



Osteopathy Career Choice Factsheet

Background

This study forms part of a wider project between Health Education England and the University of Winchester exploring Allied Health Professions (AHP) career choices.

An online questionnaire was disseminated to current AHP students in England (undergraduate and postgraduate) for four weeks between February and March 2021. The aim was to explore and understand key motivations, sources of influence and barriers to choosing their specific profession.

The information and findings from the questionnaire will be shared via profession specific factsheets to help shape targeted careers information and guidance. This factsheet focuses on osteopathy as a career of choice.

Osteopathy student population in England

In 2020/2021 there were approximately 1,272 active students on osteopathy courses in England. In 2021/2022 this has risen to approximately 1,309 active students.

Survey sample

- 56 osteopathy students completed the questionnaire. It is acknowledged that this represents only 4.4% of the student population in 2020/2021.
- 62.5% of the participants were female and 35.7% were male.
- This finding differs from national statistics from NHS England, who found that females comprised 55.7% of the number of qualified osteopaths working for the NHS in England in 2020/2021 with 44.3% male (Institute of Osteopathy, 2022).

Ethnicity

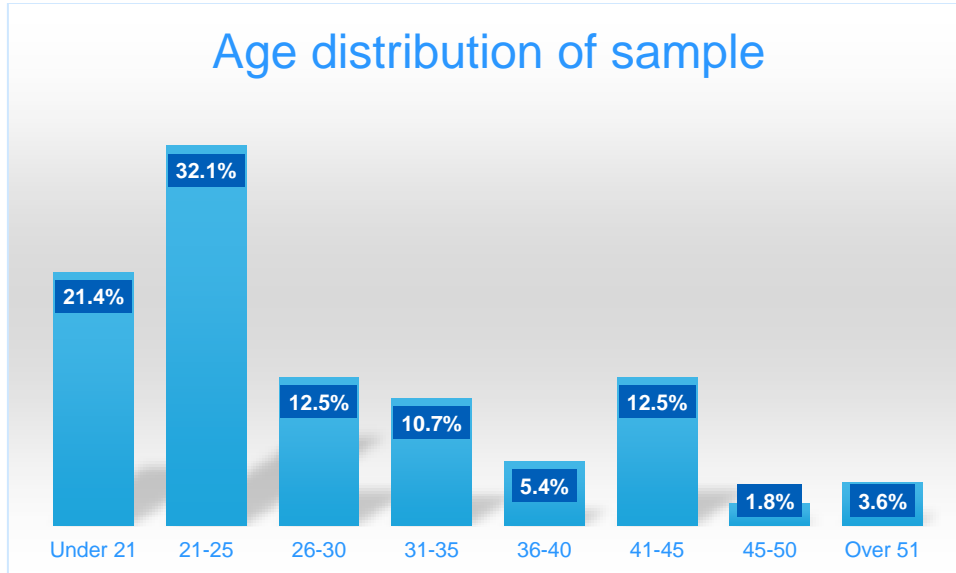
Ethnicity	Percentage of sample
White background	92.8%
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	5.4%
Asian background	1.8%

The findings from our sample (shown in the table above) are aligned with those from NHS England, who found that individuals from a white background comprised 80% of the total number of qualified osteopaths for the NHS in England in August 2021 (Institute of Osteopathy, 2022). There were no participants from Black, African, Caribbean, Arab or 'other' background in our sample.

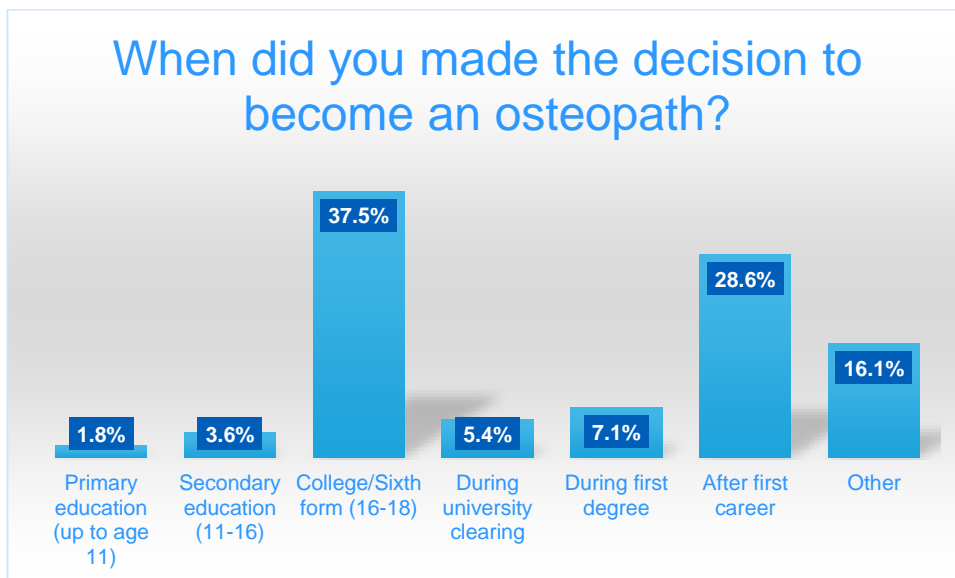
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Age and stage at which participants made the decision to become an osteopathy

