaching clinic. The welfare officer refers him to an occupational health doctor for an assessment. The doctor determines that the student is suffering from bipolar disorder, and advises that he needs to be placed on appropriate medication immediately. After an initial improvement, the student's behaviour again worsens, and in a meeting with the welfare officer, he admits that he has stopped taking his medication. He shows no insight into his condition, or on the affect of his behaviour on his colleagues and patients. He is suspended from the course, and a fitness to practise investigation is instigated.

82. If an osteopathic educational institution has concerns about how you are managing your condition, they will raise the concern with you and discuss what can be done to remedy the problem. If, despite adjustments and support, you still do not manage your condition effectively and you might put patients at risk, the question will arise as to your fitness to practise, which may lead to a formal fitness to practise investigation and could result in your exclusion from the course.
83. Osteopathic educational institutions should have processes in place to detect behavioural issues which might call into question a student's ability to practice safely as a student osteopath. These might include:
- Poor attendance at lectures
 - Late submission of coursework
 - Lack of engagement with the course
 - Aggressive behaviour
 - Poor communication with staff and/or patients.

84. Collectively, these might be considered to be fitness to practise concerns, but they may also be indicators that the student is struggling generally, or has a health condition that is affecting their study. Monitoring processes can therefore be used as a way of identifying the need for action and support.
85. In exceptional cases, a student's health may make it impossible for them to complete the course, and meet the expectations of the [*Osteopathic Practice Standards*](#). In such circumstances, the osteopathic educational institution should be open with the student and try to come to a mutual decision as to the best course of action. The osteopathic educational institution should offer support to the student in finding another course of study or career, where possible.

Fitness to study

86. Fitness to study policies and procedures are widely used in higher education institutions. They assist in the assessment of risks, and the taking of action in circumstances where a student's health, behaviour, or other circumstances, give rise to concern. Such concerns may be regarding the student's ability to take part in their studies, or that this might represent a risk to themselves or others.
87. Fitness to study procedures usually comprise several stages, with early intervention designed to identify and understand the issue and offer appropriate support. If the issues leading to the concerns continue, the next stage is likely to involve a more proactive and formal process to assess the student's situation, and decide how this might best be managed.
88. In osteopathic educational institutions, there is likely to be a crossover between fitness to study and fitness to practise procedures, with a failure of early intervention under a fitness to study process, being likely to lead to a fitness to practise investigation.

Case example

A student suffers from depression and anxiety issues, but this is generally well managed with a combination of antidepressant medication and counselling. She also finds that regular exercise helps alleviate her symptoms. In year 2 of the course, she experiences a family bereavement which intensifies her anxiety and depression, and she struggles to cope with the demands of her studies. Her GP changes her medication, which initially seems to make things worse. She is reluctant to take time away from her studies, as she feels that this will also make things worse. Her educational institution agrees that she can continue with her studies, but that she can come in late each morning, if she needs to, and take time out of lectures if feeling an increase in her anxiety. The institution spaces out her assessment schedule, so that she can take some of her exams later in the summer. These adjustments help her to manage this challenging period, and she successfully progresses to Year 3.

What happens if a disability or health condition starts or comes to light after I start the course?

89. It is possible that you may not be aware that you have a health problem because you have found ways to manage it, or you assume that everyone has the same problems. For example, during induction some osteopathic educational institutions have uncovered undetected cases of dyslexia – a specific form of learning difficulty – and been able to put in place adjustments to help these individuals manage their difficulties through the remainder of the course, even though the students did not seek or expect this when they applied.
90. Some students become ill during their course, suffer an accident that affects their abilities, or find that the medication they have been using needs to be changed. Educational institutions are usually very sympathetic to such changes and recognise that they can be difficult for students to manage. It is essential that you are open and honest and that you explain the difficulties you are experiencing. Reasonable adjustments can be altered during a course or be put in place later if your needs change. As at the start of the programme, the earlier you are able to tell your institution about any changes the better, because it means there is more time to work with you to prevent any problems escalating.
91. Mental health issues are common, with estimates that some 25% of the population will be affected over the course of a year²⁶. Depression and general anxiety are the most common mental disorder to affect people in the UK, and may be influenced by the stresses of studying, living away from home, and coping with new situations and challenges. Educational institutions will be experienced in supporting students with a range of mental health issues and, as with any other health condition, it is advisable to let an appropriate person in the institution know and to seek support at the earliest opportunity.
92. Educational institutions will encourage you to register with a local GP. This will ensure that you are able to receive appropriate and objective medical support and advice in your new local area. When ill health occurs during your studies, usually the most appropriate action will be for the educational institution to refer you to your GP, who will be able to refer you on for more specialist treatment, should this be necessary.

If I pass my degree programme, will I be registered as an osteopath by the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC)?

93. If you are awarded a recognised qualification (RQ) it means the osteopathic educational institution has judged you capable of practising independently to the required standards set out in the *[Osteopathic Practice Standards](#)*²⁷. Once you are on the GOsC Register of osteopaths, you will be required to practise in accordance with our published standards of competence and conduct.

