



COUNCIL FOR THE PROFESSIONS
COMPLEMENTARY TO MEDICINE

Benchmarking document

Acupuncture

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine is issuing this Benchmarking Document for Acupuncture in the performance of its functions as defined by Article 27 of the Health Care Professions Act, Chapter 464 of the Laws of Malta and in terms of Article 28 Health Care Professions Act, Chapter 464 of the Laws of Malta and Subsidiary Legislation 454.16 Professions Complimentary to Medicine (Licence to Practice) Regulations.

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Introduction

This benchmarking document outlines the standards of education and language proficiency for acupuncturists as dictated by CPCM (the Council for the Professions Complimentary to Medicine in Malta).

CPCM regulates the complimentary health care professions including acupuncture.

The standards aim to reflect the expectations for practice & training of acupuncturists in Malta at different levels within the context of the national and EU legislation.

The standards are the result of a review of the education standards and language proficiency of acupuncturists guided by WHO (the World Health Organization) in line with international standards.

The benchmark is adopted by the CPCM to assess all applications for registration as acupuncturists within the jurisdiction of Malta and to address substantive differences from various levels of acupuncturists. These are guided by EU Directive 2013/55/EU on the recognition of professional qualifications and regulations as well as WHO resolution (WHA56.31)

In Malta, acupuncture is governed by general legal provision, through The Health Care Professions Act (Chapter 464) and The Medical and Kindred Professions Ordinance (Chapter 31)

Description and Scope of Practice

Occupational Description

Acupuncturist is a registered profession within CPCM (Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine in Malta).

Acupuncture is an important and integral part of the Traditional Chinese Medical system (TCM), which is recognized by the WHO (World Health Organization) as the oldest existing therapeutic system.

Acupuncture can be used to treat various medical conditions without side effects. When practiced by qualified acupuncturists correctly, acupuncture helps to protect and improve patients' health effectively by rebalancing ZangFu, Yin-Yang & Qi, restoring physical functions and mental balance as well as optimizing well-being.

Scope of Practice

Each and every one of acupuncturists should have certain level of medical knowledge including but not limited to, that of human anatomy, nutrition, physiology, pathology and radiology.

Mainly through TCM principles of meridians, Zang-Fu, Yin-Yang & Qi balance, acupuncturists make diagnoses, sometimes aided by laboratory tests and radiology images, before using fine acupuncture needles to treat the symptoms and underlying causes.

Diseases and disorders that can be treated with acupuncture and recognized by WHO are listed in Annex B.

Diseases and disorders that can be treated with acupuncture Published by World Health Organization Complete document available at:

<http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/pdf/s4926e/s4926e.pdf>

Meeting the Standards

It is imperative that acupuncturists must put patients' safety and wellbeing first, and that the standards to practice safely, lawfully and most effectively are met at all times.

As an autonomous professional, an acupuncturist in practice is expected to take reasoned & informed clinical decisions, exercising prudent judgment and, if in doubt or in complex situations, seeking advice from other professionals including colleagues and radiologists, referring patients to colleagues or other medical specialists in the best interest of the patients.

Level of Qualification

According to WHO guidelines, acupuncturists' training programmes must take the following into consideration:

- Content of the training;
- Method of the training;
- To whom and by whom the training is to be provided;
- The roles and responsibilities of the future practitioner; and
- The level of education required in order to undertake training.

WHO experts recommended at least two types of training programmes for acupuncturists, depending on prior qualifications and clinical experience of the trainees.

Type I is aimed at those who have completed high school/secondary education or equivalent but have no prior medical or other health training or experience. These trainees are required to study a full TCM programme, covering the basic theories of TCM including acupuncture, as well as the knowledge and skills required for safe practice of acupuncture and relevant research.

This Type I training programme needs to be full time, and of a duration of at least 3 to 4 years, offered by an appropriately equipped institution recognized by relevant Maltese authority and regulatory bodies, such as NCFHE (National Commission for Higher and Further Education), Medical Council of Malta and CPCM.

