

Acupuncture and the role of the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB)

Acupuncture has a long history as a healthcare practice and continues to thrive in the modern world as an effective way to support health and wellbeing. This guide explains the roots of acupuncture, how it is practised today, and the role of the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) in maintaining high standards for acupuncture education and professional practice in the UK.

Understanding Acupuncture as a Treatment Modality

Acupuncture is a key component of Chinese medicine, which operates on an integrative model of human health. Diagnosis within this system focuses on understanding the individual as a whole, rather than merely labelling a disease. Signs and symptoms—whether physical, mental, or emotional—are interdependent and considered in the context of a dynamic system.

Treatment involves stimulating specific acupuncture points on the body to promote healing. This is most commonly achieved using fine needles, but other techniques, such as warming, applying pressure, or using a mild electrical current, may also be used. The overarching goal of acupuncture is to restore healthy functioning, traditionally described as “restoring the flow of qi.” Modern research increasingly explains these effects through mechanisms like neurophysiological signalling, endorphin release, and autonomic balance restoration.

Research and Evolution of Acupuncture

Over the past two decades, acupuncture research has expanded exponentially, with over 13,000 studies conducted in 60 countries. This growing body of evidence supports acupuncture as a safe and effective treatment for a range of health conditions, including pain management, stroke rehabilitation, anxiety, sleep disorders, and pregnancy care.

Acupuncture has continually evolved, with distinct styles emerging from different traditions and communities. These include Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Five Element Acupuncture, Stems and Branches, Japanese Meridian Therapy, and Western Medical Acupuncture (WMA). Despite their differences, these styles share common principles, reflecting acupuncture’s rich and diverse heritage. The British Acupuncture Council (BACc) and BAAB embrace this plurality under the ethos of “unity in diversity.”

The Professional Acupuncturist

Professional acupuncturists in the UK, particularly members of the BACc, are educated to degree level, with comprehensive training in theory, practice, and research. They are equipped to make Chinese medicine diagnoses, devise safe treatment strategies, and engage with patients using both traditional and conventional medical language.

This patient-centred approach emphasises the uniqueness of each individual, ensuring that treatments are tailored to personal needs rather than generic diagnoses. This perspective sets acupuncture apart as a holistic, adaptable, and integrative form of healthcare.

The Role of the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB)

The Establishment of BAAB

BAAB was established in 1990 as a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to advancing acupuncture education in the UK. It worked closely with the British Acupuncture Council (BACc), which was formed in 1995 as the lead professional body for traditional acupuncture. In November 2025, BAAB became an integrated function of the BACc, strengthening the relationship between education, professional standards and public protection while maintaining independent accreditation decision-making.

BAAB is responsible for accrediting degree-level acupuncture programmes. Graduates of these accredited programmes are eligible to join the BACc, ensuring they meet the highest standards of professional competence and ethical practice. BAAB's Board and committees are composed of both professional and lay members who oversee the accreditation process and ensure adherence to the **Threshold Standards** outlined in our accreditation Handbook.

The Purpose and Activities of BAAB

BAAB's primary purpose has always been to foster high standards in acupuncture education and to support the development of new and existing course providers. Our specific aims include:

- 1. Ensuring High Standards of Education**
Developing and maintaining robust criteria to ensure the quality and safety of professional education.
- 2. Providing Assurance to Stakeholders**
Demonstrating to the public, higher education institutions, and other agencies that accredited programmes produce competent, knowledgeable, and ethical practitioners.
- 3. Encouraging Institutional Self-Improvement**
Supporting reflective and critical evaluation through tools such as the **Annual Monitoring Audit Forms (AMAFs)**.
- 4. Supporting Course Providers**
Offering guidance and assistance to new and existing programmes to ensure they meet accreditation standards.
- 5. Championing inclusive teaching, learning and assessment**
Promoting respect, fairness, and effective communication between providers and students.
- 6. Encouraging Innovation**
Supporting diversity and creativity in course design, aligned with the **Quality Assurance Agency's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications**.

These aims have been redefined as part of our 2022-25 strategic plan. More details about our current strategic ambitions can be found on the website and within the course leader's handbook.

A Developmental Approach to Accreditation

BAAB has always taken a supportive approach to accreditation. From the moment a formal relationship is established, we provide guidance and resources to help course providers achieve and maintain the required standards. This collaborative method ensures that educational institutions are not only compliant but also continuously improving.

For more information about how we currently carry out our remit, please see our website and or download our **Accreditation Handbook**.