²⁶ See The Mental Health Foundation website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics

²⁷ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards

94. A RQ will normally lead to registration, provided the GOSC is satisfied that you are:

- In good health – that is you are capable of safe and effective practice without supervision, whether or not you have a disability or health condition. On first registration we require all prospective registrants to provide a health reference from a doctor who has access to your medical records of the past four years. If you are unable to obtain a health reference from a doctor, you should seek advice from the GOSC. In the case of mental health conditions, the GOSC will only be concerned where an osteopath's mental health may put patients at risk. Most mental health conditions will not represent a risk to patients, provided the osteopath understands their own condition and this is well managed.
- Of good character – that is you are honest and trustworthy. Good character is based on a person's conduct, behaviour and attitudes. We take account of any convictions and cautions that are not considered compatible with professional registration and that might bring the profession into disrepute. We require a character reference from a professional person (for example an accountant, teacher, dentist or similar) who has known you for four years (and is not a relative) on first registration;
- Fit to practise – that is, you have the skills, knowledge, good health and good character to do your job safely and effectively. Your fitness to practise as a student will be assessed throughout your pre-registration programme by the osteopathic educational institution. We consider it to have been judged satisfactory if you are awarded a recognised qualification.

What happens once I have qualified?

95. Registration confers unrestricted practice rights. If you are disabled or have a health condition, we do not hold this information on our Register, nor do we place any restrictions on the manner in which you practise osteopathy.

96. When you become a GOSC registrant, you commit to practising in accordance with the standards set out in the [*Osteopathic Practice Standards*](#)²⁸. You will be personally responsible for maintaining professional standards of practice. This includes ensuring that any problems with your own health do not affect your patients.

97. If your condition worsens or you develop a health impairment or disability when you are on the Register, it is your responsibility to make any necessary changes to the way you work. This might include, for example, working in a group practice where colleagues can provide support or substitution, restricting your practice to a more limited approach, or paying for specific forms of support (such as signing or administrative support) to help you maintain high standards of patient care. The majority of osteopaths are self-employed, but if you are employed, your employer has a duty to make reasonable adjustments if they are aware of your disability.

²⁸ Available at: www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/osteopathic-practice-standards/osteopathic-practice-standards/

98. Deciding whether you are – and remain – fit to practise and are able to continue to ensure the safety of patients and the public is a core professional responsibility and a matter for you to determine, exactly as it is for every registrant.
99. Once you are registered, you will be expected to undertake continuing professional development (CPD), and to compile sufficient evidence to demonstrate your compliance with our CPD requirements. *Continuing Professional Development Guidelines* are available on the GOsC website at: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/standards/continuing-professional-development/>

Will I be able to earn a living as an osteopath?

100. Our responsibility is public protection. We cannot say whether you – or any other registrant – will be able to earn a living as an osteopath. Every registrant needs to assess for themselves their fitness to practise and their ability to earn a living from osteopathy.

Section 4: Getting more information and support

Sources of further information and guidance:

Action on Hearing Loss

(Action on Hearing Loss is the trading name of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID))

19-23 Featherstone Street, London, EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 0808 808 0123

Text phone: 0808 808 0123

informationline@hearingloss.org.uk

<https://www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/default.aspx>

British Dyslexia Association

Unit 8 Bracknell Beeches, Old Bracknell Lane, Bracknell, RG12 7BW

Tel: 0333 4054555

National Helpline: 0333 4054567

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Directgov

For information about the Disabled Student Allowance:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining/HigherEducation/DG_10034898

Disability Rights UK

A useful guide for students regarding disclosing their disability is available at:

www.disabilityrightsuk.org/telling-people-you%E2%80%99re-disabled-clear-and-easy-guide-students

Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has a statutory remit to promote and monitor human rights and to protect, enforce and promote equality across the protected characteristics. It can be accessed at: www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Equality Advisory Support Service

The Helpline advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, across England, Scotland and Wales.

Advice helpline: 0808 8000082

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/home

General Osteopathic Council

176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU

Tel: 020 7357 6655

Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk

www.osteopathy.org.uk

Government Equalities Office

The Government Equalities Office (located in the Home Office) has responsibility across government for equality strategy and legislation. It can be accessed at:

homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities

Mind

15-19 Broadway, Stratford, London, E15 4BQ

Tel: 020 8519 2122

Email: contact@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

Mind Cymru

3rd Floor, Quebec House, Castlebridge, 5-19 Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF11 9AB

Tel: 029 2039 5123

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

The OIA is an independent body, set up to deal with student complaints. Free to students, the OIA deals with complaints against higher education providers in England and Wales.

Second Floor, Abbey Gate, 57-75 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 3AB

<http://oiahe.org.uk>

Royal National Institute of Blind People

105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999.

www.rnib.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

Universities UK

Publishes *The Student Wellbeing in Higher Education Good Practice Guide*, available at: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/StudentMentalHealthGuidance.aspx#.VhPncflVhHw

Legislation

The *Equality Act 2010* can be accessed at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

Explanatory notes to the *Equality Act 2010* can be accessed at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/notes/contents

The *Osteopaths Act 1993* can be accessed at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/21/contents