



Podiatry 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 podiatry as a career of choice.

Podiatry student population in England

There are currently approximately 866 active students on podiatry courses in England.

Survey sample

- 115 podiatry students completed the questionnaire.
- 87% of participants were female and 13% were male.
- This finding was fairly representative of qualified podiatrists in the UK registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) with 76.2% female and 23.8% male (HCPC, 2019).

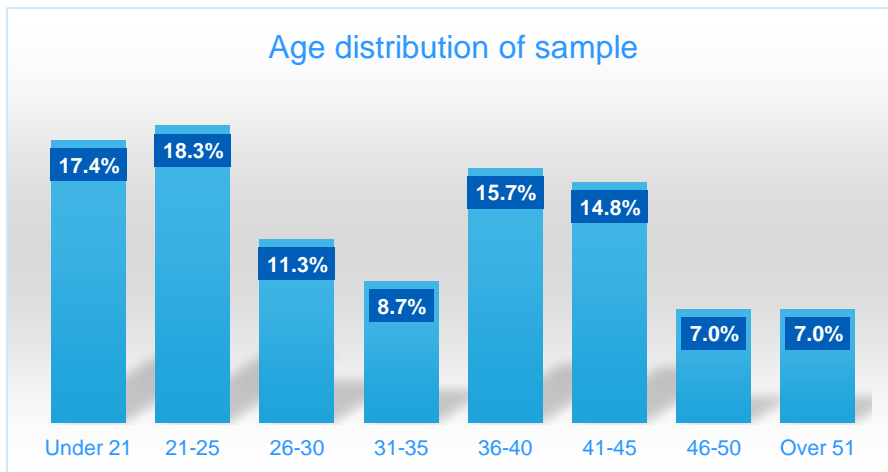
Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Percentage of sample
White background	74.8%
Asian background	12.2%
Black, African and Caribbean background	8.7%
Arab background	1.7%
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	1.7%
Other	0.9%

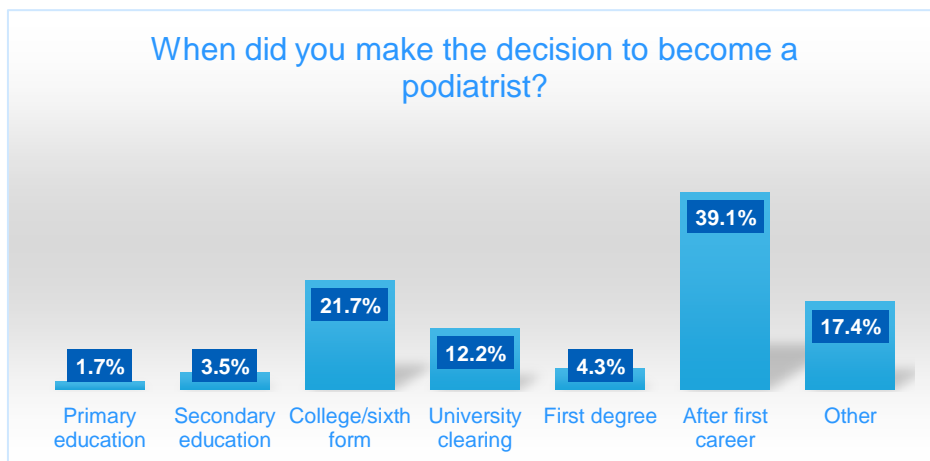
Although our sample comprised mainly white individuals, the diversity of ethnicity of undergraduate students in England studying podiatry increased in 2017-18, in comparison to 2016-17 (Office for Students, 2019a). However, this could be accredited to the 35% decrease in white entrants to podiatry courses.

Age and stage at which participants made the decision to become a podiatrist

- In our sample, 64.5% of students were over 25.
- In 2016/2017, 45% of students beginning a podiatry undergraduate course in England were over 25 years of age (Office for Students, 2019b).
- 28.8% of the sample were over 40 years of age.



- 39.1% of the sample were choosing to become podiatrists after their first career. Only 26.9% of the sample had chosen podiatry during their school education.



