



Access and Participation Policy 2025

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Introduction

The College of Osteopaths (CoO) has been active in the training of osteopaths since 1948. It is the only college to provide a programme delivered simultaneously in the Midlands and in the Southeast. This allows students to utilise both locations throughout their course. Course flexibility is further increased by the inclusion of an element of blended learning, virtual clinics and clinic location choice throughout the 4.5 years of study. All factors designed to cater for the mature learner, minimising travel, and increasing attendance options on this professional training programme.

The College is currently the only provider delivering a programme that addresses access to osteopathic training for those in the Midlands and the North of England and is intentionally a small institution, structured to cater for a maximum of 200 learners spread across both campuses.

The College is historically committed to the concept of widening participation and the undergraduate programme of study, features contact time that is modified across the various elements of the programme, to meet this. Examples include alternate weekend attendance for theoretical teaching and practical sessions, clinical training hours bookable over weekdays and Saturdays within a framework that allows an element of student choice. Further flexibility is added through delivery that includes elements of face-to-face and online learning, alongside virtual and simulated clinical scenarios.

The College aims to promote life-long professional enhancement opportunities in osteopathy. The dynamic four and a half-year Bachelor of Osteopathy with Honours programme (BOst) provides the foundation for this. It is anticipated that future provision will lead to postgraduate certificate, diploma and master's inter-professional healthcare programmes, with individual modules available to enhance the College's portfolio of short courses for professional development (CPD). Through its teaching clinics, the College offers osteopathic healthcare to the local and wider community, delivering between 4,000 and 5,000 osteopathic appointments annually.

The College is committed by its mission and values, to improve training access, and enable all learners, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds to be successful in higher education. As access to osteopathy for the public is still rarely or inconsistently available on the NHS, there are still real challenges involved in improving performance in terms of this access agenda. Although the latter is changing and osteopaths are increasingly being employed by the NHS, these challenges to improving performance still exist.

The College offers a programme that through design and flexibility options allows students a significant degree of attendance choices particularly when it comes to essential clinical attendance. Also due to the location of clinics a choice of attendance in the Midlands or in the Southeast. Weekend hands-on, and online teaching at weekends, add to this broader flexibility.

The College aims to widen access to osteopathy to under-represented groups and address the lack of study location choice, for those living in the Midlands or further north, in addition to supporting attainment and progression into employment or further study for all our students.

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Our students and areas to address

Data collated about the College's specialist target market, indicates that the student body is mainly compiled of mature learners from a range of backgrounds, many entering the programme with non-traditional qualifications and /or aiming to upskill and change careers.

Statistically, mature learners are typically more likely when compared to their younger counterparts, to have characteristics associated with those under-representation in higher education. These include undiagnosed special educational needs, family or caring responsibilities, and being returners to learning. Recruitment to the programme is supported by the modified contact and flexible delivery approach described earlier, which broadens opportunities for students who need to continue working full-time. Being able to study in this way plays a significant role in improving access for students who face these inequalities.

The student body in 2024-25, included a small percentage from the most deprived backgrounds (as per the Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD - Quintile 1). Osteopathy is historically less well known when compared to other allied health professions and does not attract comparative funding and grants as those that are part of the NHS. As osteopathy is still rarely offered as an NHS option, training with a view to entering the profession, remains a challenge in terms of attracting students from areas where the service is little known and costly in terms of training. These are the areas that the College aims to target to redress equality of opportunity over the coming years.

Since the last Access and Participation Statement, there has been a change in the categories used to describe ethnicity. This has made it more difficult to accurately gauge changes in the recruitment of ethnic minority populations in the College. Recent college data from 2024-25 indicates 4% of the population are reported as being from ethnic minority groups. The remaining 86% as English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish, British or White, with 8% unknown and 2% as other. The data recorded also reported 27% of students with either a physical and or a learning disability.

As a small institution there is a strong supportive interface between tutors, Year Leads and students. Our aim is to continue current good practice and further develop the student support for our learners. This is evidenced by good learner retention levels, with internal data showing continuation statistics or graduation success of 88% from 2023-24 college data. In 2023-24 75% of students achieved a 1st or 2:1 degree classification which remains consistent with previous years.

The College will continue to monitor non-continuation and attainment rates for under-represented groups, and where necessary implement measures to support groups of students who are identified as at risk of non-continuation or lower achievement.

Information provided by exiting students suggests that personal and financial reasons are some of the main factors for early withdrawal rather than academic failure. The College has a Student Support and Wellbeing Fund administered by a Working Group which consists of staff, student, and governor representatives. This Working Group reports back to the Board via the appropriate subcommittee.

