



General
Osteopathic
Council

Guidance for Applicants and Students with a Disability or Health Condition

ABOUT THE

General Osteopathic Council

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.

We are one of nine health professional regulators established by law to ensure the safety and wellbeing of patients and the general public.¹

By law osteopaths must be registered with the General Osteopathic Council in order to practise in the UK.

As with all healthcare regulators, our primary purpose 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 profession.²

We do this by:

- Keeping the Register of all those permitted to practise osteopathy in the UK.
- Setting, monitoring and developing standards of osteopathic training, practice and conduct.
- Assuring the quality of osteopathic education and ensuring that osteopaths undertake continuing professional development
- Helping patients and others who have concerns or complaints about an osteopath. We have the power to remove from the Register any osteopath who is unfit to practise.

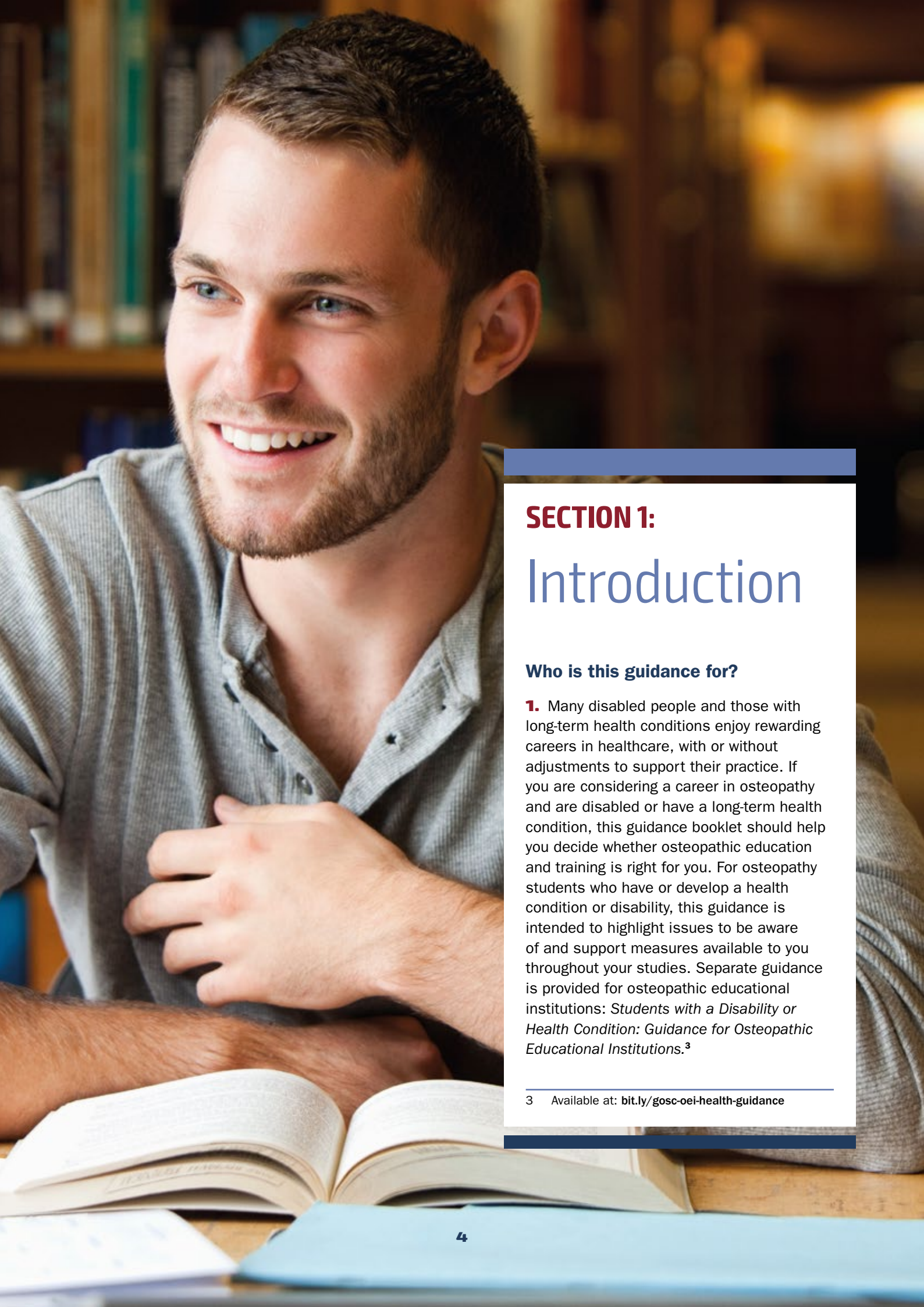
Patients expect that healthcare professionals will be competent and practice safely, that they will treat patients properly and will behave ethically. It is the responsibility of the General Osteopathic Council to ensure this happens, and to take action if an osteopath's practice falls below our standards.

