

**General
Chiropractic
Council**



Pye Tait
Consulting

Perceptions of preparedness of chiropractic graduates for practice 2017 Summary Report

The General Chiropractic Council (GCC) commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to undertake a study and evaluation of the preparedness of chiropractic graduates for practice. The findings were reported upon in September 2017 and are based on views received from (number of respondents in brackets):

- Employers and colleagues working with new registrants (140)
- Newly qualified chiropractic practitioners or NQPs (60)
- Final year students (31)

The purpose of the study was to evaluate:

- the extent to which individuals who complete a recognised chiropractic degree programme are perceived, and perceive themselves to be prepared for practice, including meeting the GCC's Code and Standards.
- the support available, and perceptions of the usefulness of this support in helping with the important transition from student to newly qualified chiropractic practitioner.

This short research study began by reviewing available literature on preparedness in order to identify typical methods of design and topics. Similar studies conducted in comparable sectors were identified and their thematic approach adapted to chiropractic.

- The research comprised stakeholder and provider interviews (10) and online surveys for employers/colleagues, newly qualified practitioners and final year students (3).
- Follow-up interviews with the Royal College of Chiropractors (RCC) and employers (20) examined newly qualified practitioners in handling of patients and the voluntary Post-Registration Training (PRT) available to new graduates on successful completion of a chiropractic degree programme.

The thematic basis was drawn from the literature review and broadly comparable research studies. Five main themes with similarly worded-questions emerged and allowed for a comparison of perceptions from employers, newly qualified practitioners and final year students. The themes identified were:

1. clinical knowledge and skills;
2. levels of confidence in applying those skills;
3. the degree programme in preparation for practice;
4. entrepreneurial and business skills;
5. the transition phase in terms of support from student to newly qualified practitioner.

Application of the GCC's Code of Conduct was also explored with employers and newly qualified practitioners.

Overall perceptions point to employers feeling new registrants are generally prepared for practice. A few specific areas are noted below as potential exceptions. Newly qualified practitioners appear largely content with their preparation for practice, as is broadly the case for students in their final year, the latter have some understandable minimal reservations.

In summary:

1. Most employers and newly qualified practitioners offer some indication on what they felt being prepared for practice involves. Both groups explicitly mentioned being safe and referenced confidence and competence. It was acknowledged that mistakes are likely in early days of practice.
2. Employers understand being prepared for practice involves patient care and good communication. The research suggests they perceive new registrants to be good at the former but less good at the latter. Newly qualified practitioners agree with preparedness for practice being about patient care/management, patient safety and communication. Final year students talk about being safe and competent in practice. They also mentioned confidence.
3. 64 % of employers feel that newly qualified practitioners are very well or sufficiently prepared for practice: 84% of newly qualified practitioners reported feeling very well or sufficiently prepared for practice.
4. Newly qualified practitioners rate the chiropractic degree course at 7.2 (out of 10) in terms of preparation for their first job, and students rate it at 7.9 (out of 10).
5. Employers, newly qualified practitioners and students all agree that the clinical skill in which new registrants are most prepared is '*obtaining consent from a patient*'. Employers and students agree that the second top clinical skill in terms of feeling most prepared '*is taking a patient's history*'.
6. Employers and newly qualified practitioners agree that the least prepared clinical skills are: knowing when and how to make referrals, developing and documenting a plan of care, applying therapeutic psychomotor and condition management. Students agree, although they also state they have a perception of being least prepared in legislation relating to chiropractic care (e.g. imaging).
7. Employers were ready to comment on the additional skills they perceive newly qualified practitioners to be well prepared in. However, conversely they frequently highlighted that newly qualified practitioners exhibited poor communication skills (45% of those 81 employers providing responses).

8. The findings suggest employers feel newly qualified practitioners are generally good on clinical skills but weak on business/commercial skills.
9. Newly qualified practitioners and final year students feel most confident about their communication skills with patients, a skill that employers feel somewhat more anxious about in relation to this group.

Recommendations

In summary, the recommendations in the report relate to the following broad areas:

1. Repeating the research to measure progress

Repeat the research to measure change and contrast responses across target audiences, supplementing the survey research with student focus groups for qualitative detail.

Extend and explore the scope of future research to include investigation of challenging situations and communication skills.

2. Consider a mandatory postgraduate training scheme (subject to legislative change)

Consider using the existing PRT as a mandatory training scheme for all newly qualified practitioners, recognising this would be subject legislative change. Provide guidance to employers/registrants on mentoring practice and other areas of good practice in supporting the transition.

3. Developing newly qualified practitioners' communication skills

Increase the number of work placement, mentoring and role-playing opportunities by which graduates can further develop vital communication skills.

4. Ensuring that the course content sufficiently covers key patient-centred skills

This includes those areas identified as weakest in newly-qualified practitioners: when and how to make referrals; developing and documenting a plan of care; applying therapeutic psychomotor and condition management and legislation relating to chiropractic care.

5. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Widen opportunities for, and encourage greater take-up amongst newly qualified practitioners of mentoring, shadowing and other forms of development to broaden experience, which could include CPD and PRT.