The training duration is of a minimum 1800 to 2400 hours, consisting of at least 1200 to 1560 hours of theory and clinical practice plus 600 to 900 hours of supervised clinical practice, out of which, minimum 160 hours real time practicum should be in acupuncture.

These are the professional entry levels into the Acupuncture Register, with a Diploma in TCM including acupuncture (MQF/EQF1 Level 5, 1800 hours) or Bachelor's degree in TCM including acupuncture (MQF/EQF1 level 6, 2400 hours).

The Type II training programme is aimed at those with prior medical and or other health related (MQF/EQF1 Level 5 or Level 6) qualifications (e.g. medical doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, midwives, etc.) who wish to provide acupuncture service. Trainees are to study the theories of TCM and acupuncture for one year (full time) to three years (part time), or equivalent, to satisfy all requirements included in Type I programme. The curricula could be flexible depending on the health professionals' training background, hence the one to three years requirement.

CPCM understands that, in line with the Bologna Process Agreement in Europe, a course of one-year/ 3-semester on TCM & Culture leading to a Master's degree (MQF/EQF1 Level 7) in Acupuncture has been offered since 2015 at the University of Malta. In such cases, the safety and health of patients must be guaranteed and thus it is imperative that the standards stipulated in this benchmarking document must be met.

It is understood that this Type II training programme aims to be in keeping with the standard expected. There may be some circumstances giving rise to concerns, such as when trainees whose prior health-related study background (e.g. social workers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, nursing aides, etc.) does not cover relevant subjects which are essential for acupuncturists when making correct clinical diagnoses independently.

They could have obtained 90 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulations System) credits to graduate with a Master degree in Acupuncture, this does not necessarily equate to the graduates being capable of independent clinical practice, because each ECTS credit is defined as 25 hours of student workload, thus 90 ECTS credits are considered as equivalent to 2250 hours of workload.

So, although academically the ECTS credits are reached; clinically, the real time spent in theory study and clinical exposure cannot possibly be obtained to ensure the standard of acupuncture practice. Therefore, the requirement by CPCM is that those above mentioned applicants (who were not medical doctors, not registered physiotherapists, not licensed nurses & not licensed midwives), after completing the Type II training successfully, to obtain required hours in real time (160 hours) and in real clinical environment supervised by a qualified and fully registered acupuncturist.

Language Proficiency

The CPCM requires those applicants who wish to enter the Acupuncture register, to provide proof of language proficiency as defined in Annex A.

An acupuncturist needs to have language skills for effective communication with patients and other medical practitioners.

Evaluation of Application

On evaluation of the applicants to register as acupuncturists, the CPCM may choose to do one of the following with unanimous agreement of the Acupuncture Sub-Committee:

- Grant full registration;
- Grant conditional registration;
- Ask for further clarification when required;
- Ask for the applicant to attend an interview and undergoing an aptitude test with CPCM Acupuncture Sub Committee;
- Reject the application if the qualification is not in line with this benchmark; and
- Reject the application but allow the applicant to carry out a period of supervised practice until further review.

Minimum Curriculum Requirements

This benchmarking document ensures that the curriculum meets the standards for professional knowledge, skills and aptitude as expected nationally & internationally. The programmes must reflect the TCM philosophy, core TCM theories, diagnoses & acupuncture skills and essential medical knowledge to ensure that an applicant can practice safely and effectively.

Practice and Training

This benchmark concerns Clinical Practice. The Clinical Practice refers to supervised clinical practice with real patients in a diverse clinical setting. This should be accompanied by evidence, such as a practice and competence portfolio which is examined and approved by CPCM.

The evidence of the Clinical Practice must be clear and distinguished from classroom practice.

