

Response to General Osteopathic Council consultation on changes to the quality assurance of osteopathic education

May 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care promotes the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, service users and the public by raising standards of regulation and registration of people working in health and care. We are an independent body, accountable to the UK Parliament. More information about our work and the approach we take is available at www.professionalstandards.org.uk
- 1.2 As part of our work we:
- Oversee the nine health and care professional regulators and report annually to Parliament on their performance
 - Accredit registers of healthcare practitioners working in occupations not regulated by law through the Accredited Registers programme
 - Conduct research and advise the four UK governments on improvements in regulation
 - Promote right-touch regulation and publish papers on regulatory policy and practice.

2. General comments

- 2.1 We welcome the opportunity to respond to the General Osteopathic Council's (GOsC) consultation on changes to the quality assurance of osteopathic education. We are supportive of work by the GOsC to review its role in assuring the quality of osteopathic education. We welcome the principles which it has outlined for the review¹, a number of which align with the principles we highlighted in our recent publication *Right-touch reform*².
- 2.2 We also welcome the GOsC's recognition of the changes that are occurring in higher education and the need to ensure effective joint working with other organisations towards mutual objectives. As we have highlighted in *Right-touch reform*, changes in the landscape of higher and further education and wider

¹ a. The GOsC quality assurance mechanisms should contribute to the enhancement of quality in pre-registration providers and should also ensure that standards are met.

b. The quality assurance mechanisms should build on the providers' own internal quality assurance mechanisms.

c. The quality assurance mechanisms should be proportionate.

d. The quality assurance mechanisms should be transparent.

² Professional Standards Authority 2017, *Right-touch reform*. [Online] Available at:

https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/publications/thought-paper/right-touch-reform-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=2e517320_5 [Accessed: 15/03/2018]

challenges including the UK's exit from the EU, increasing divergence in approach across the four countries of the UK and workforce pressures are likely to lead to increasing pressure on regulators to ensure that their approach remains proportionate and fit for purpose.

- 2.3 We have highlighted that, for some professions, particularly those operating primarily in the NHS, the regulatory landscape for education is crowded. However, we recognise that the GOsC is in a somewhat different position particularly in relation to practice placements as they are the only regulator or body that visits osteopathic educational institution patient clinics. Whilst we recognise that this limits the GOsC's scope to reduce duplication of regulatory activity, we are encouraged by the attempt in this consultation to start thinking about what a more risk based approach to regulation of osteopathic education might look like. We recognise that any attempt to move towards a more risk based system must be balanced against the need to be assured that students completing recognised qualifications are safe and competent to join the register and able to meet the Osteopathic Practice Standards.

3. Detailed answers to questions

Removal of Recognised Qualification (RQ) Expiry Dates

Question 3. Do you agree with the proposal to remove RQ expiry dates and to award RQs which are not subject to specific conditions for an indefinite period?

- 3.1 Yes. This seems like a sensible proposal to ensure that the review cycle can more flexibly fit with internal institution quality assurance processes, and that the GOsC's review can ensure it takes into account any relevant information or events which may make a material difference to the outcome of the review for example, a new curriculum being introduced.
- 3.2 It is also positive that a more flexible system will reduce uncertainty for students who currently may be unsure about whether their qualification will still be recognised upon graduation.
- 3.3 This move fits with the principle outlined in *Right touch reform* that quality assurance activity by the regulators builds on other quality assurance mechanisms, including those put in place by the institution.

Question 4. Do you agree that expiry dates should be retained for new institutions or for those institutions which may not be delivering the Osteopathic Practice Standards?

- 3.4 Whilst we recognise that there may be a rationale for retaining expiry dates for new institutions or those which may not be delivering qualifications which equip graduates to meet the Osteopathic Practice Standards (OPS), we suggest that the benefits of a more flexible approach are likely to apply to these institutions also. The difficulties outlined in fitting in with institutional quality assurance processes and accessing the relevant information for reviews are likely to be equally applicable.

- 3.5 If the GOsC can assure itself that it is able to take action to remove RQ status in the case of concerns or issues relating to whether the institution is fully preparing graduates to meet the OPS then it may be worth considering applying the open ended RQ status to all institutions but tailoring monitoring activity based on an assessment of the specific risks posed by the institution.

Question 5. What is the most appropriate way forward to introduce the removal of expiry dates from RQs?

- 3.6 No view.

Publication of conditions or requirements

Question 6. Do you agree that it would be appropriate to treat all types of conditions, requirements and recommendations as having the same status and using the same term?