1 Information about all of the nine health professional regulators can be found at: bit.ly/gosc-who-regulates-leaflet

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

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SECTION 1:

Introduction

Who is this guidance for?

1. Many disabled people and those with long-term health conditions enjoy rewarding careers in healthcare, with or without adjustments to support their practice. If you are considering a career in osteopathy and are disabled or have a long-term health condition, this guidance booklet should 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 Condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions*.³

³ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-oei-health-guidance

What is covered in this guidance?

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

Language

- 6.** We understand that the choice of language that people use about their disability or health can be a personal one. In this guidance we refer to ‘disabled people’ and ‘disabled students’, terms informed by the social model of disability. This recognises that barriers caused by attitudes in society can disable people, as well as environmental and organisational factors. We also use the term ‘people with disabilities’ or ‘students with disabilities’ in some contexts. The definition of a disability as set out in the *Equality Act 2010* is described in paragraphs 27-29.
- 7.** Throughout this guidance, we refer to ‘disabilities’ and ‘health conditions’. This acknowledges that not everyone who meets the definition in the *Equality Act* considers or describes themselves as ‘disabled’, and that some health conditions are not classed as disabilities within the definition of the *Equality Act*. Where we refer to the legal protection that disabled people have by law, we use the words ‘disabled’ or ‘disability’.

What is osteopathy?

- 8.** Osteopathy is a manual form of diagnosis and treatment, and is used 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 influencing a person’s health. The osteopathic approach to health and healing is underpinned by the concept of each human being as an individual whose body’s structures and systems are interrelated, possessing self-regulatory and self-healing mechanisms.

What do osteopaths do?

- 9.** 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 so that the osteopath can gauge their general mobility, as well as the mobility of specific symptomatic areas. An 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.
- 10.** 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.
- 11.** 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

⁴ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-student-ftp

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.

12. Osteopaths' patients are very diverse, 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.

13. 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 their 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.

14. 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.

15. 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

How can I become an osteopath?

16. To be registered to practise as an osteopath, you need to achieve a 'recognised qualification'. This is a qualification that the General Osteopathic Council has approved and is awarded by an osteopathic educational institution.

“To be registered as an osteopath, you need to achieve a 'recognised qualification'”

17. Both full-time and part-time osteopathic degree programmes are available in the UK.⁵ These comprise a combination of academic study, practical osteopathic training and supervised clinical experience. Typical assessment methods within osteopathic education include written exams, essays, research-based dissertations, practical osteopathic technique assessment, case-based practical assessments, and clinical assessments with real patients.

18. The General Osteopathic Council monitors the standards of education and training provided by osteopathic educational institutions, through a process of annual reporting; 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 (QAA). Course reviews are conducted with reference to our published standards, the QAA's *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*⁶ and our *Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education*.⁷

19. Achieving a recognised qualification means that you are capable of practising, without supervision, to the standard expected in our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*,⁸ and have met the outcomes set out in the *Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education*.

5 Details about osteopathic education institutions are available at: bit.ly/gosc-rq-courses

6 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2015. *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*. Available at: bit.ly/qaa-benchmark-osteopathy

7 Available at: bit.ly/gosc-gopre

8 Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

20. The recognised qualification will entitle you to apply for registration with the General Osteopathic Council. As part of your application for registration, you will 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. You must be registered before you commence practice.

