

Report: Developing a Quality Standard for Acupuncture

An 'in camera' event held on June 8th, 2022, at the University of Westminster, London

Introduction and Aims

This event brought together a range of leading experts to discuss the future for acupuncture in the UK with a focus on education and training.

Acupuncture is increasingly accepted as a valid and effective healthcare intervention, and has been found to be safe, cost effective and popular with patients. Different professional groups and opposing schools of thought have resulted in a wide variation in the standards of training and education for acupuncturists and health professionals delivering acupuncture in the UK. Additionally, there are differences in approach, such as those between traditional and western medical acupuncture. This makes it challenging to provide a common quality standard for the profession which can meet patients' needs in the developing healthcare landscape. This event aims to explore how a common quality standard for acupuncture might be achieved and enhanced through increased mutual understanding; and reconcile our differences through developing common shared packages with different principles.

Participants

The roles of the participants ranged from those at the BAAB and the British Acupuncture Council (BACc) to high-level players offering acupuncture provision and included leading figures in parallel health professional organisations to stimulate debate.

Initial feedback

The immediate feedback emphasised the interest participants had in hearing the presentations and what they had learned about the current situation of health education, parallel health professions, and their recognition by the NHS.

Particular points of interest noted:

- Some other recognised health professions do not have protection of title
- Umbrella organisations representing particular professions are made up of several professional bodies who retain their own membership with their own integrity and style of practice
- There is no evidence that styles of practice have been restricted by working in the NHS
- Patients are more concerned with effective treatment outcomes than styles of practice
- Healthcare is a much broader market than it used to be and the private care agenda is fully open
- Decision-making is now with the Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) whose central aim is to integrate care across different organisations and settings, joining up hospital and community-based services, physical and mental health, and health and social care.

Meeting the Objectives of the Day

The event had objectives set in advance, drawn from the presentations and the subsequent discussion with all the participants. The five objectives are listed below with the outcomes from the informed debate.

1. Understanding how ‘complementary’ or ‘integrated’ health can become accepted as standard healthcare

By meeting standards set by different regulatory, accrediting and professional groups
By understanding how parallel professions have gained acceptance
By forming umbrella organisations under which professional groups meet agreed standards, whilst retaining their individual identity and styles of practice

2. Exploring how diverse professional groups can reconcile their differences

Agreeing a future vision with common goals which benefit patients
Demonstrating a willingness to modify practice in the light of tradition, current practice and modern research
Valuing each other’s regard for safety and professional integrity

3. Exploring how diverse opinions within groups can be reconciled

Through exploring commonalities of philosophy and practice
Through discussion, listening and learning from others
By educators, professional bodies and accreditors encouraging open communications, being curious and challenging perceptions

4. Analysing the value of developing a quality standard for acupuncture

An agreed quality standard could provide a basis for stronger relationships between traditional acupuncturists and health professionals using acupuncture
Stronger affiliation between groups could increase the influence of acupuncture, particularly in representation with Integrated Care Systems, increasing visibility for acupuncture and increasing referral opportunities
Increased access to acupuncture treatment has the potential to offer patients effective outcomes with lower risk levels, at lower costs to the NHS
A quality standard must offer value for acupuncturists and those using acupuncture as part of their practice, but most importantly, value for patients

5. Setting a pathway to an inclusive approach to acupuncture education

Review educational standards and guidance from parallel professions to ensure acupuncture education meets current expectations in healthcare (Strategic Objectives, BAAB Strategic Plan 2021-25) (Aims and Objectives 3, BAAC Strategy 2021-26)
Focus on the benefits for patients
Value an inclusive and integrated approach with other health professionals (Aims and Objectives 2, BAAC Strategy 2021-26)
Use the outcomes of the Quality Standards event to begin a conversation about developing acupuncture education to raise the profile of BAAC members as acupuncture specialists (Strategic Objectives, BAAB Strategic Plan 2021-25) (Aims and Objectives 2, BAAC Strategy 2021-26)

How might these outcomes inform the development of acupuncture education?

1. Maintain a connection with developments in health professions’ educational standards as well as with Higher Education generally
2. Develop education standards to focus more on the benefits for patients
3. Encourage learning outcomes that provide students with confidence to modify their practice in the light of tradition, current practice and new research

4. Develop curricula to include exploring commonalities with different practices of acupuncture
5. Encourage interprofessional learning with health professions to deepen students' understanding of the wider field of healthcare in the UK and elsewhere
6. Support integration through communications with other professionals using acupuncture and with other healthcare professionals generally
7. Encourage students' confidence to be curious, challenge perceptions and engage in discussion about different styles of acupuncture
8. Build students' confidence to embrace their role as health professionals who meet the same standards as all health professionals in the UK.

These outcomes should be explored in consultation between the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board and its Accreditation Committee, the accredited Course Providers and the British Acupuncture Council. This consultation will inform future development in acupuncture education.

Speakers

Professor Mike Saks, BAAB Chair

Developing a Quality Standard for Acupuncture: Welcome and Introductions

Professor Lesley Haig, Vice Chancellor, AECC University College

Developing a Quality Standard for Acupuncture: Examples from working with other professional groups

Steve Jamieson, Chief Executive, Royal College of Podiatry

The Saks Report and achieving Royal College Status

Jasmine Uddin, British Acupuncture Council, BAAB, European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association: Acupuncture Education Standards in Europe

Harriet Lansdown, Lead Accreditation Officer, BAAB

Developing a Quality Standard for Acupuncture

Steven Bettles, Policy Manager, General Osteopathic Council

Review of Guidance for Pre-registration Osteopathic Education and the Development of Standards for Education and Training