

24th September 2013

The SMA - Short/Intensive courses

Dear Colleague,

Part of our remit when we were created 11 years ago was to help ensure that education standards in the soft tissue industry were standardised and improved -- during the intervening period we have worked with Awarding Organisations and training providers to ensure that those objectives are achieved.

SMA Core Standards suggest that a Level 4 qualification is run over a minimum period of 6 months and includes a 100 hour practise logbook. The reasons for this are extremely sound ensuring the development of well qualified therapists, with good hands on skills, who have had the opportunity for reflection and practise over a minimum period of time. The model has proved sound over more than 10 years, and the reality is that many courses are run over a much longer period than 6 months.

Unfortunately the current lack of clarity over what constitutes Guided Learning Hours, and the fact that they are not recognised as part of the quality control process, has resulted in an ambiguous situation that has helped to open the door for courses being delivered in unacceptably short timescales.

We do understand the commercial imperatives involved here, and the practicalities of Awarding Organisations policing all of their training centres and the strictures you work under, but we have a responsibility to the industry and to the general public -- a responsibility which may become more acute, as Professional Associations such as ourselves have the opportunity to become 'regulators' via the Professional Standards Authority accredited registers initiative. What we want to avoid is a 'race to the bottom' with training providers churning students through short courses and turning out graduates who are a risk to the public and the profession. There is also a credibility issue for the profession and for us as a Professional Association -- short courses devalue the profession and cast doubt on the integrity of our register.

We have been impressed with all of our dealings with Awarding Organisations, and have worked (and do work) with many of you in different capacities. So we know there is a real desire to improve standards -- we are sure we can work together on this issue. However, what we have at the moment (in some examples) is a situation where a training provider may meet Awarding Organisation requirements, but they may not meet our requirements as a Professional Association. We have a choice -- which is to either lower our standards and accept graduates from ever shorter courses or make a stand. We have decided to take the latter course. Where we are aware of courses being run in what appear to be unacceptably short timescales we reserve the right to decline membership subject to further investigation. We will of course exercise a degree of discretion where courses are close to meeting our requirements or where a graduate can satisfy us of their competence to practice on the general public.



Last year Sports Massage Practitioners worked (by invitation) alongside Physiotherapists, Osteopaths and Chiropractors at the 2012 games -- statutorily regulated professions with degree level academic requirements -- and we were massively successful in raising the profile of the profession. The SMA lobbied for inclusion in the Games, recruited the practitioners and managed the process from beginning to end -- you will appreciate, we hope, that we cannot afford to compromise that hard won ground by passively accepting the direction some training providers appear to be taking.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Paul Medicott'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Paul Medicott MSMA
Director and Chairman