21. 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 those with long-term health conditions are able to practise with or without adjustments to support their practice.*⁹

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

22. The General Osteopathic Council is committed to the principles of equality and diversity, and we firmly believe that the profession and its patients benefit from having disabled practitioners on the Register. Disabled students and practitioners make a unique contribution to osteopathy, bringing direct experience of a variety of 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 welcomes people with a range of backgrounds and capabilities, but in order to be an osteopath a person must be able to meet the requirements of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. This requires that your physical and mental health are sufficient for you to be capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. It does not mean the absence of any disability or health condition.

Many people with disabilities and health conditions are able to practise safely, effectively and without supervision, with or without adjustments to support them.

“Osteopathy welcomes people with a range of backgrounds and capabilities, but you must be able to meet the requirements of the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*”

23. If we confirm that an applicant 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 an osteopathic educational institution considers an applicant’s suitability to undertake a programme of study, they have to be confident that the individual is likely to have the capacity and capability to meet all the demands of professional practice once they have graduated. Once registered, osteopaths have an ongoing 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.

24. 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.

⁹ General Osteopathic Council, 2012. *Guidance about Professional Behaviours and Fitness to Practise for Osteopathic Students*. Available at: bit.ly/gosc-student-ftp

What rights does the *Equality Act* give to students with disabilities and health conditions?

25. The *Equality Act 2010* protects students from discrimination or harassment on the basis of a ‘protected characteristic’, and also from victimisation. Disability is a protected characteristic.¹⁰

26. Unlawful discrimination includes:

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

27. A person is considered disabled for the purposes of the Act if they have a *physical or mental* impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.¹¹ ‘Long-term’ means that the impairment has lasted or is likely to last 12 months or more. ‘Substantial’ is defined as being more than minor or trivial.

28. 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 *Equality Act*. These are set out in Government guidance.¹²

29. According to the *Equality Act*, the term ‘impairment’ can cover, for example, long-term medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes, where these impact substantially, and fluctuating or progressive conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis. Mental impairment includes mental health conditions (such as bipolar disorder or depression), learning difficulties (including conditions such as dyslexia) and learning disabilities (such as autism). Some people, including those with cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV/AIDS, are automatically protected as disabled people by the Act. People with severe disfigurement will be protected as disabled without needing to show that it has a substantial adverse effect on day-to-day activities. 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 met the definition in the past. There are some named exclusions and this includes drug and alcohol dependency.

30. Further detail regarding the different types of discrimination can be found in *Students with a Disability or Health Condition: Guidance for Osteopathic Educational Institutions*.¹³

“You do not need a medical diagnosis of a physical or mental impairment: the important factor is the effect of the impairment”

10 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.

11 This is the definition used in the *Equality Act 2010*, available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15 or in easy-read format at: bit.ly/equality-act-2010-easy

12 See: Office for Disability Issues, 2011. *Equality Act 2010: Guidance on Matters to be Taken into Account in Determining Questions Relating to the Definition of Disability*. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-guidance

13 Available at: bit.ly/gosc-oei-health-guidance

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

31. Osteopathic educational institutions are subject to the Act's provisions that apply to further and higher education institutions.¹⁴ They are also subject to the public sector equality duty.¹⁵ This is a general duty which requires public bodies not only to take steps to eliminate unlawful discrimination, but also to actively promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a particular protected characteristic and people who do not.

32. The Act prohibits osteopathic educational institutions from discriminating against, harassing or victimising applicants or students.

33. An applicant or student who believes they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised by an educational institution can make a claim under the Act.

34. Educational institutions can decide how best to meet their obligations under the Act. So institutions will use different approaches to achieve the same ends, depending on each institution's size and nature.

Are there any osteopathic students with disabilities or health conditions?

35. Yes. There have been many disabled students and students with health conditions who have successfully completed their course and gone on to practise osteopathy. Current and previous students in osteopathic education include 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 and 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?

36. Initially you should talk to as many people as you can – including, 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.

“Talk to as many people as you can – including osteopaths, if possible – about whether osteopathy would be a good career choice for you”

37. You will probably also find it useful to read our *Osteopathic Practice Standards*¹⁶ and *Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education*,¹⁷ so that you can start to assess for yourself whether osteopathy may be the career for you.

38. As well as talking to people you know, it is essential to talk to people in osteopathic educational institutions. They have experience of supporting students with a wide range of disabilities and health conditions. You should contact these institutions before you make a firm application, to find out what the programme involves, what it is like to work as an osteopath, and 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 have received, and how they have adjusted to the challenges of life as a student.