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In respect of graduate outcomes, the professional nature of the degree course ensures high rates of employability for all students, with 100% of osteopathic graduates progressing to highly skilled professional employment as evidenced by the General Osteopathic Register or progressing to further (including postgraduate) study.

The College will continue to monitor and analyse data, using (where possible) three-year averages to mitigate data volatility due to very small cohorts, and ensure trends are more clearly identified in terms of access and participation.

Ambition and strategy

The College is committed to further improving, and maintaining excellent performance levels, in access and participation for under-represented groups. As one of the smaller providers of Osteopathic education, the college has always been proud of the breadth and depth of its widening participation activity and will continue to develop its data and use of technology to better understand its student body. The current EDI focus is on impact on students following the pandemic, and the country's slow economic recovery following this and Brexit. Over time it is envisaged that the EDI focus will benefit from a broader data capture and be used to explore other target groups, as well as aligning with equality and diversity protected characteristics.

Access

As a small niche provider our programme is designed and delivered with mature returners to learning, career changers and those wanting to upskill in mind. We have identified these groups as being 'overlooked' and therefore often educationally disadvantaged. We are continually developing our means to broaden access in a way that is proportionate to our limited resources. While the College notes excellent performance in this area, it is also committed to further improving access for students from POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2 areas, from IMD Quintile 1 and disabled students. The College would also wish to continue the positive trajectory of access for students from ethnic minority groups, to increase participation further and encourage further diversity in its student base, and consequently the profession.

For example, the College works with other Osteopathic Education Institutions (OElS) and the Institute of Osteopathy (IO) to address the issues of widening participation and raising awareness and knowledge of osteopathy as a healthcare practice. The College's teaching clinics offer value for money health care to the public, and through this, also introduce awareness of osteopathy as a profession. The College will also continue to work collaboratively with its validating partner on outreach activities to raise awareness of osteopathy and other healthcare professions more broadly.

Additional Access measures include:

Bespoke visits and presentations to students in Further Education and Sixth Form colleges. Attending Access to HE courses related to the allied health professions, health and human science, healthcare and midwifery.

Delivering inclusive, informal and regular open days, delivery supported by unconscious bias training for staff.

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The College video and website testimonials that reflect the varied student body and promote the inclusive ethos of the College to all students regardless of their background.

An admissions process that is inclusive, and encourages students to submit application forms, and seek further guidance from the course team pre formal admission. This includes exploring the impact the course may have on current family and social life.

The admissions process also enables students with additional needs to have an early conversation with the Student Support Coordinator to assess and consider whether the College is the best place to complete their training. This would include e.g. any specialist support or provision that the College could realistically offer outside of the main programme.

Students once registered, have the option to study some elements of their programme at either venue, London or the Midlands and interchange between the two. The College has found that this is particularly valuable to all students, particularly those who must work full-time or travel nationally for work throughout the 4.5 years of study.

Students can also choose which clinic they wish to attend for clinical practice, and they have commented that this flexible approach supports managing their studies with work and family commitments.

Success:

The College has several measures in place to support students throughout the student lifecycle and to support progression through their course successfully. Year Leads provide academic, pastoral and general support and advice. In addition, there is a dedicated Student Support Coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the students with additional learning needs, guiding them through the DSA process and ensuring that their learning needs are met.

Attendance at academic teaching weekends and clinic is monitored on a regular basis and the Year Leads support students who are at risk of not achieving their attendance targets. This ensures that students who are beginning to struggle are identified, and assistance and support is provided early. Furthermore, the size of the College allows a strong collegiate ethos with student groups providing valuable peer support throughout the programme.

The College is committed to maintaining and enhancing continuation rates. College data indicates that non-progression/early exit is most prevalent in the early years of study. Data from exit interviews, indicate personal and financial hardship as reasons. If investigated in more detail, managing the expectations of the programme alongside real-life events is often a major reason behind this. The College has scheduled interviews arranged for students at key points in the programme, where their progress, strengths and /or concerns are discussed with their Year Lead. A series of workshops focusing on mental health wellbeing are available for all our students. These include building resilience, examination preparation, overcoming anxiety and building a positive mind-set. These practical workshops include strategies for students to support their own mental wellbeing.

To support the financial aspects, the College has as mention previously a Student Support and Wellbeing Fund which can be used to support students at risk of dropping out for financial reasons. Recent formal recognition of how this might be issued better to broaden the criteria to include those that relate to the additional responsibilities that many mature students have that relate to maintaining jobs, family and home, along with addressing low socio- economic status is ongoing and the focus of the Student Support and Wellbeing Fund Working Group.