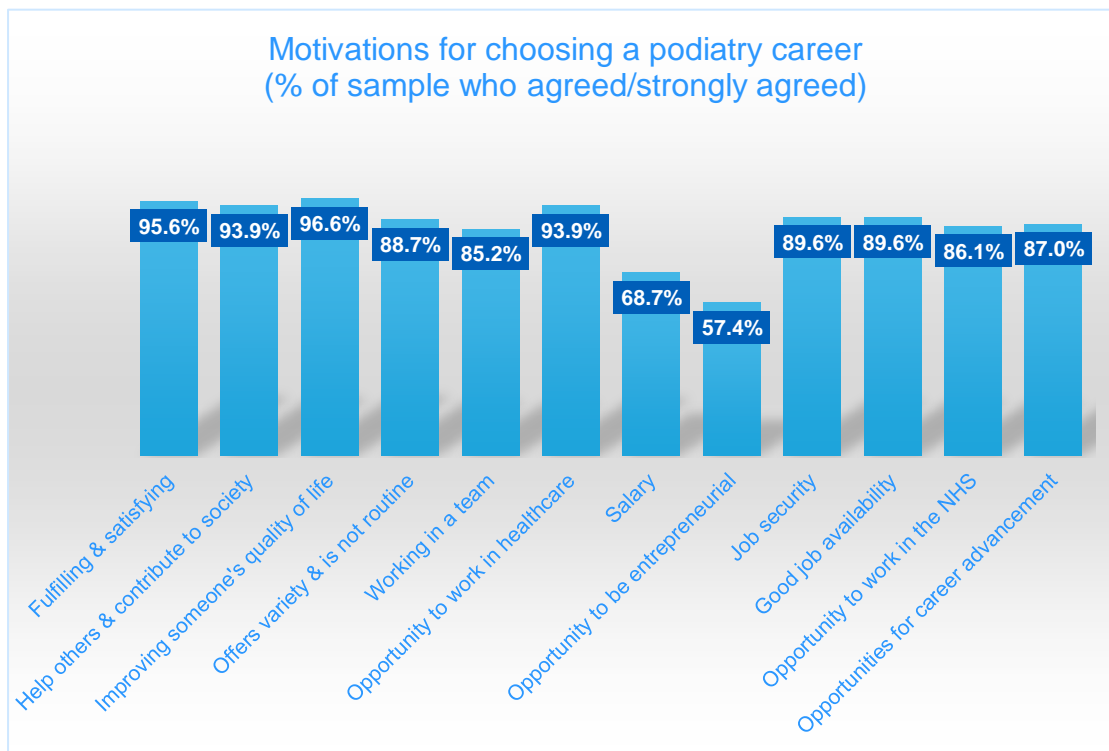
Motivations

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

- Choosing a career 'where I can use my skills to improve the quality of life for a patient/service user' was the most popular motivation for choosing podiatry (96.6% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with this statement).
- Most common motivations are shown in the graph below on page 3
- Across the 35 motivations in the questionnaire, only four had less than 50% agreeing/strongly agreeing with the importance of the motivation.
- Altruistic reasons had the highest percentages of responses, professional motivations were also important.

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- Only 53.1% of the sample strongly agreed/agreed that they chose podiatry for its 'good public image and prestige'. This may suggest that prestige is not important to the sample or that podiatry is not seen as having a good public image.



- Choosing a profession that 'reflects my academic interests/abilities' was important for 83.4% of this sample and one that is 'intellectually stimulating' (88.6%). This finding highlights the importance of career advisors (explored below) having knowledge of podiatry to encourage school/college students down this career path.
- Participants were asked about the influence of the opportunity to work in the public and private sector. The public sector scored only slightly higher: 81.8% to 78.2%. It was interesting that only 57.4% of the sample chose podiatry to be entrepreneurial and yet 78.2% were motivated by working in the private sector. This suggests that other aspects of the private sector are motivating students beyond the business/entrepreneurial motivation.