¹⁴ The *Equality Act* applies in England, Scotland and Wales. Separate anti-discrimination law applies in Northern Ireland.

¹⁵ See the Equality and Human Rights Commission website: bit.ly/ehrc-guidance-psed

¹⁶ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

¹⁷ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-gopre

39. You can be reassured that initial contact of this sort will not influence your application, if you decide to make one. Osteopathic educational institutions will use this initial contact not to assess you as a potential applicant, but to help you think through the implications of undertaking osteopathic education and training and embarking on a career in osteopathy.

40. When you contact an osteopathic educational institution, ask about their equality policy, the support they provide for disabled students and those with health conditions, and whether you can talk to their disability or learning support service. This will give you a good indication of the types of support that might be available to you.

“Open days provide an excellent opportunity to gain an insight into what osteopathy is”

41. 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 studying osteopathy. It will also help you to assess whether the level of support that will be available is likely to be sufficient for you.

A man with short brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is smiling warmly at the camera. He is wearing a blue and white plaid button-down shirt. He is standing in a library, with wooden bookshelves filled with books visible in the background. In his left hand, he holds a large blue book. In his right hand, he holds a teal folder or folder. The overall atmosphere is bright and positive.

SECTION 2:

Applying to study osteopathy

Which osteopathic educational institution should I apply to?

42. We cannot 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. In reaching your decision, you may wish to identify what support needs you are likely to have, and consider how these could best be met while you are a student. This might include factors such as:

- the osteopathic educational institution's proximity to your family, friends and healthcare services, so that you have their continued support
- its size and location
- the nature of the course
- whether the institution can offer or help you find suitable student accommodation
- the disability support services that would be available to you.

Should I disclose my disability on the application form?

43. It is in your interest to raise any requirements for adjustment or support relating to your disability or health condition as early as possible in the application process.¹⁸ However, you are not obliged to do this. We advise you to be open about this information because it gives an osteopathic educational institution the best chance of meeting your needs and of arranging support before the course starts. You can be reassured that if you do let educational institutions know this information, it is unlawful for them to discriminate against you because you have a disability or health condition.

44. 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, a particular learning need or a medical condition (from a list of options), or to indicate that you do not want to give this information. If you provide information about a disability or health condition, it will be held in confidence by the institution.

45. Osteopathic educational institutions will consider your disability, and any adjustments that can be made to support you in meeting the requirements of the course, separately from considering whether you have the knowledge, skill and attributes required for entry to the course.

46. 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 the interests of students or the institution to admit a student who does not have a good chance of completing the course. The institution also has a duty of care to all the students they

enrol: they do not want anyone who starts the programme to fail to complete it.

47. 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.

48. Being open and trustworthy is an important element within the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*.¹⁹ Standard D10 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.

49. A student should understand that health conditions may affect their ability to study. Where students acknowledge this, and seek appropriate support, their health condition is far less likely to affect their progression.

How will my application be considered?

50. 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 they are applied, do not discriminate (directly or indirectly) against disabled applicants. Entry criteria must be genuine and necessary requirements for the course.

51. 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

¹⁸ Disability Rights UK produces *Telling People You're Disabled: Clear and Easy Guide for Students*, available at: bit.ly/disability-rights-factsheet-54

¹⁹ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

applicants) whether you have any specific requirements, so that you can access and participate fully in the interview process.

52. 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 2010* does not prohibit such questions. The course provider may ask questions concerning adjustments necessary for you to study or to meet the competence standards of the course. However, you are free to discuss your disability or health condition at interview and to use the opportunity to explore how this might affect your education and training experience. This can include how you believe that your experiences relating to disability or health could be considered a positive attribute in your studies and as a professional.

53. Osteopathic educational institutions will base their assessment of your suitability for the course on the assumption that they are able to make adjustments that are reasonable, as defined in the *Equality Act*. 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’?

54. The *Equality 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.

55. 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; a ‘substantial disadvantage’ is one that is more than minor or trivial. They are also obliged to provide auxiliary aids or services – such as particular equipment, computer software, or extra assistance from staff – where, without them, disabled students would be put at a substantial disadvantage.