- 3.7 Yes, we agree that it would be appropriate to treat all types of conditions, requirements and recommendations as having the same status and using the same term. Whilst we recognise that the GOsC has used different mechanisms to monitor the progress made by institutions in different areas and against certain objectives, as currently described in the consultation document, the status and meaning of the different types of conditions may be confusing.
- 3.8 In line with the other changes proposed, to remove the RQ expiry dates and improve transparency of what the GOsC publishes it would make sense to streamline the requirements that can be placed on institutions in the form of conditions and clarify their meaning and status. This is particularly important as the status of such conditions varies across the health and care professional regulators, for example the GOsC can approve a qualification with conditions in place whilst other regulators require conditions to be met before approval can be granted.

Question 7. Do you agree that there should be greater transparency in terms of publishing these conditions?

- 3.9 Yes, we agree that there should be greater transparency in terms of publishing conditions. In *Right touch reform* we highlighted the importance of ensuring that 'processes, criteria and procedures are consistently applied and, along with outcomes and rationale, are publicly available and clearly explained.³ This is also in line with our Standards of Good Regulation⁴.
- 3.10 As noted in our answer to the previous question, it will be important to be clear on the status of such conditions to avoid unnecessarily raising concerns with potential students or members of the public about the institution or qualification.

³ Professional Standards Authority 2017, *Right-touch reform*. [Online] Available at: https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/publications/thought-paper/right-touch-reform-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=2e517320_5 [Accessed: 03/05/2018]

⁴ Professional Standards Authority, Standards of Good Regulation. [Online] Available at: <https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/publications/detail/standards-of-good-regulation> [Accessed: 03/05/2018]

3.11 As the consultation document notes, there may be less value in retaining all completed conditions after a period of time has elapsed but it may be helpful for students and members of the public to be able to see the progress made by institutions over time, providing appropriate context is provided.

3.12 It has been positive to see an increase in the information provided in this area across the regulators we oversee and we welcome ongoing efforts to increase transparency of process wherever possible.

Question 8. Are there any types of conditions/information that it would not be appropriate to put in the public domain?

3.13 We agree with the specification outlined in the consultation document of information that should not be placed into the public domain - information which would identify individuals, unverified information or confidential/commercially sensitive information.

Question 9. What would be the most appropriate mechanism for publishing conditions and updating their status in order to provide accurate and timely information?

3.14 We do not have a strong view on what the best mechanism would be for publishing conditions and updating their status. As noted in the consultation document there are a range of approaches across the regulators. It will be important to ensure that it is clear what action is being taken by the regulators to address the issues raised.

Question 10. If expiry dates and conditions were removed, what are the important matters to consider in terms of implementation?

3.15 If expiry dates for RQs are removed then, as well as further clarity on the type and status of conditions, it will be important to consider at which points it will be possible for the GOsC to implement conditions on institutions and at what points it will be possible to assess progress and consider whether conditions have been met.

Question 11. Do you have any further suggestions?

3.16 No.

Procedure for dealing with concerns about osteopathic education

Question 12. Is the draft Procedure for dealing with concerns about osteopathic education at Appendix 2 clear and accessible?

3.17 The draft procedure for dealing with concerns appears to be clear and well laid out. It will also be useful to have such a procedure in place to raise the profile of the facility for students, staff, patient or others to raise any concerns that they may have.

Question 13. Do you have any suggestions about how the process might be more fair, effective or comprehensive?

- 3.18 It may be useful to clarify how the formal concerns process fits in with other mechanisms that the GOsC may have in place for gathering information and feedback from students, staff and other stakeholders about institutions and courses.

Question 14. Would it be appropriate to publish information about concerns if findings were upheld and conditions were imposed? If so, what form would this take? For instance, could this include a condition which could then be incorporated in the publication of other conditions attached to the provider?

- 3.19 We would agree that where concerns are upheld and result in conditions being imposed it would be useful to publish information as part of the overall summary of conditions in place and progress made against them.
- 3.20 Information should not be published if it includes the kind of information previously outlined as being unsuitable for publication - information which would identify individuals, unverified information or confidential/commercially sensitive information.

Question 15. Please give any other comments.

- 3.21 Whilst the policy very clearly outlines the kind of issues that the GOsC may not be able to consider, it may be helpful to outline a little more clearly the status of information received to make it clearer that this is to contribute to the GOsC's overall work ensuring the safety and quality of osteopathic education. This may help in managing expectations of those raising a concern about what will happen with the information they provide.

Quality enhancement

Question 16. What are the best mechanisms for identifying, sharing and sustaining good practice?