The expectations of meeting these standards of education are that an independent acupuncturist can perform without guidance or clinical supervision and manage patients with simple or complex conditions, consistently, proficiently and effectively; is logical and clear in clinical reasoning; able to consult with or refer to colleagues and other medical specialists to resolve unfamiliar or ambiguous situations in the best interest of the patients.

Other CPCM documents to be considered in conjunction with this Benchmarking Document:

1. Codes of Professional and Ethical Conduct

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/Codes%20of%20Professional%20and%20Ethical%20Conduct%20-%20March%202019.pdf>

2. Code of Practice (Acupuncture)

<https://deputyprimeministercms.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/copacupuncture.pdf>

3. Legal Notice 277 of 2008

Health Care Professions Act (CAP. 464) Professions Complementary to Medicine (Licence to Practise) Regulations, 2008

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/legal%20Notice%20277%20of%202008%20-%20Licence%20to%20Practice.pdf>

4. Subsidiary Legislation 464.16

S.L.464.16 - Professions Complementary to Medicine (Licence to Practise) Regulations, 2009

[https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/S.L%20464.16%20-%20Professions%20Complementary%20to%20Medicine%20\(Licence%20to%20Practise\)%20Regulations.pdf](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/regcounc/cpcm/Documents/S.L%20464.16%20-%20Professions%20Complementary%20to%20Medicine%20(Licence%20to%20Practise)%20Regulations.pdf)

5. ANNEX A

Language Proficiency Requirements by The Council for The Professions Complementary to Medicine (CPCM)

6. ANNEX B

Diseases and disorders that can be treated with Acupuncture (WHO publications)

Diseases and disorders that can be treated with acupuncture Published by World Health Organization Complete document available at:

<http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/pdf/s4926e/s4926e.pdf>

ANNEXE A

Language Proficiency Requirements by The Council for The Professions Complementary to Medicine

The Council for the Professions Complementary to Medicine requires applicants to meet the Council's level of Proficiency in the English or the Maltese Language.

All professionals seeking registration are requested to present either one of the following:

1. A Maltese language certificate; **OR**
 - (i) An Ordinary Level MATSEC certificate (MQF level 3); OR
<https://myexams.gov.mt/matsec-examinations/>
 - (ii) An Advanced/Intermediate Level MATSEC certificate (MQF level 4); OR
<https://myexams.gov.mt/matsec-examinations/>
 - (iii) A Medical Maltese Proficiency Certificate.
<https://www.um.edu.mt/arts/malti/korsijiet/medicalmaltesecourse>
2. The applicant can provide evidence that his/her professional qualification(s) (on the basis of which he/she is applying for registration) was/were acquired through the medium of English or Maltese and that practice placements in that/those qualification(s) were undertaken and supervised through the medium of English or Maltese; **OR**

3. The applicant can provide evidence that s/he has **lived in and practised** his/her profession through the medium of English or Maltese in a country that has English or Maltese recognised as the official language of that country for a period of **not less than 2 years in the past five-year period; OR**
4. Any other proof of English or Maltese language Proficiency.

Additionally, should the applicant choose to opt for other forms of proving language proficiency, the applicant can opt for either one of the following Secure English Language Tests.

Should the applicant opt for this, the below is the list of Examining Boards recognized by the Council and the minimum required standards accepted by the Council in terms of the table below (or equivalent);

Examining Board	TOEFL Internet-Based (iBT)	IELTS (Academic)	Cambridge	Occupational English Test (OET)
Required Level	95	6.5	Advanced Certificate	B
Remarks	A writing score of at least 24 is required.	Required with a minimum of 6.0 in all elements.	A pass at a grade C or better is required.	A grade B or better is required in all components.

Any other Secure English Language Tests which are equivalent to those mentioned in the table above will also be considered.