56. Osteopathic educational institutions are expected to plan ahead and anticipate the requirements of people with different kinds of disability (such as those 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
- any disruption to others, which could include staff, other students or patients
- the availability of financial support.

57. Long-term mental health conditions are considered to be disabilities under the *Equality 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 (for example, during an acute episode of distress following a bereavement, which does not last for more than a year), it would still be considered best practice to make reasonable adjustments.

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 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 learning needs requiring the use of assistive computer software.
- Providing loop systems to assist students with hearing impairments.
- Allowing students time away from studies to attend health-related appointments such as counselling, physiotherapy or pain clinics.
- 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 example²⁰

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 her 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 will be able to cope with the course.

On this basis, the educational institution offers the applicant 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 teaching she has missed 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 single day. On this basis, she successfully progresses through Year 1 of the course.

Are there any disabilities that might prevent me training as an osteopath?

58. Osteopathy is a physically, intellectually and emotionally demanding profession. Some people may have disabilities or health conditions which prevent them from acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills or from practising safely in a way that meets our standards, but there are no specific disabilities or health conditions that automatically preclude someone from training to be an osteopath. Each applicant is considered on an individual basis.

59. When considering your application, the osteopathic educational institution 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*.²¹

60. You should recognise that there will be instances when an osteopathic educational institution concludes that reasonable adjustments will be insufficient to enable a student to meet the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*, the expectations of the *Subject Benchmark Statement for Osteopathy*²² or the outcomes required of graduates at entry into the profession, as set out in the *Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education*.²³ Extracts of these outcomes are shown, for illustration purposes, on page 16, with an indication of what an educational institution will need to consider in each case.

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

21 Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

22 Available at: bit.ly/qaa-benchmark-osteopathy

23 Available at: bit.ly/gosc-gopre

Graduate outcomes from Guidance for Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education

(selected examples only – see the guidance for full outcomes)

Communication and patient partnership

Graduates will be able to do the following:

- 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 by, for example:
 - 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 that 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, and taking steps in partnership with the patient to minimise their impact
 - encouraging and assisting patients to make decisions about their care.

Osteopathic educational institutions will consider an applicant's communication skills.

Knowledge, skills and performance

Graduates will be able to do the following:

- 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 that is adequate to form the basis of a treatment and management plan in partnership with the patient, including an analysis of the aetiology and any predisposing or maintaining factors.
- Use the most effective combination of care, agreed with and 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.

Safety and quality in practice

Graduates will be able to do the following:

- 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 support I need?

61. Each osteopathic educational institution 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 support during your course. Services will vary, as will the premises from which institutions operate and the facilities available. You may wish to contact student support services in advance when you are considering which institution to apply to.

62. You may be entitled to receive financial support through the Disabled Students' Allowance,²⁴ 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 Gov.uk website,²⁵ to find help and support for your specific needs.

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

63. 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 Osteopathic Pre-Registration Education* and the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*, you should contact the institution 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; details can be found in Section 4.

“Each osteopathic educational institution will have a support service for students with health conditions or disabilities, either within the institution itself or in its associated university”

²⁴ Information about this allowance is available at: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

²⁵ There are a range of resources at: www.gov.uk/browse/education/student-finance



SECTION 3:

During the programme of study

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

64. As soon as you are offered a place, the osteopathic educational institution will want to work with you to agree the adjustments needed to support you. A member of staff will ask you for your views on the adjustments that you think you need. 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.

65. In some instances you may 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 learning needs. This may also be necessary if you are applying for financial support.

66. 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 in fact going to be reasonable. The educational institution will explain their decision to you and with you explore possible alternative courses and career choices you might wish to consider.

What adjustments can be made to support me in completing the programme?

67. Osteopathic educational institutions will endeavour to put in place all of the adjustments that you need to ensure that you are not substantially disadvantaged in the learning, teaching and assessment of the course, where these are reasonable. They cannot change the competence standard (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 in order to register and practise as an osteopath.

“Institutions will endeavour to put in place all of the adjustments that you need”

68. It is important that adjustments to support you do not have a significant adverse impact on others. For example, the *Equality Act 2010* 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.

69. Some adjustments (examples of which are given on page 20) have become standard practice for education providers and can be put in place quickly, especially for students who have a well-understood disability or health condition 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.

