



Karen Smith BOst (Hons)

Karen was working for four days a week as a Health and Justice Commissioner in local government when she attended a College Open Day in 2016. She had wanted to train to be an Osteopath for about 15 years but with 2 small children it just did not seem possible.

She had first been introduced to Osteopathy when she had taken her children to the Osteopathic Centre for Children (which at the time had a clinic in Manchester) and had been amazed by the positive effects the treatments had had on herself and on her children.

At the Open Day, Karen heard how students who were also parents had managed to combine study with the responsibilities of bringing up a family and in 2018, after a delay due to a change in family circumstances, she took up the offer of a place on the course.

Juggling work and family commitments while studying was not without its challenges. Karen's approach was to take it a year at a time. Having completed Year 1, she thought she would try Year 2. By the end of her third year, Karen finally started to get excited, there was light at the end of the tunnel and she knew she could achieve her dream of becoming a qualified Osteopath.

During the course, Karen got better at planning ahead. She learned how to calculate the best way to use her annual leave and flexi leave and generally how she could fit more into her day.

By the time she reached Year 4, Karen reduced her week to three days at work, moving to a new role in Children's Commissioning.

The pandemic presented additional challenges for all students. Lockdown meant that initially students could not attend clinic and Karen found it a particularly testing time. However, she kept on track with the support of her peers, her own Osteopath and by remembering her goal! Her sons kept her going and if ever she expressed any thoughts of giving up, they would say "why would you do that? You keep passing your exams, so you can do it", and she did! In addition, Karen represented students of the College of Osteopaths on the newly formed Institute of Osteopathy, Student Council. This experience helped Karen understand the challenges and opportunities for other osteopathy students particularly during lockdown and provide a student perspective, in particular the new GOSC educational standards for students and GOSC online CPD portal.

In the summer of 2023, the boys were doing GCSEs and 'A' Levels while Karen was doing her finals and they were all successful in their exams.

Apart from becoming a student again in her 50s, Karen, originally a Social Science graduate, found the most difficult part of the course was studying anatomy and physiology. However, she learned that going over things again and again eventually made it stick and it would start to make sense.

To Karen the most enjoyable part of the course was working with patients, building a rapport, helping them to live with less pain and helping them to have a better awareness of what was happening in their bodies. Karen described the satisfaction she felt when a patient returned to clinic with less pain and more mobility as "unbeatable".

During her training, having passed her Diploma in Soft Tissue Manipulation*, Karen worked for one day a week treating patients in the Osteopathy clinic where she now works as an Associate Osteopath. (*the diploma is an interim award which the students sit in stages during the course}.

Karen continues to work in local government for 2 days a week and has also started her post graduate training in Cranial Osteopathy. After five years of studying, she finds she has more time on her hands to do what she loves, going for walks, meals out, the cinema and seeing friends.

In 2023, Karen was awarded the Institute of Osteopathy Rising Star award, which "recognises those at the very start of their careers who have shown a commitment to their study of Osteopathy and an aspiring commitment to continue the development of the profession."

Karen's advice: "Follow your dreams. I graduated at 58 and am proud of what I achieved".

