



College of Osteopaths

Access and Participation Statement

2019/2020

Introduction to The College of Osteopaths

The College of Osteopaths (CoO) has been active in the training of osteopaths since 1948, providing the only fully part-time programme in the UK, and the only osteopathic programme currently in the Midlands and North of England. The student body comprise of 184 Home/EU students (HESA 17/18).

The College has a commitment to widening participation and the programmes of study offered by the College, which are of a part-time, blended learning nature, attract mature learners.

The College aims to promote life-long opportunities in osteopathy. It has developed a dynamic new part-time four year programme (Bachelor of Osteopathy with Honours (BOst)). It is anticipated that future provision will include postgraduate certificate, diploma and masters inter-professional healthcare programmes. The College also runs a variety of short courses for professionals wishing to undertake continuing professional development. Through its two teaching clinics, the College offers osteopathic healthcare to the local and wider community. It delivers more than 5,000 osteopathic appointments annually.

The CoO is committed by its mission and values to improve access and enable all learners, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds, to be successful in higher education. This is against some structural issues for access, being the relative lack of understanding of what osteopathy is, and the fact that it is generally unavailable on the NHS. These are real challenges to improving performance in the access agenda.

Nevertheless, the CoO mission is to support non-standard entry students. The CoO is the only programme that offers a 100% part-time flexible programme in both the South and North of the country. We aim to widen access to under-represented groups in addition to support the retention, attainment and progression into employment or further study of all our students.

Our students and areas to address

In 2018-19, the College has 100% mature learners, in contrast to the national decline in participation for this group. These students are from diverse backgrounds and often come with non-traditional qualifications. The College will continue to prioritise and target mature learners as our key market. Our programme is structured and delivered to support this particular target group, and since 2017/18 the College has seen a steady increase in the number of entrants.

Mature learners are more likely than their younger counterparts to have characteristics associated with under-representation in higher education, particularly related to, for example, non-traditional entry qualifications, family or caring responsibilities, return to learning, and first-in-family to higher education. Recruitment to the programme supported by flexible delivery which opens opportunities in particular for students who come from low-income backgrounds, as the flexible nature of the programme enables students to continue working full-time. Studying on a part-time basis is not the only measure to tackle disadvantage, but part-time provision plays a significant role in improving access for students who face these inequalities

Of our cohort, approximately 12% are from the most under-represented areas (POLAR4 Quintile1), and this proportion increases to 27% for POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2. While this percentage is encouraging, the College notes a gap of approximately 20% between POLAR4 Quintile 1 and Quintile 5 participation (based on those with available data).

In respect of student from the most deprived backgrounds (as per the Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD), the College has approximately 10% from IMD Quintile 1, rising to 32% from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2. While not as pronounced as the POLAR4 gap, the College notes a gap in participation for students from IMD Quintile 1 compared to Quintile 5, of approximately 8.5%. These are areas the College will address in terms of ensuring equality of opportunity over the coming years.

The CoO is pleased to note an increasingly ethnically diverse student body, with 26.2% BAME students in 2017-18; an increase of 12.2% on the previous year. The 2018/19 data, which formed part of the CoO HESA return with the validating university, shows that the CoO is also surpassing its benchmark for access to students in receipt of Disability Support Allowance (9.2% (2018/19), the benchmark is 6.7%).

As a small institution there is a strong supportive interface between tutors, Education Support Officers 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 of above 90% for all year groups in 2017/18, and no identified significant gaps between target groups. In respect of attainment, the College's students perform well; in 2017-18 71% of students achieved a 1st or 2:1 degree classification. Data for target groups is too small to show meaningful trends, and the College has not identified any significant gaps between target groups.

The CoO 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. Some information provided by exiting students suggests that personal and financial reasons are the main factors for withdrawal rather than academic failure.

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 in highly skilled employment or further study, as evidence by the General Osteopathic Council Register (2016-17 and 2017-18).

The CoO 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 CoO is committed to further improving, and maintaining excellent performance levels, in access and participation or 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. The College will continue to develop its data and understanding of its student body, and over time it is envisaged that this will include broader data capture to explore other target groups, such as care leavers and refugees; as well as aligning with equality and diversity protected characteristics (gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation).

Access

As a small niche provider our efforts are on those students who have already been identified as educationally disadvantaged (mature learners with limited education) in a way that is proportionate to our limited resources. While the CoO notes excellent performance in this area, the College is also committed to further improving access for students from POLAR4 Quintile 1 and 2 areas, from IMD Quintile 1 and disabled students, and to better understand disaggregated disability type data. The College would also wish to continue the positive trajectory of access for BAME students, to increase participation further and encourage further diversity in its student base, and consequently the profession. These intersections of disadvantage for our mature learner base are therefore an important focus.