70. The adjustments 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 which 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. He is offered extra time in assessments, and, because he finds it easier to write with a laptop, can use a computer in written assessments.

Osteopathy students with disabilities and health conditions have benefited from a wide range of adjustments made by educational institutions, including:

- 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 of assignments).
- **Making allowances** – for example, by extending deadlines, permitting absences, providing breaks in teaching sessions, or relaxing regulations (for example, to allow a student to carry, store on site and administer necessary medication).
- Providing **equipment or software** – for example, to support computer-assisted learning, voice recognition software and screen-readers, and laptops and handheld devices for note-taking.
- Facilitating access to **resources** – for example, the purchase of textbooks for use at home to help combat the fatigue associated with frequent trips to the library, and the use of taxis after specific healthcare treatments.
- Adjustments to **examinations** – for example, by changing the design and presentation of exam papers; 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.
- Adjustments to **practical assessments** – for example, by allowing extra practice sessions; more time for the student to familiarise themselves with the setting or to obtain, assess and record patient information; the use of a recording device for subsequent transcription of patient information; adjustments to the physical arrangement and features of the examination and treatment area (such as additional space or specific lighting); and the use of aids to facilitate manipulations.
- Providing **additional support** – for example, offering one-to-one tutorials or extra clinic instruction; teaching particular study skills and learning techniques; identifying a student 'buddy'; and offering ongoing mentorship or course-long support from a personal tutor, student counsellor or disability officer.

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

71. You will need to think about how you have managed your disability or health condition 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.

72. Some students with disabilities and/or 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 do health and disability issues relate to student fitness to practise?

73. 'Fitness to practise' is a term used in healthcare which relates to someone having the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice safely and effectively in accordance with prescribed standards. There are expectations of students in this regard as well, and you should behave as a responsible professional throughout your training. You can read more about this in our student fitness to practise guidance.²⁶ However, there may be occasions when your fitness to practise is called into question because of a disability or health condition.

74. Osteopathic educational institutions are likely to be concerned if you show a lack of insight into the nature or impact of your disability or health condition, and the potential impact of it on patient care and your ability to meet the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*.²⁷ An example would be a student whose insight was intermittently impaired because they failed to take maintenance medication as prescribed.

75. 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, your fitness to practise may be questioned. This may lead to a formal fitness to practise investigation and could result in your exclusion from the course.

76. Osteopathic educational institutions should have processes in place to detect behavioural issues which might call into question a student's ability to practise 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.

77. 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 disability or health condition that is affecting their study. Monitoring processes can therefore be used as a way of identifying the need for action and support.

²⁶ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-student-ftp

²⁷ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

Case example

A mature student performs well in Year 1 of an osteopathy programme, but in Year 2 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 has 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 into his behaviour's effect on his colleagues and patients.

He is suspended from the course, and a fitness to practise investigation is instigated which results in further suspension for a period, during which time he is able to gain some advice from a support group and also seek treatment from a different consultant. This gives him a new perspective on managing his condition and the impact of not doing so on others. As a result, he is readmitted to the course in the following September, and recommences Year 2.

78. In exceptional cases, a student's health or disability 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 institution should offer support to the student in finding another course of study or career, where possible.

What is 'fitness to study'?

79. Fitness to study policies and procedures are widely used in higher education institutions. They assist in the assessment of risks and in taking action in circumstances where a student's health, behaviour or other circumstances give rise to concern. There may

be concerns regarding the student's ability to participate in their studies, or that they represent a risk to themselves or others.

80. 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.

81. In osteopathic educational institutions, there is likely to be a crossover between fitness to study and fitness to practise procedures: if early intervention under a fitness to study process fails, a fitness to practise investigation is likely to ensue.

Case example

A student suffers from depression and anxiety, 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 support her in managing this challenging period, and she successfully progresses to Year 3.

What happens if a disability or health condition develops or is diagnosed after I start the course?

82. 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 problem. For example, during induction some osteopathic educational institutions have identified students who have dyslexia – a specific form of learning difficulty – which had previously been undiagnosed; the institutions have been able to put in place adjustments that support

these students to manage this through the remainder of the course, even though the students did not seek or expect this when they applied for admission to the course.