ANNEXE B

Diseases and disorders that can be treated with Acupuncture (World Health Organisation Publications)

1. Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which acupuncture has been proved—through controlled trials—to be an effective treatment:

- Adverse reactions to radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy;
- Allergic rhinitis (including hay fever);
- Biliary colic;
- Depression (including depressive neurosis and depression following stroke);
- Dysentery;
- Dysmenorrhoea;
- Epigastralgia (primary, acute in peptic ulcer, acute and chronic gastritis, and gastro-spasm);
- Facial pain (including cranio mandibular disorders);
- Headache;
- Hypertension;
- Hypotension;
- Induction of labour;
- Knee pain;
- Leukopenia;
- Low back pain;
- Malposition of fetus;
- Morning sickness;
- Nausea and vomiting;
- Neck pain;
- Pain in dentistry (including dental pain and temporo mandibular dysfunction);
- Periarthritis of shoulder;

- Postoperative pain;
- Renal colic;
- Rheumatoid arthritis;
- Sciatica;
- Sprain;
- Stroke; and
- Tennis elbow.

2. Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which the therapeutic effect of acupuncture has been shown but for which further study is needed:

- Abdominal pain (in acute gastroenteritis or due to gastrointestinal spasm);
- Acne vulgaris;
- Alcohol dependence and detoxification;
- Bell's palsy;
- Bronchial asthma;
- Cancer pain;
- Cardiac neurosis;
- Cholecystitis, chronic, with acute exacerbation;
- Cholelithiasis;
- Competition stress syndrome;
- Craniocerebral injury, closed;
- Diabetes mellitus, non-insulin-dependent;
- Earache;
- Epidemic haemorrhagic fever;
- Epistaxis, simple (without generalized or local disease);
- Eye pain due to subconjunctival injection;
- Female infertility;
- Facial spasm;
- Female urethral syndrome;
- Fibromyalgia and fasciitis;

- Gastrokinetic disturbance;
- Gouty arthritis;
- Hepatitis B virus carrier status;
- Herpes zoster (human (alpha) herpesvirus 3);
- Hyperlipaemia;
- Hypo-ovarianism;
- Insomnia;
- Labour pain;
- Lactation, deficiency;
- Male sexual dysfunction, non-organic;
- Ménière disease;
- Neuralgia;
- Neurodermatitis;
- Obesity;
- Opium, cocaine and heroin dependence;
- Osteoarthritis;
- Pain due to endoscopic examination;
- Pain in thromboangiitis;
- Polycystic ovary syndrome;
- Stein–Leventhal syndrome;
- Postextubation in children;
- Postoperative convalescence;
- Premenstrual syndrome;
- Prostatitis, chronic;
- Pruritus Radicular and pseudo radicular pain syndrome;
- Raynaud syndrome;
- Primary Recurrent lower urinary-tract infection;
- Reflex sympathetic dystrophy;
- Retention of urine, traumatic;
- Schizophrenia Sialism;
- Drug-induced Sjögren syndrome;
- Sore throat (including tonsillitis);

- Spine pain;
- Stiff neck;
- Temporomandibular joint dysfunction;
- Tietze syndrome;
- Tobacco dependence;
- Tourette syndrome;
- Ulcerative colitis;
- Chronic Urolithiasis;
- Vascular dementia; and
- Whooping cough (pertussis).

3. Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which there are only individual controlled trials reporting some therapeutic effects, but for which acupuncture is worth trying because treatment by conventional and other therapies is difficult:

- Chloasma;
- Choroidopathy, central serous;
- Colour blindness;
- Deafness;
- Hypophrenia;
- Irritable colon syndrome;
- Neuropathic bladder in spinal cord injury;
- Pulmonary heart disease, chronic; and
- Small airway obstruction.

4. Diseases, symptoms or conditions for which acupuncture may be tried provided the practitioner has special modern medical knowledge and adequate monitoring equipment:

- Breathlessness in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease;
- Coma;
- Convulsions in infants;
- Coronary heart disease (angina pectoris);
- Diarrhoea in infants and young children;
- Encephalitis, viral, in children, late stage; and
- Paralysis, progressive bulbar and pseudobulbar.

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