- In our sample 21.4% of the sample were under 21 years of age, and 37% between 21 and 25 years of age.
- Mature students accounted for 46.5% (aged over 25 years of age); of these 28.6% were aged between 25 and 40 years and 17.9% were aged over 51 years of age.



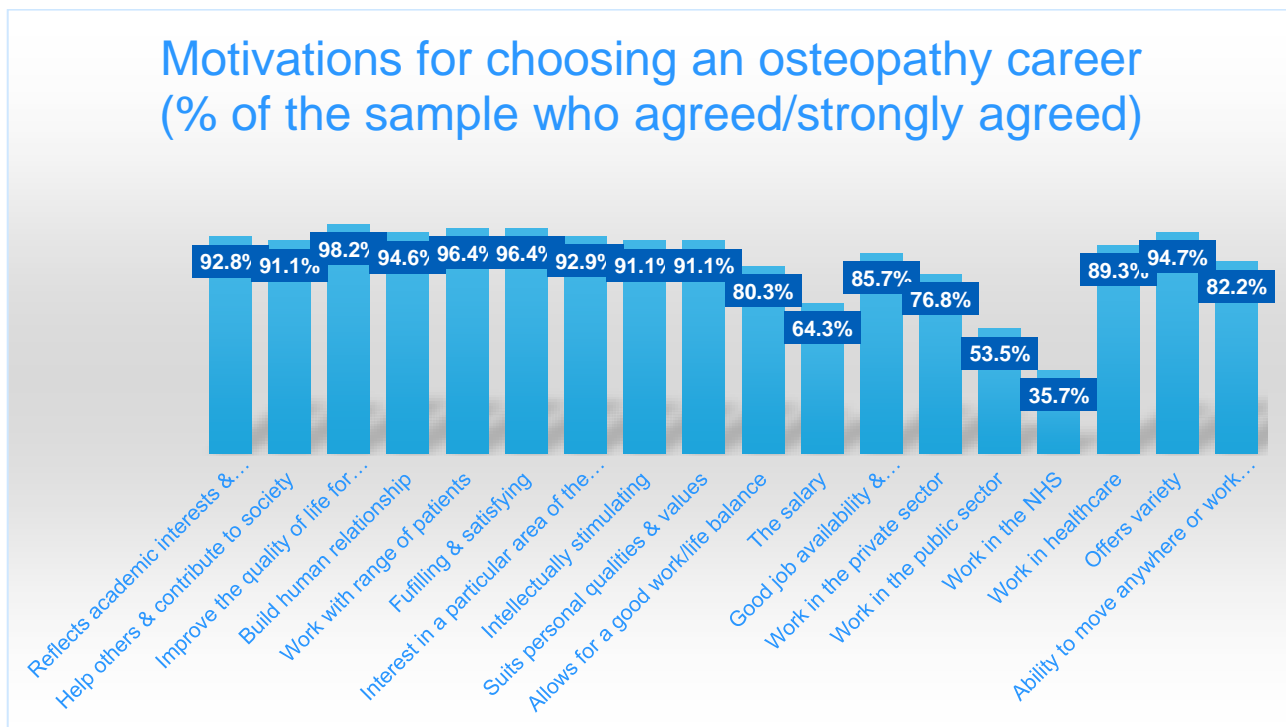
The majority of the sample (42.9%) chose osteopathy during their school education. Over half of the sample (51.8%) chose osteopathy during their first degree, after their first career or at other stages.



Motivations

Participants were asked to what extent different motivations impacted their career choice in osteopathy.