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

Additional Access measures include:

- Whilst the College's target market is for mature students, work has been undertaken to contact local 6th form Colleges to raise awareness of osteopathy as a profession early in the pipeline.
- Bespoke visits and presentations to students attending Access to HE courses related to the allied health professions, health and human science, healthcare and midwifery are undertaken.
- Delivering inclusive, informal and regular open days, supported by input from current students, including a meet and greet session. Current students who support these events will reflect target groups.
- The College video reflects the varied student body and promotes the inclusive ethos of the College to all students regardless of their background, with testimonials from target students.
- Attendance at events which focus on access to higher education.
- The CoO admissions process is inclusive and all students are encouraged to submit application forms as well as having individual discussions with the programme team about their specific circumstances and how the CoO can support them throughout the programme. This is an opportunity for the interviewing team and the prospective student to discuss the impact the course has on family and work life and to consider how these impacts can be effectively managed.
- The CoO Preparing to Study programme is specifically designed to support students from a non-standard background whether that be because of low-income, or undiagnosed dyslexia in their high-school years, for example. The Preparing to Study programme aims to support students to boost the confidence of mature students, who may have not been in a formal education environment for some time and to provide an introduction into study skills, along with a helping hand in basic anatomy and physiology. Students who complete this programme are fully prepared for the 1st year, which also positively impacts retention and attainment.
- All students once registered with the CoO can choose to study at either programme venue, London or the Midlands, and interchange locations to suit them. The College has found that this is particularly valuable to all students and particularly those who must work full-time throughout the five years of study to support families.
- All students can also choose which clinic they wish to attend. Students have commented that this flexible approach supports them in managing their studies with work and family commitments.

Success

The College has a number of measures in place to support students throughout the student lifecycle and to support progression through their course successfully. Education Support Officers who are replicated in both the North and South of the country provide academic support, counselling, pastoral support and general advice. In addition the CoO has a dedicated Student Support Officer 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 Education Support Officers 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 and the student groups provide valuable peer support throughout the programme.

The College commits to maintaining and enhancing continuation rates in the early years of study and working with our validating partner to further develop support measures. Given data from exit interviews, which suggests personal reasons and financial hardship as a reason for non-continuation, the College will also support target students from low income backgrounds to apply for hardship fund support, which can help with living expenses or study-related expenses such as the purchase of a diagnostic kit, ensuring access to necessary equipment. The College will also ensure it understands the personal circumstances of its students and offers as much flexibility and appropriate learning support as possible to encourage continuation. It is the intention that the College continues to improve its current continuation rate, and the percentage of students achieving a 1st or 2:1 degree classifications across its student body. Measures are particularly targeted to supporting the particular needs of our mature learner base, and of these those who also come from low income backgrounds or are disabled.

Success measures include:

- A dedicated Education Support Officer (ESO) supports students through their learning journey, with the expertise to support students in receipt of DSA and with other concerns such as finance, learning management and study skills development.
- Students receive a 'settling-in' one-to-one tutorial with the Education Support Officer during the first semester of study. The Education Support Officer responsible for these tutorials has specific responsibility for Level 4 (Year 1) students and works closely with the ESO Student Support.

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.

- Regular catch-up sessions at various points throughout the programme with the dedicated Student Support ESO are held with students to ensure they are managing financially and personally. If financial support is needed, students are signposted to the Bursar to discuss individual and tailored payment plans.
- Providing self-led peer support in the teaching clinics from day 1 of Year 1, which helps promote an inclusive, collegiate, supportive and welcoming learning environment. The ESO for Clinic works closely with the ESO Student Support to ensure the target groups receive specific support to their needs.
- A voluntary student mentor scheme, where students in Years 2,3 and 4 act as student mentors for new students, is provided. Further consideration will be given to matching of students from similar target groups to help support belonging and transition.
- Students receive a Diploma in Soft Tissue Manipulation after successful completion of Year 1 of the programme. This allows the students to establish their own client base and begin to draw income by the option to establish their own business, this also aids the development of their practical skills. Insurance is provided by the College.
- In addition to flexibility of study locations, students are able to do 20% of their observational hours with local osteopaths, this decreases the number of times they are required in clinic and therefore reduces costs and time away from families and full-time employment.

Progression

The College has an excellent performance in progression for its student body. The CoO prepares the students for employment in many ways. From the beginning of Year one, students are eligible for an interim Diploma Award in Soft Tissue Manipulation, together with insurance cover 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, ready for when they graduate. 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.

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

College works closely with many osteopaths through the Student Osteopathic Observation scheme, which allows students to spend time with osteopaths local to their homes. This collaboration has a two-fold affect, as students gain observational experience which reduces their travel into the Teaching Clinics and it build relationships with osteopaths and networks into the industry to support graduate progression. This is particularly important for under-represented target students, who are less likely to have existing professional networks and contacts.

The College offers students the opportunity to present their research work in a formal conference setting thereby enhancing their ability to be considered for further graduate study.

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.

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 Board of Governor/Student Representative meetings. 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 of the College's geographic location (West Midlands and London) have been consulted about the development of this Access and Participation Statement and their comments

have been incorporated. This Statement will also be considered and redeveloped annually 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 we perform against the ambitions we have set. The College has a bespoke data collection system which will be further enhanced over the next year to provide the clean data required to monitor performance through the student lifecycle of Access, Success and Progression.

The College understands that systematic evaluation is a priority area and produces annual monitoring reports for both the Professional Body and the validating university, 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 Quality Cycle and Committee Structure will enable us to continuously reflect upon these as well as the relevant investment and financial support.

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
- % of learners in highly skilled employment or further study, and % on the General Osteopathic Council Register
- Student feedback (survey/ interviews; formal committee input)
- Number / % of students attending appointments with support staff
- Utilisation and student feedback on financial support offers (e.g. hardship fund, payment plans)
- Number of student mentors / mentees; feedback from both
- Number of outreach activities; feedback from attendees (survey)