83. 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 sympathetic to such changes and recognise that these circumstances can be difficult for students to manage. It is essential that you are open and honest and explain the difficulties you are experiencing. Adjustments can be altered during a course or be put in place later if your needs change. The earlier you are able to tell your institution about any changes in your circumstances, the better, as there will more time to work with you to prevent any problems escalating.

84. Mental health issues are common, with estimates that some 25 per cent of the population are affected by them over the course of a year.²⁸ Depression and general anxiety are the most common mental disorders to affect people in the UK, and may be increased 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; 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.

85. 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.

28 See The Mental Health Foundation website at: bit.ly/mental-health-common-problems

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

86. If you are awarded a recognised qualification, it means the osteopathic educational institution has judged you capable of practising independently to the required standards set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*.²⁹ Once you are on the General Osteopathic Council Register of Osteopaths, you will be required to practise in accordance with these standards.

87. A recognised qualification will normally lead to registration, provided the General Osteopathic Council is satisfied that you are:

- In good health – that is, that nothing relating to your health prevents you from being capable of safe and effective practice without supervision. On first registration, the General Osteopathic Council requires all prospective registrants to provide a health reference from a doctor who has access to their 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 General Osteopathic Council. In the case of mental health conditions, the General Osteopathic Council 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.

- 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 normally consider it to have been judged satisfactory if you are awarded a recognised qualification.

What happens once I have qualified?

88. Registration confers unrestricted practice rights. If you have a disability or 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.

89. When you become a General Osteopathic Council registrant, you commit to practising in accordance with the standards set out in the *Osteopathic Practice Standards*. 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.

90. If your condition worsens or you develop a health condition 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.

²⁹ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-ops

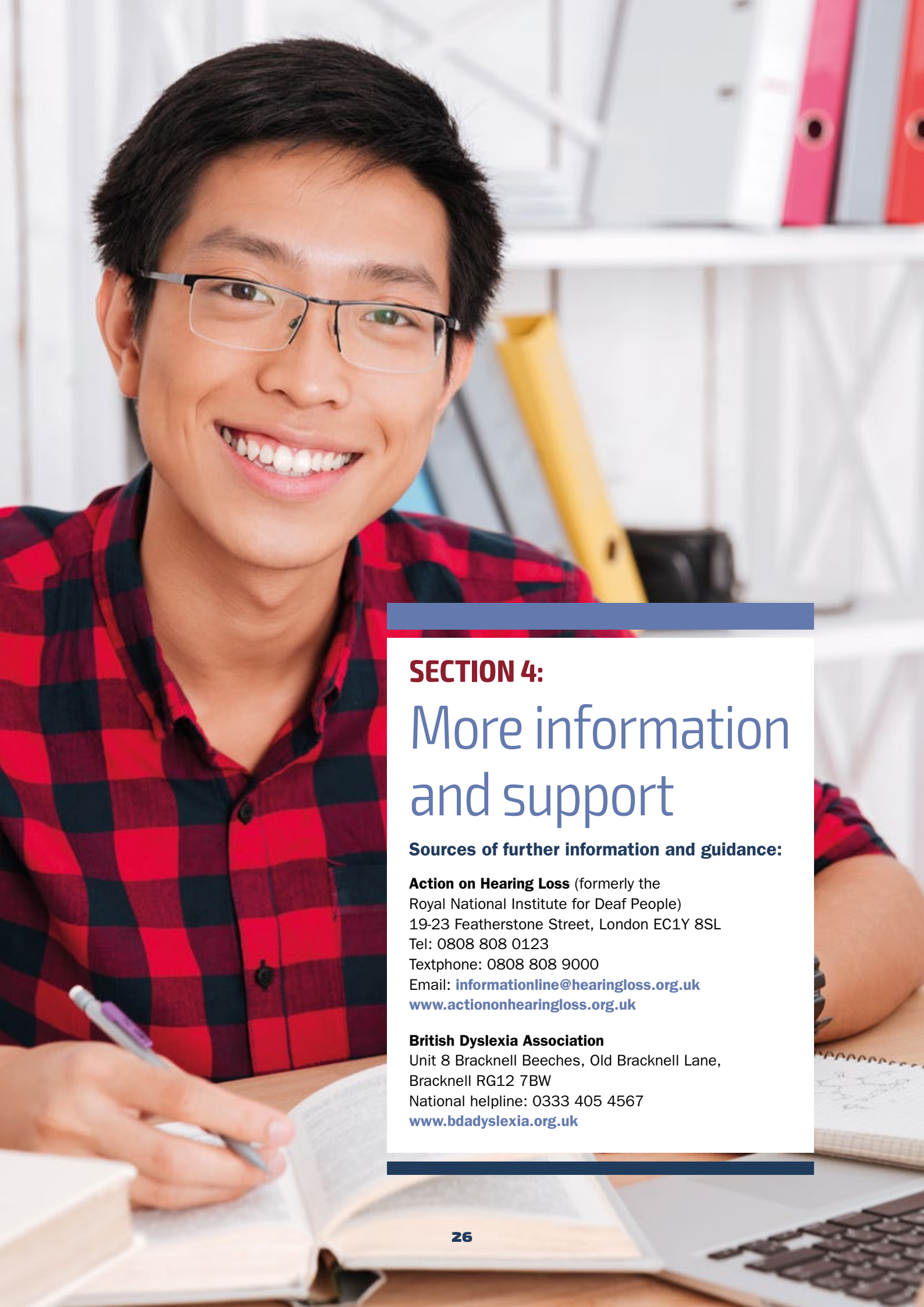
91. Deciding whether you are – and remain – fit to practise and able to continue ensuring the safety of patients and the public is a core professional responsibility and a matter for you to determine, exactly as it is for every registrant.

