



FORE response to European Commission Green Paper on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications

Background

The Forum for Osteopathic Regulation in Europe (FORE) brings together national osteopathic organisations to enhance the protection of patients in Europe by promoting wider recognition and regulation of osteopaths and high standards of osteopathic treatment. In this work, we also actively collaborate with the European Federation of Osteopaths (EFO)¹.

European context

FORE supports the principle of free movement, and would welcome a revised directive which enhances patient safety and respects the rights of osteopaths moving within Europe.

As both patients and healthcare professionals move increasingly within the EU to live and work, there is a need for greater patient protection through proper regulation and high standards of treatment. In regulatory terms, osteopathy is an emerging profession within Europe. Currently six EEA countries regulate osteopathy: France, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Osteopaths predominantly work in unsupervised, private practice.

Key concerns

Our comments on the Green Paper reflect those concerns relating to a largely private sector profession which is not widely regulated across Europe.

1. Professional cards: FORE recognises the rationale of introducing mechanisms, such as professional cards, to facilitate professional mobility, and the EFO is piloting its own professional card among its members. We are concerned however, that the impact of this initiative has not been fully considered, particularly for health professions, and those without an established employment structure. What would be the added value for professionals and patients? How much will this cost? What information should the card contain? How can fraud be avoided? Are effective IT systems in place to validate the card?

¹ www.efo.eu

2. Partial access: We would not support 'partial access' to a health profession because of the risk to patients – particularly in a profession like osteopathy, where most practitioners work as sole practitioners in the private sector.
3. Common platforms: FORE did explore the establishment of a common platform for osteopathy, but this was not considered feasible in the absence of regulation across Europe and the different in standards of osteopathic education, training and practice between Member States.

To address this, FORE and the EFO have agreed a consensus on European standards of osteopathic education, training and practice² so that the public have confidence in osteopaths. We are now looking to formalise these standards through the development of a European Standard with the European Committee for Standardisation³.

Such a European Standard on Services for Osteopaths should set out minimum standards of competency at an EU level. Although it would not override national legislation, such a European Standard would provide a consistent benchmark in those countries currently without any regulation. We envisaged that it could take up to three years to agree and implement this European Standard.

4. Internal Market Information system: FORE welcomes increased mobility of health workers within the EU, but this should not be at the expense of public protection. For this reason we support Option 2 to introduce a wider and more rigorous alert obligation for Member States to immediately alert all others if a health professional is no longer allowed to practise due to a disciplinary sanction.

Despite the current lack of osteopathic regulation in Europe, FORE members are working actively to explore mechanisms to improve information exchange between Member States, in particular through membership of the Healthcare Professionals Crossing Borders⁴ initiative. National osteopathic organisations have signed up to the Memorandum of Understanding, Portugal Agreement, and exchange Certificates of Current Professional Status when osteopaths are moving from Member State to another.

We look forward to the remit of the Internal Market Information system being extended to osteopaths.

² European Framework for Codes of Osteopathic Practice. FORE 2007; European Framework for Standards of Osteopathic Practice. FORE 2007; European Framework for Standards of Osteopathic Education and Training, 2008.

³ <http://www.cen.eu>

⁴ <http://www/hpcb.eu>

5. Language requirements: Effective communication is a key to the delivery of high quality osteopathic care, not only between osteopath and patient, but also other healthcare professionals. This is even more important when patients and professionals move across an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse Europe.

We would, therefore, favour an amendment of the Directive as set out in Option 2, but would emphasise that all health professions should be required to demonstrate the knowledge of the language of the country in which they are practising, including general system professions like osteopathy.

FORE signatories to this response:

Associação de Profissionais de Osteopatia – Portugal

Consiglio Superiore di Osteopatia – Italy

Danske Osteopater – Denmark

General Osteopathic Council – United Kingdom

*Groupement National Représentatif des Professionnels de l’Ostéopathie /
Nationaal en Representatief voor de Professionele Osteopaten – Belgium*

Nederlandse Register voor Osteopathie – Netherlands

Nederlandse Vereniging voor Osteopathie – Netherlands

Norsk Osteopat Forbund – Norway

Registre des Ostéopathes de France – France

Registro de Osteópatas de España - Spain

Osteópatafélag Íslands – Iceland

Österreichische Gesellschaft für Osteopathie

Suomen Osteopaatit – Finland

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