

# Review of Traditional Chinese Medicine Training and Education Systems in the UK

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As we know, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) mainly refers to Acupuncture, Chinese Herbal Medicine (including dietary therapy), Tuina and Qigong. In the UK, acupuncture among the above is the most popular and acceptable therapy with the public and Chinese Herbal Medicine is the second. Based on this situation, schools/colleges in the UK mainly provide acupuncture training courses but, in recent years, Chinese Herbal Medicine training has been added to some school/college teaching programmes. However, we need to know that, in the UK, there are different forms/types of acupuncture training courses:

## Forms/Types of Acupuncture in the UK

- A. Five Element Acupuncture: the Initial form of acupuncture training in the UK was provided by private schools/colleges and offered five element acupuncture, which uses the TCM concept of five element theory in order to diagnose and treat. However, with the Chinese Government Open Door Policy beginning in the early 1980s, more and more people travelled to China to study TCM and more Chinese TCM doctors came to the UK to practice. This provided good opportunities for Westerners to learn Traditional Chinese Acupuncture (TCA) systematically and wholly. Gradually, people have realised that, five element acupuncture is just a tiny part of Traditional Chinese Acupuncture. To date, the schools/colleges which provided five element acupuncture training only have tended to widen their curriculum to encompass the whole of TCA.
- B. Traditional Chinese Acupuncture: TCA is the main stream form of acupuncture which is widely provided in universities and private schools/colleges. Due to political reasons and sensitivities, one of the leading acupuncture professional bodies in the UK does not use the term TCA, preferring to use the more vague term “oriental acupuncture” or “oriental medicine” in their official documents. However, TCM theory is widely applied to training and practice in the UK.
- C. Western Medical Acupuncture: This type of acupuncture is mainly used to treat musculoskeletal pain, including myofascial trigger point pain (<http://aim.bmj.com/content/27/1/33>). Training and membership is only open to those with Western Medical qualifications (i.e. doctors, physiotherapists etc). The British Medical Acupuncture Society (<http://www.medical-acupuncture.co.uk/>) is their professional body.

In addition in this area, there is the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists (<http://www.aacp.org.uk/>), operated by qualified physiotherapists who are interested in integrating acupuncture into mainstream physiotherapy for the management of pain and systemic conditions (<http://www.aacp.org.uk/about-us>)

## **Types of Degree/Diploma for TCM Training in the UK**

Current Traditional Chinese Medicine training in the UK is a mixture of the following formats:

- A. TCM training courses provided within the university system (Higher Education): these types of courses are validated by the university and accredited by one of the leading professional bodies in the UK. University courses offer BSc Degrees with Honours, Postgraduate Diplomas or Master Degrees.
- B. TCM training provided by private colleges: a majority of these have been validated by a university and accredited by one of the leading professional bodies in the UK. They usually offer BSc Degrees with Honours, Postgraduate Diplomas or Masters Degrees. There are also a small number of private colleges running courses accredited by professional bodies but without university validation. These courses offer Diploma Certificates.

Please be aware that, in the UK, the British Acupuncture Council (BACc) is the de facto primary professional body for traditional acupuncture practitioners. Acupuncture courses in most of the universities and private colleges are under the accreditation of the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) which independently runs course accreditation on behalf of BACc. BACc has no requirement for private colleges to be validated by a university as long as they meet BACc's standard of curriculum.

European Herbal & Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association (EHTPA) is the primary professional body for herbal practitioners including Chinese Herbal Medicine, Western herbal medicine and Ayurvedic medicine etc. In the UK, only two Universities have Chinese Herbal Medicine training courses and they have both been approved by EHTPA Accreditation Board. They require that any herbal courses run by private colleges must be validated by a university. There are no Chinese herbal training courses in private schools currently accredited by EHTPA Accreditation Board in the UK.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture UK (ATCM) is also one of the largest voluntary regulatory professional bodies in the UK for the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is a rising star and with its membership mainly drawn from ethnic Chinese TCM practitioners.

- C. Short TCM training courses: these are provided by some private colleges without accreditation by any leading professional bodies in the UK.

## **Standards of Education and Training for Acupuncture (SETA)**

As mentioned earlier, British Acupuncture Council is one of the leading professional bodies in the UK and its Accreditation Board has accredited most of the acupuncture schools in the UK. They have produced SETA, which includes:

- practice context;
- Diagnosis and treatment;
- Communications and interaction;
- Safety;

- Professional development;
- Business management

Furthermore, SETA also requires that the overall length of courses must not be less than three years full-time or the part-time equivalent. The hours must be based on a three-year total of 3,600 hours but no less than one-third of 3,600 must be contact hours. Of the 1,200 staff-student interactive/contact hours, a minimum of 400 hours must be spent in a clinical setting. Students must spend a minimum of 200 hours being responsible for the personal management of patients through all aspects of treatment. For more information, please see appendix A

### **Standards of Education and Training for Chinese Herbal Medicine**

In the UK, European Herbal & Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association (EHTPA) is one of the leading bodies, which has produced a core curriculum for herbal and traditional medicine and is recognised as having a good standard for Chinese Herbal training including guidelines for the following:

- Module content
- Study time
- Module levels
- Assessment

Taking study time as an example, the following table gives the minimum number of hours to be incorporated into the programme to be accredited:

<b>MODULE</b>	<b>HOURS</b>
Human Sciences	250
Nutrition	80
Clinical Sciences	350
Plant Chemistry and Pharmacology	80
Pharmacognosy and Dispensing	100
Practitioner Development and Ethics	150
Practitioner Research	150
Clinical Practice	500
The Specific Herbal Tradition	1,150
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,810</b>

For more details, please see appendix B

### **Limitation and Challenges**

#### **A. No statutory regulation in the UK**

In Europe, UK was the first country to provide TCM training within a university setting (Higher Education). However, in recent years, there are at least 3 acupuncture courses in universities that have closed down. The main factor is due to no state regulation (statutory regulation), although increases in tuition fees is another factor. The downside of no statutory regulation is that students may choose cheaper, shorter

courses over more expensive, longer university courses which could potentially lead to a decline in standards of TCM training. This is why there are so many weekend short courses available. For the public, it is difficult to identify which clinics are operated by well qualified practitioners and which ones are not. This is a really worrying situation in the UK and is potentially harmful to the public.

#### B. Lack of scientific evidence

Lack of appropriate scientific-based research to support the efficacy of Traditional Chinese medicine. This is due to acupuncture and traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine involving individualised treatment based on an holistic approach which means standardised treatments and outcome measures of effectiveness are difficult to provide. For example, currently there is no suitable placebo control for acupuncture research.

### **Suggestions**

There are definitely increasing demands for Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine by the public in the UK. However, there are also many scientist groups and state regulated health professions who are against TCM. This often due to a perceived lack of scientific evidence and professional protectionism. Therefore, our duty is not only to train people to master TCM theory but also transform it with modern scientific evidence so as to be widely accepted by national health systems. To carry out appropriate TCM research is one of the priorities for us. These need to be run as a network, collaborating with other health professions, with China and cross Europe.