92. 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. More information can be found in our *Continuing Professional Development Guidelines*.³⁰

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

93. Our responsibility is public protection. The General Osteopathic Council is unable to say whether you – or any other registrant – will be able to earn a living as an osteopath. There are many osteopaths practising who have disabilities or health conditions. Some had these as students, and others developed them later in their careers. Every registrant needs to assess for themselves their fitness to practise and their ability to earn a living from osteopathy.

³⁰ Available at: bit.ly/gosc-cpd



SECTION 4:

More information and support

Sources of further information and guidance:

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly the Royal National Institute for Deaf People)
19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL
Tel: 0808 808 0123
Textphone: 0808 808 9000
Email: informationline@hearingloss.org.uk
www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

British Dyslexia Association
Unit 8 Bracknell Beeches, Old Bracknell Lane,
Bracknell RG12 7BW
National helpline: 0333 405 4567
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Disability Rights UK

You can find a student's guide to disclosing a disability at:

bit.ly/disability-rights-factsheet-54

General information for students on understanding the *Equality Act 2010* is available at:

bit.ly/disability-rights-factsheet-56

Disabled Students' Allowances

Information about these is available at: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Equality Advisory Support Service

Advice and assistance for individuals on equality and human rights issues in England, Scotland and Wales.

Freepost, EASS Helpline, FPN6521

Advice helpline: 0808 800 0082

Textphone: 0808 800 0084

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Great Britain's national equality body has a statutory remit to promote and monitor human rights and to protect, enforce and promote equality across the protected characteristics.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

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

Part of the Home Office, with responsibility across Government for equality strategy and legislation.

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-equalities-office

Inspire

(formerly the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health)

Lombard House, 10-20 Lombard Street,

Belfast BT1 1RD

Tel: 028 9032 8474

Email: hello@inspirewellbeing.org

www.inspirewellbeing.org

Mind

Information in England and Wales about mental health problems, where to get help and advocacy. (See also Inspire and the Scottish Association for Mental Health.)

Mind Infoline, Unit 9, Cefn Coed Parc, Nantgarw, Cardiff CF15 7QQ

Tel: 0300 123 3393

Text: 86463

Email: info@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The independent body that deals with student complaints about higher education providers in England and Wales.

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

www.oiahe.org.uk

Royal National Institute of Blind People

Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk

Scottish Association for Mental Health

Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street, Glasgow G1 1UZ

Tel: 0141 530 1000

Email: enquire@samh.org.uk

www.samh.org.uk

Universities UK

Publishes *Student Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education: Good Practice Guide*, available at:

bit.ly/universities-mental-wellbeing

Legislation

The *Equality Act 2010* can be accessed at:

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

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

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

The *Osteopaths Act 1993* can be accessed at:

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



General
Osteopathic
Council

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