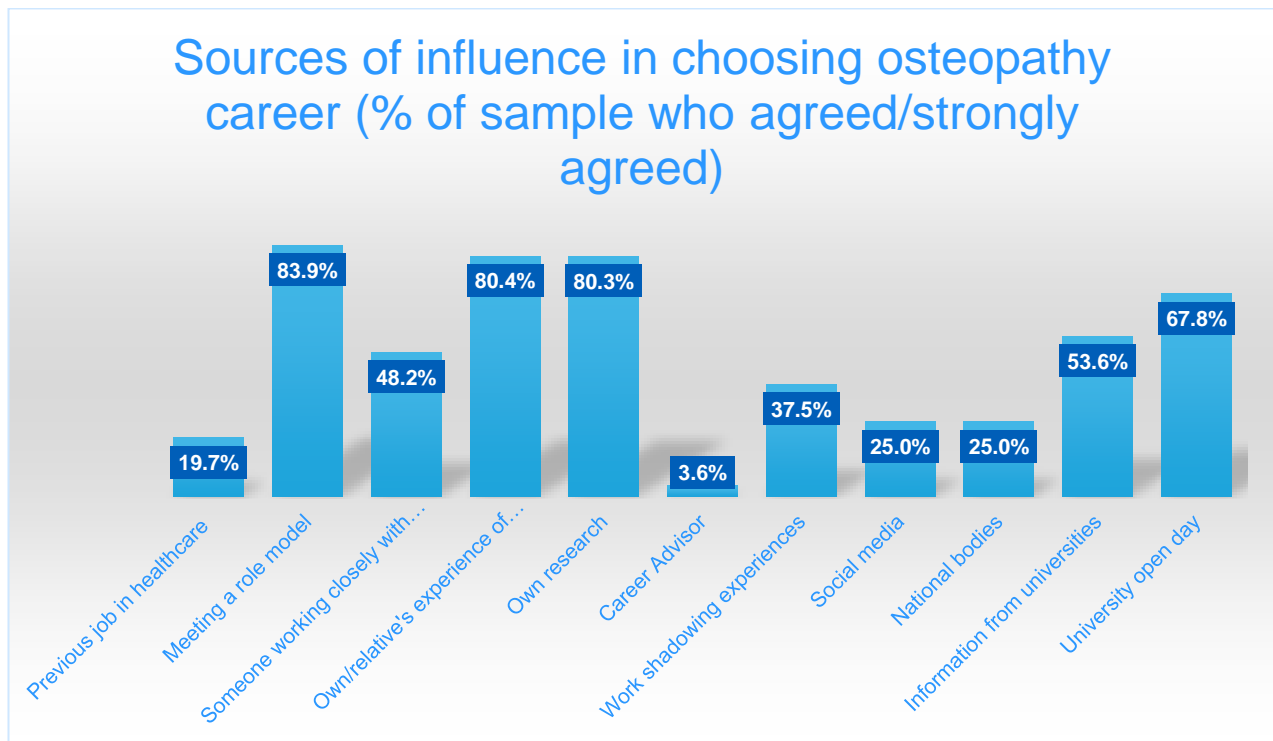
- Altruistic reasons had the highest percentages of responses; professional motivations were also important.
- A selection of the most cited motivations is shown in the figure below.
- Choosing a career ‘where I can use my skills to improve the quality of life for a patient/service user’ and ‘where I can engage in/build human relationships’ were the most popular motivations for choosing osteopathy (98.2% and 96.4% respectively of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with both statements).
- Across the 35 motivations in the questionnaire, only eight had less than 50% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the importance of the motivation.
- The perception of the nature and variety associated of the job was valued for a large percentage of the sample, e.g. choosing a job which ‘offers variety’ (94.7%), ‘allows for ‘working with a range of patients’ (96.4%). Moreover, ‘good job availability and employment opportunities’ (85.7%) and ‘regular working hours allowing for good work/life balance’ (80.3%) were also important to the participants. 64.3% agreed or strongly agreed that salary was a motivating factor.
- Choosing a career which ‘reflects academic interest and abilities’ (92.8%) and is ‘intellectually stimulating’ (91.1%) were also influential motivations for a majority of the sample.
- Participants were asked about the influence of the opportunity to work in the public and private sector. More participants agreed/strongly agreed to be motivated by the private sector 76.8% compared to 53.5% in the public sector. Interestingly, 89.3% agreed/strongly agreed working in healthcare was a motivation, however working in the NHS was only a motivator for 35.7% of the sample.