- 3.22 There are a range of potential mechanisms for identifying, sharing and sustaining good practice which may include written summaries shared with the relevant institutions or workshops to discuss progress in different areas.
- 3.23 As outlined in our answer to question 18, we would suggest that any mechanism needs to ensure that good practice is clearly distinct from the performance of the institution to deliver graduates who meet the OPS and progress against any requirements or conditions imposed following review.

Question 17. How can quality assurance review help to sustain good practice?

- 3.24 There may be scope to identify and share information about how different institutions are demonstrating good practice where this information is gathered as part of the review.

Question 18. Do you think it would be appropriate to publish good practice alongside conditions?

- 3.25 We would welcome further clarity from the GOsC on how it would seek to ensure that there is clear differentiation between any requirements or conditions imposed

as part of the quality assurance process to ensure that the institution produces graduates who meet the OPS and any information on good practice observed as part of the quality assurance review.

- 3.26 We highlighted in our comments under questions 6 and 7 the potential for confusion from members of the public or students about the status of the different kinds of conditions or requirements imposed. There is the potential for good practice to further complicate matters if it is not clear what action is required and what is supplementary.
- 3.27 It may be worth considering ways to present information on good practice as clearly distinct from performance against the standards, for example the recent thematic analysis published by the GOsC on boundaries education and training by Osteopathic Educational Institutions⁵.

Risk based quality assurance

Question 19. Do you agree that it would be appropriate for the GOsC to move to a more risk-based approach for its quality assurance of osteopathic education?

- 3.28 Yes. In *Right touch assurance* we outlined the importance of taking a risk based approach to quality assurance and ensuring that activity remains proportionate to the risk of harm arising. We also noted that for some professions, particularly those operating primarily in the NHS, the regulatory landscape for education is crowded and that there may be scope to review or reduce quality assurance activity where other agencies can provide sufficient assurance.
- 3.29 We recognise that the GOsC are in a different position particularly in relation to practice placements as they are only regulator or body that visits osteopathic educational institution patient clinics and this may limit scope to reduce duplication of regulatory activity. However, we are encouraged by the attempt in this consultation to start thinking about what a more risk based approach to regulation of osteopathic education might look like. We recognise that any attempt to move towards a more risk-based system must be balanced against the need to be assured that students completing recognised qualifications are safe and competent to join the register. We would also suggest that the GOsC needs to be able to assure itself of consistent outcomes across the institutions that it oversees.

Question 20. What are the risks particular to osteopathic education that the GOsC should take into account when designing a risk-based approach?

- 3.30 No specific views. This information should be gathered by the GOsC either from information obtained as part of its existing quality assurance process or through commissioned research if required.

Question 21. What are the particular risks for the recognition of new osteopathic programmes/providers versus the renewal of existing programmes?

⁵ General Osteopathic Council, Thematic Analysis of Boundaries Education and Training. [Online] Available at: <http://www.osteopathy.org.uk/news-and-resources/document-library/research-and-surveys/thematic-analysis-of-boundaries-education-and-training/> [Accessed: 03/05/2018]

- 3.31 There may be more risks associated with new providers who will have less established systems in place and where the GOsC will have less information on their past performance to deliver graduates who meet the OPS.

Question 22. How should the GOsC's approach to quality assurance of undergraduate and pre-registration education and training be adapted for a risk-based approach? How should the components of the GOsC's approach to quality assurance (on-going dialogue, concerns, general conditions/triggers, annual reports and Visits) be adapted? Are there any missing elements?

- 3.32 Whilst we recognise that the GOsC plays a key role in overseeing undergraduate and pre-registration training and is unlikely to be able to rely on other quality assurance activity entirely, there may be scope to tailor the GOsC's approach based on the past performance of specific institutions. For example, if the GOsC is comfortable with how a programme has performed in delivering graduates who meet the OPS they may feel it is proportionate following consideration to carry out a less in-depth form of review than for a programme where there are more concerns.
- 3.33 It will be important to ensure that consistency of outcomes across educational institutions is maintained. When exploring options to be more risk based in quality assurance activities the GOsC will need to be confident that it can continue to assure the quality and safety of those joining the register, regardless of where they are qualifying from.

Question 23. Do you agree that the period of GOsC/QAA RQ review visits should be varied to take account of the risk standing of RQ programmes? If so, how (please include thoughts about the nature, frequency and content of Visits or other monitoring mechanisms?)

- 3.34 Yes, as noted above this is an option worth exploring.

Question 24. Any other comments?

- 3.35 No further comments.

4. Further information

- 4.1 Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspect of this response in further detail. You can contact us at:

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