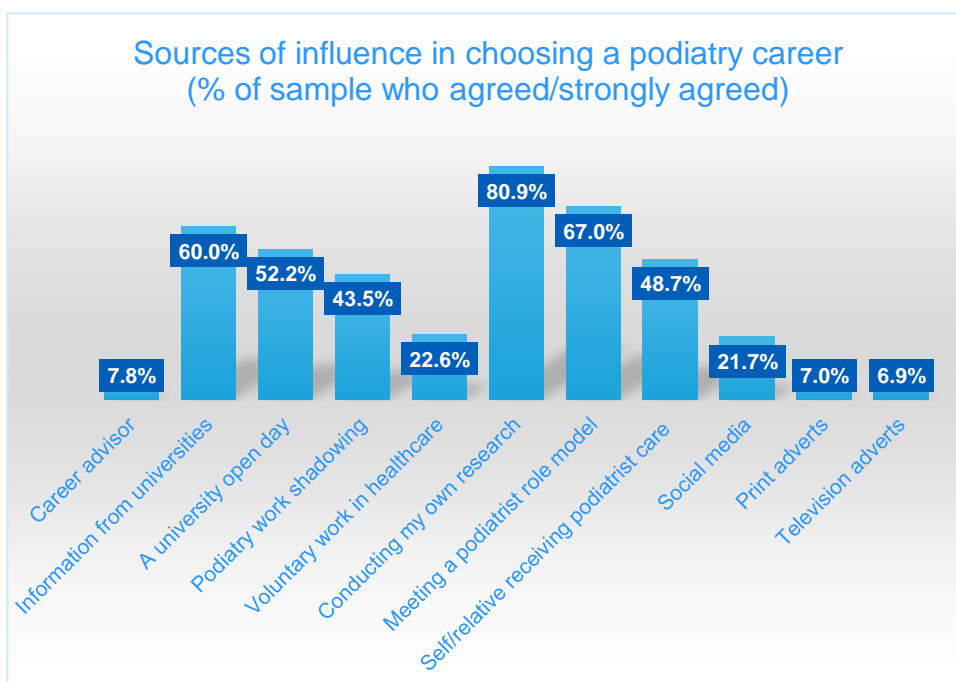
Sources of Influence

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

- The two most influential factors were personal sources: 'conducting my own research' (80.9% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed) and 'someone in the profession I saw/met who was a really good role model for me' (67%).
- Selected sources of influence are shown in the graph below on page 4.
- All personal sources scored higher than educational sources (all 20% or below). Most media and marketing sources were influential for less than 25% of the sample.
- Universities play a key marketing role: 60% of the sample were influenced by information they received from universities. This emphasises the key role universities can play in encouraging podiatry course applications. This could take the form of school outreach work. This is made more vital considering only 7.8% of the sample being influenced by career advisors.

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- Podiatry work shadowing experiences was influential for 43.5% of the sample. The importance of work shadowing was highlighted by many participants as being important before choosing podiatry. Voluntary work in healthcare settings generally only influenced 22.6% of the sample.
- Nearly 50% of the sample being influenced by receiving treatment from podiatrists themselves or a relative shows the impact on patients of watching podiatrists perform their role.
- Only 21.7% had been influenced by social media. This suggests that more traditional methods of information gathering are still more influential in choosing a podiatry career but also that this is a platform which could be utilised more. The low percentage being influenced by television adverts is likely due to their only recent introduction.



Barriers to entering podiatry

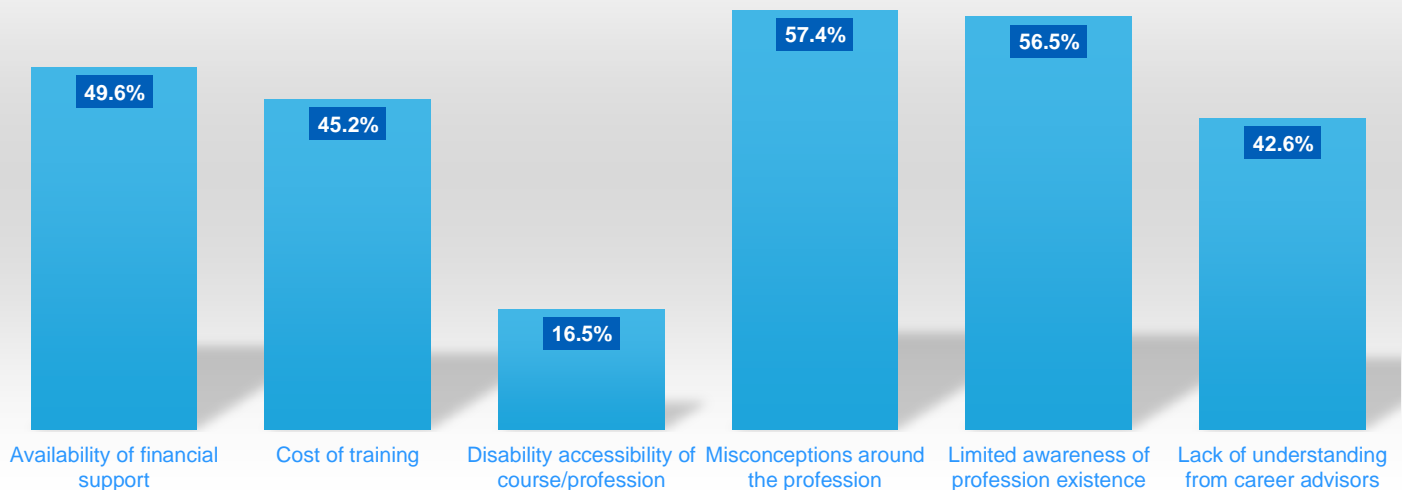
Participants were asked how their career choice had been affected by potential barriers to entering a podiatry career. The participants had recognised barriers and overcame them to still choose podiatry.