Sources of Influence

Participants were asked about the sources that influenced their osteopathy career choice.

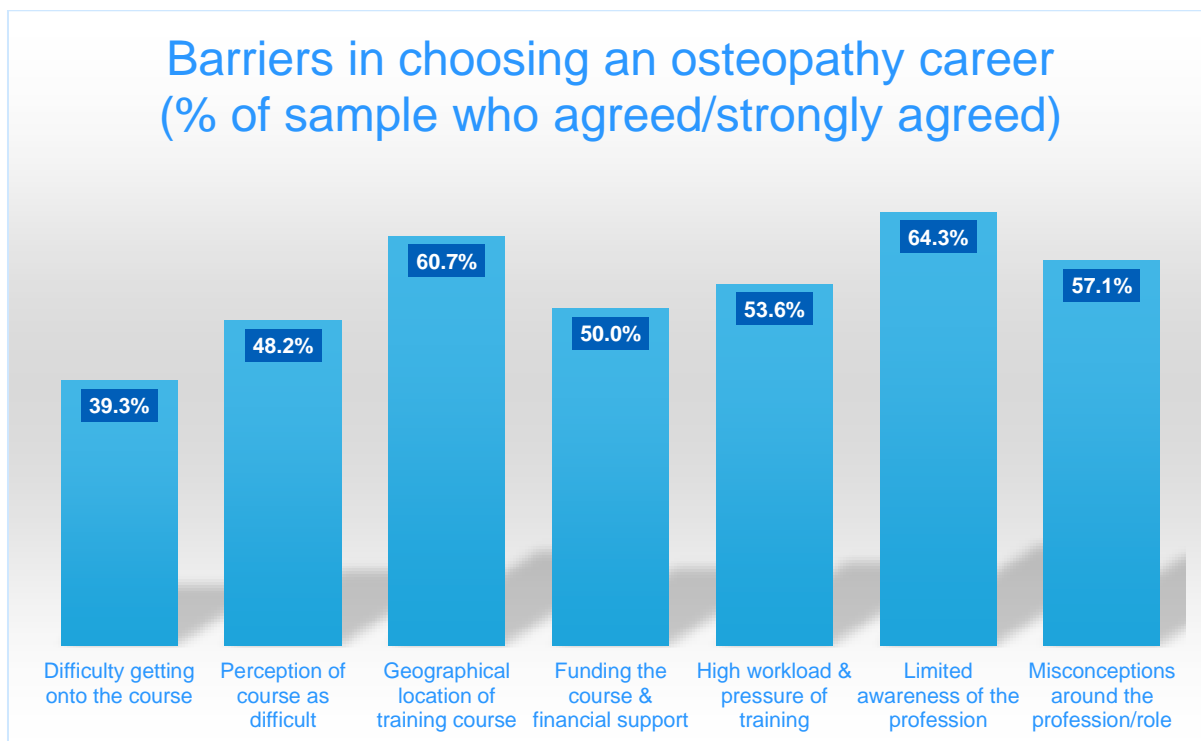
- The most influential factors were 'someone in the profession I saw/met who was a really good role model for me' (83.9% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed). Closely followed by 'conducting my own research' and 'my own experience of being a patient/a relative receiving care from the profession' (agreed/strongly agreed by 80.4% and 80.3% respectively).
- These results emphasise the influence these encounters have on individuals choosing this career. It also highlights the potentially missed opportunity for osteopaths to act as career ambassadors.
- Selected sources of influence are shown in the figure below.
- Universities play a key marketing role: 67.8% of the sample were influenced from attending university open days and 53.6% by information they received from universities. This emphasises the key role universities can play in encouraging osteopathy course applications. This could take the form of for example school outreach work. This is important as only 3.6% of the sample were influenced by career advisors.
- 25% had been influenced by social media and none of the sample had been influenced by television programmes, print or television adverts. This suggests that traditional methods of information gathering are still more influential in choosing an osteopathy career but also that this is a platform which could be utilised further.
- It was clear that the overall highest influential factors were meeting osteopaths and doing their own research, which suggest that more could be done to highlight and market osteopathy as a career.



Barriers to entering osteopathy

Participants were asked how their career choice had been affected by potential barriers to entering an osteopathy career. The participants recognised the barriers and overcame them to still choose this profession.

