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23 November 2020

**Covid 19 and the consequences for students**

**on BAAB accredited programmes**

Dear Student

We trust this finds you well. We are writing to you on behalf of the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB), the body responsible for overseeing the standards of professional acupuncture courses in the UK, to reassure you that the Board is continuing to work with your course providers to ensure that you can continue progressing through your course safely to reach your goal as a graduate of an accredited course that meets the high standards required by your chosen profession. We wrote to all students on accredited courses in April, during the first national lockdown, to tell you what BAAB, in collaboration with the course providers and the British Acupuncture Council (BAcC), was doing to support your progress. The re-introduction of a national lockdown in England, where all the accredited courses are based, makes it timely to give you a further up-date.

First, we would like to say how impressed the Board has been by the magnificent way that staff and students have responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The course providers have shown enormous resource and dedication to ensure, wherever possible, that teaching and learning can continue, but in a Covid-safe environment. They could not have done this without the active collaboration of their students: you have demonstrated your commitment and professionalism by continuing to study assiduously in such trying circumstances. We recognise that some course providers have faced particular difficulties because of the continuing closure of premises, and in these cases we are working with them to ensure that you can continue to study in the best way possible.

When we wrote in April, BAcC had recently agreed exceptional arrangements for students due to graduate in 2020 to be granted provisional membership. This was subsequently extended to all students due to graduate before 1st October 2021, given the continuing difficulty students face in completing their 400 clinical hours by the expected date of graduation. This means that students due to graduate before 1st October 2021, who have completed all other course requirements and have met the expectations of the Standards Of Education and Training for Acupuncture (SETA), may be granted full BAcC membership, providing the following conditions are met:

1. Course providers must be confident any graduating students applying for BAcC membership are able to practice safely.

2. Course providers must continue to log these students’ clinical hours, in the expectation that within a four month period, the full 400 clinic hours will have been completed.

3. Course providers may utilise the final 40 hours of clinical practice via ‘indirect supervision’, as long as the guidelines in the BAAB Accreditation Handbook are fully met.

4. Graduating students applying for BAcC membership are provided with documents to submit to the BAcC evidencing:

• the number of clinical hours already completed

• the plans for completing any remaining hours

The Board recognises that the restrictions resulting from practicing in a Covid-safe environment make it very difficult for students to observe clinical practice. The Board has therefore agreed that thirty hours of video consultation can be included in the clinic hours, under the following circumstances:

1. Video consultations where students observe a supervisor taking a case with a patient, and take part in a subsequent session of case analysis and clinical reasoning.

These sessions can be live-streamed to students in another part of the building, or at home or a mixture of these settings. All students attending remotely should be actively involved in the subsequent discussion, and supervisors are expected to engage these remote students as well as students taking part on site.

This opportunity can include observing members of the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (RCHM), many of whom also practice acupuncture and are BAcC members. If observations with RCHM members are arranged, the course provider’s clinical acupuncture supervisors should also attend to lead or support the subsequent session of case analysis and clinical reasoning.

2. Video consultations where the consultation forms part of the appointment, with the patient then coming into clinic to receive a physical examination and acupuncture treatment.

This opportunity can count towards observation hours for any students involved online. For senior students carrying out the consultation and the subsequent treatment, the hours can count toward the final 200 hours of taking responsibility for patients.

The allowing of video consultations is a temporary measure which will be reviewed in 2021, and is subject to the following conditions:

1. A minimum of 400 hours of clinical practice for each student continues to be maintained and recorded.

2. A confidentiality and data protection statement, in line with all the requirements of the GDPR, are in place to cover any video consultations, with particular attention to any recording of the session. Recorded sessions should be destroyed once they have been viewed by the students for whom the recording is initially intended.

3. Patients and students involved in being video streamed are fully aware they will be observed, made aware of the confidentiality and data protection statement, and given a choice to take part or not. Consent must be verified by a signed consent form.

Besides this change, BAAB has agreed that, while the pandemic continues, your course provider can change arrangements for teaching, assessment, and other aspects of your course, provided that the basic standards for accreditation are met. This enabled course providers to respond quickly and effectively at the start of the pandemic, moving teaching and assessment online without having to go through a detailed approval process. We have asked them to inform us of these changes, so we can assure this.

There continue to be mixed messages about the future course of the pandemic. However, it seems highly likely that education and clinical practice will be required to implement Covid-safe provisions for many months to come. In this light the Board will continue to review the special arrangements outlined above, but will keep them in place for as long as necessary. We are committed to enabling you to continue your education whilst maintaining the high standards of entry to the profession, and we believe that we are achieving that balance.

On occasion, students contact us with concerns about the action their course provider is taking in response to Covid-19. May we remind you that your course provider has mechanisms in place to consider and act upon student feedback; and, where necessary, you have access to your course provider’s complaints procedure. Only in exceptional circumstances, e.g. where there was evidence that the accreditation standards were not being met and a student was unreasonably refused access to their course provider’s complaints process, would BAAB consider intervening.

We would like to take this opportunity to mention that BAcC has a new staff member, Steve Rainbird, the Membership Manager, overseeing student affairs. Steve is keen to develop stronger links with BAcC’s student members, and is discussing with your course providers how to do this most effectively.

We hope this offers you some reassurance as we all enter a new phase with the country soon to emerge from lockdown again. Your road to graduation will continue to be challenging, but we have no doubt you have chosen a wonderful profession that will offer many years of career satisfaction. You will continue to have the support of BAAB and BAcC in the months and years ahead.

Best wishes,



Professor Mike Saks, Chair, BAAB

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Harriet Lansdown, Lead Accreditation Officer, BAAB