- The most influential barrier was 'Misconceptions around the profession and what the role involves' (57.4% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed with this statement).
- Most common barriers are shown in the graph below on page 5.
- Although each barrier was not chosen by a high percentage, most barriers were chosen by 30-50% of the sample.
- Financial barriers were seen as a concern by almost half of the sample. This suggests that communication surrounding financial support available for podiatry students' needs to be strengthened.
- Interestingly, 42.6% of the sample disagreed/strongly disagreed that 'limited amount of information about the profession available' was a barrier but 38.3% agreed/strongly agreed that it was. This suggests that effective signposting to information about a podiatry career is still needed.

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- Although a lower percentage in comparison to other barriers, 16.5% of the sample agreed/strongly agreed that 'a concern around accessibility of the course/profession in terms of physical or mental disability' was a barrier. 10% of the sample reported having a disability and therefore it is important that this message is addressed to potential podiatry students.

Barriers to choosing a podiatry career (% of sample who agreed/strongly agreed)



Additional findings

Participants were asked what they thought the public perception of podiatry was. The question was answered by 52% of respondents and the most frequent response was that the public were unaware of podiatrists. Additionally, there was a perception that the public did not understand podiatrists' scope of practice and they have a negative response to working with feet.

Key findings

- **Individuals are choosing to become podiatrists at many different stages and ages.**
- **Altruistic reasons were the key motivations for choosing podiatry.**
- **Personal sources of influence, such as meeting a podiatrist or conducting research, were the most important sources of influence. Overall, educational, media and marketing sources scored low in terms of influence.**
- **A lack of awareness and information were identified as the key barriers to choosing podiatry.**

Recommendations

Changes in employment circumstances and priorities because of the Covid-19 pandemic may mean that individuals are looking for a career change (Biddle, 2021). Additionally, the number of students entering podiatry after a first career is relatively high. Therefore, **marketing targeted at those looking for a career change is key**. For example, Health Education England (HEE) have produced career change videos and written case studies with allied health professionals (including a podiatrist) who previously worked in the armed forces about their experiences (HEE, 2020).

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- The low impact of educational sources as a source of influence in choosing podiatry is troubling. This could help explain the relatively high number of students over the age of 25 joining podiatry courses as they are not discovering the profession at school/college. Only 7.8% of the sample stated that a career advisor had influenced their choice of podiatry. **This suggests that career advisors need to be engaged to promote the profession to younger people.** Promotional work to increase the publicity of podiatry especially in schools and colleges *has* been introduced such as the WOW Show. However, introduced in July 2019, it is unlikely to have had an impact on this sample, but this intervention should help increase podiatry awareness at an earlier age.
- Findings from this study have highlighted the transformational influence on individuals spending time with podiatrists on their decision to study podiatry:

Podiatry work experiences were influential for 43.5% of the sample. Therefore, **upscaling work experience is critical** to recruitment to podiatry to help ease the reliance on discovering podiatry through a chance interaction or treatment from a podiatrist.

However, 48.7% of the sample had been influenced by themselves/a relative receiving podiatry treatment. **Qualified podiatrists therefore should be helped to recognise their roles as career ambassadors when meeting patients.** The age range of podiatry students suggests that interactions with patients of all ages is a potential recruitment opportunity.

Acknowledgements

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

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