- The most influential barrier was 'limited awareness of the existence of the profession' (64.3% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with this statement). Followed by 'geographical location of training course', a barrier identified by 60.7%
- Most common barriers are shown in the figure below.
- Moreover, 'misconceptions around the profession and what the role involves' was seen as a barrier by 57.1% of the sample, as well as the 'high workload and pressure of training' (53.6% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed).



Additional findings

Participants were asked what they thought the public perception was of osteopathy. The question was answered by 73% of respondents. Overall public perception was that there is a lack of awareness about the profession. Many participants also mentioned the lack of recognition and respect from other NHS professions. It was highlighted that those who had used an osteopath had positive perception of the profession.

Key findings

- 43% of participants had chosen osteopathy during their school/college education degree and the remaining 51.8% after their first degree/career or later.
- 63% of the participants were female and 35.7% were male, which is a higher ratio of males than seen in other allied health professions.
- Over half of the sample (53%) were aged under 25 years, reflecting a career choice decision made early on in participants' lives.
- Altruistic reasons, as well as having a fulfilling and satisfying career were the key motivations for osteopathy.
- Meeting someone in the profession, either as a role model or being a patient themselves, were by far the most impactful source for influencing the career choice. Doing their own research also played an important role. There was a lack of influence from school education sources and career advisors, which reflect the barriers also reported of the lack of awareness about an osteopathy as a career amongst career advisors, as well as the challenges and limited access to information about a career in osteopathy.
- Public perception of the profession was seen as being generally misunderstood and there was a lack of awareness of the profession.

Recommendations

- 43% of our sample chose osteopathy during their time at school/college. Most students were influenced in the decision from meeting role models or doing their own research. For the students, their own lack of awareness of the profession, as well as lack of awareness amongst career advisors acted as barriers for many. The challenges in accessing information about an osteopathy career and a limited amount of available information of osteopathy noted by many is concerning. It is therefore of the **upmost important to increase the availability of information and to utilise sources of influence at school/college, such as career advisors, to promote the profession accurately to ensure clear understanding of the role.**
- In addition, the lack of understanding and awareness of the profession were the focus of the responses to the question of 'what do you think the public perception of the profession is?' **It would therefore be beneficial to raise awareness of the work osteopaths undertake when promoting the profession.**
- The importance of osteopathy work shadowing was influential for 38% of the sample. Voluntary work in healthcare more generally was influential for only 13% of the sample. This highlights the importance of **upscaling work experience specifically in osteopathy to help prospective students learn about the profession** as volunteering more generally in healthcare is less influential.
- Altruistic reasons were overwhelmingly the most influential motivations for choosing osteopathy. Therefore, when promoting the profession, **the altruistic aspects of the profession should be emphasised.** However, it is **also important to highlight other motivations, such as self-development and fulfilment, as well as the variety of the work of osteopaths.**
- 25% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed that social media had been a source of influence, which is very low compared to other professions. This finding suggests an

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opportunity to increase marketing via social media and provide accurate representations of what the role comprises to increase awareness of the career.

- 60% of the sample saw 'geographical location of training course' as a barrier. **Having courses offered in more locations would help attract more prospective students who may not have to option to relocate to undertake the training course.**
- Working in health care was a motivator for nearly 90% of the sample, however, working in the NHS was only a motivator for 35.7% of the sample. This suggests that some participants are unaware of the opportunities for osteopaths in the NHS and/or had negative experiences from other professionals working within the NHS. **Raising awareness of opportunity of employment in the NHS is needed and training courses should offer links to osteopaths with lived experience of working within the NHS. Opportunities for multi-disciplinary learning would also help to educate wider health and care professionals on the skills and role of osteopaths.**

Acknowledgements

This factsheet was produced by Dr Maja Fuglsang Palmer from the University of Winchester utilising the data responses from the Motivations for choosing an Allied Health Profession career questionnaire 2020. Maja was assisted by Dr Rachel Locke, Dr Lucy Wallis, Matthew Rogers, Professor Beverley Harden and Carrie Biddle. For more details, please contact Dr Maja Fuglsang Palmer: Maja.Palmer@winchester.ac.uk

References

Biddle, C. (2021). Allied Health Professions careers awareness strategy 2021 – 22, Health Education England.

<https://www.hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/AHP%20Careers%20Awareness%20-%20access.pdf>.