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The College will monitor and ensure it understands the personal circumstances of its students and offer as much flexibility and appropriate learning support as possible to encourage continuation. It is the intention that the College continues to maintain a culture of continual improvement in terms of its continuation and achievement rates across the student body. Measures are particularly targeted at supporting the needs of our mature learner base, those disadvantaged at accessing osteopathy as a career due to location, low-income backgrounds, or additional learning support needs.

Success measures include:

Data (qualitative and quantitative) supporting the value and ease of students in accessing the dedicated Student Support Coordinator throughout their learning journey. This includes feedback at exit including NSS survey, via the formal college structures including Programme Committee a Board meetings.

Student uptake of the 'settling-in' one-to-one tutorial with their Year Lead during the first semester of study. These tutorials provide an opportunity to discuss student individual needs and to address any questions they may have had regarding aspects of the programme and student life.

Student uptake of the regular catch-up sessions offered at various points throughout the programme to ensure they are managing financially and personally.

Analysis of the effectiveness of the self-led peer support in the teaching clinics, which helps promote an inclusive, collegiate, supportive and welcoming learning environment.

Feedback from students (including Module feedback) on the value of the Diploma in Soft Tissue in Manipulation, an internal college award after successful completion of Level 4 modules.

Student uptake and feedback from mental health wellbeing workshops.

Progression:

Progression rate when averaged across all year groups is 88% based on 2023-24 internal college statistics. In 2023-24 100% of students reaching the final year were successful and eligible to register with the General Osteopathic Council. The College prepares the students for progression into employment in many ways. The interim Diploma Award in Soft Tissue Manipulation, issued early in the programme enables students to start seeing their own patients as a Soft Tissue Massage Therapist. This early optional transition into employment or self-employment, alongside ongoing osteopathic studies, enables students to reinforce their learning and build up a practice-related skills that can be used prior to graduation. This Soft Tissue Diploma is complemented by a curriculum which enables students to develop entrepreneurial and business skills and formulate business plans from the start of their student journey. Most students graduating go into practice or opt for further study.

Skills in reflection, evidence-based practice, research and professional capabilities are also introduced from the start of the programme and developed incrementally through the course. This includes CV writing, business planning and

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presentation skills. Year 1 students also spend time in an osteopathic teaching clinic, working with more senior students, experienced tutors and patients to acquire the clinical skills they need to practise safely and effectively.

Student consultation:

As a small institution there is a collegiate structure and a strong supportive interface between tutors, administrative staff and students. There is an ethos that the students work in partnership with the College and as such are represented on many College committees. For example, the Programme Committee and the broader College Board where there is full student trustee membership.

Students are given the opportunity to input, make comments and suggestions on a range of college practices including the fee structure and financial support, through the feedback mechanisms of Programme Committee and at Board level via the Student Board representative. The College will continue to seek the views of its student body via these formal feedback mechanisms. The College recognises that it is extremely important that students play an important role in the College's widening participation agenda and will seek further opportunities for students to contribute over the next year.

Student representatives from both College geographic locations have been consulted on the development of this Access and Participation Statement and their comments have been incorporated. This Statement will be considered and redeveloped through the feedback mechanisms detailed above.

Evaluation:

The College recognises the importance of monitoring the impact and effectiveness of its access and participation initiatives. Monitoring and evaluation of our student data will be an important factor in determining how the College performs against the ambitions set. The College's data collection process and system continues to be under review. This includes the consideration of further technology to ensure that the clean data required to monitor performance through the student lifecycle of Access, Success and Progression is provided.

The College understands that systematic evaluation is a priority area and participates in the validating university's continual monitoring process and the annual monitoring report for the Professional Body; both of which contain access and participation information. We also recognise that there is no single best way to undertake the interventions and the evaluation of these activities. Our internal quality cycle and Committee Structure, provides the process required to continuously reflect upon our performance and consider the relevant investment and financial input required.

Evaluation measures include:

- Numbers and percentage of target learners applying and enrolling per annum
- Continuation rates
- % of learners achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree classification
- % of learners achieving a Diploma in Soft Tissue Manipulation

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- % of learners in highly skilled employment or further study, and % on the General Osteopathic Council Register
- Student feedback (survey/ interviews; formal committee input), including the NSS survey
- Number / % of students attending appointments with support staff
- Utilisation and student feedback on financial support offers (e.g. Student Support and Wellbeing Fund, payment plans)

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