

Another one bites the dust: Are we witnessing the demise of our profession?

Phillip Ebrall

Narrative: In October 2023 the former *Anglo-European College of Chiropractic*, at that time a degree-granting 'University College', announced its merger with another University College, formerly the '*British School of Osteopathy*'.

The matter was meant to be a low-key, under-the-radar event and the announcement was widely distributed several days before 9 October under embargo to that date and time.

However the embargo became a smoke-screen meant to control the narrative by being unilaterally broken earlier by the Osteopaths as they embedded the plan on their web site. McCoy Press ran with the story on Saturday Melbourne (Australia) time and this Journal followed suit on Sunday 8th October Melbourne time.

Events of this significance can not be kept from the global profession in the name of comfortable spin and we present, with references, what is known at this time.

This Journal also attempts to provide a context for what can only be described as a blatant sell-out of the principles of Chiropractic as it was founded in 1895. We implore the resultant entity to now completely remove any reference to Chiropractic in the programs it delivers as they move forward in this unholy alliance.

The former *Anglo-European College* is not and now can never be a '*Chiropractic College*'; it joins the *Welsh Institute* as a provider of small-c chiropractic education, yet will no doubt continue with the accreditation of the GCC which is lacking any intellectual capacity to discern the substance which warrants accreditation as a '*Chiropractic College*'. In turn, this renders the GCC as a fault-line which must be addressed by the profession in the name of survival.

Indexing terms: Chiropractic; accreditation; Anglo-European University College; AECC; education; Professional Identity; Future planning.

Editorial

The unquestionable weakness associated with the delivery of Chiropractic education is the inability of the Discipline to retain control of what is taught and in particular, determination of the performance capabilities of graduates entering the profession. The concern sweeping the profession globally from 3pm British time Monday 9 October is the announcement that the *Anglo-European University College*, whose name no longer references *Chiropractic* is integrating with the *University College of Osteopathy* to form a new entity meant to serve both disciplines.

As an historian who examines the Chiropractic profession through the lens of Pragmatism I have been struggling for some time to reconcile matters in the

... first it was RMIT which abandoned Chiropractic education, and now it is the former Anglo-European College of Chiropractic which has walked away from educating Chiropractors with a purity of purpose ...'



United Kingdom where it seems an incestuous bone-setter mentality (1) entwines accreditors, regulators, and providers. Both Christopher Kent (2) and I (3) have expressed concerns, along with others, (4, 5)

Here I examine the meanings of this announcement in terms of the survival of the Chiropractic Profession.

The matter of an embargo

The press release from the AECC University College (which was presumably a College of Chiropractic) was headed '*News release is under strict embargo until 3pm Monday 9th October 2023*'. You will see this in the release as included with this editorial. However on Friday 6th October it was evident that one of the two parties to this embargo had pre-released knowledge of it. (6) In media terms, and in accord with the ethics of journalism, an embargo no longer has weight when it is broken by one or more of the parties that request the embargo. When this was put to Professor Lesley Haig, Vice-Chancellor of AECC University College, her reply obfuscated the matter saying '*The press release relates to a formal position agreed by the Boards at both University Colleges having signed heads of terms and is totally different to the website notice posted by UCO several weeks ago*'. (7)

We note the press release carrying the embargo specifically relates to '*a formal position agreed by the Boards at both University Colleges having signed heads of terms*' and we have chosen to not report on this, but to rather report on the broader meaning behind the Osteopath's earlier unilateral announcement that they are acting to secure their survival as an institution. (6)

In plain language the argument was being mounted by Haig that the information from the Osteopaths about saving their skins as an educational institution had no meaning towards what was scheduled for announcement on Monday. Journalists can see through such smokescreens and thus this Journal took the position that the embargo has been broken and the story could now be told. Hence this editorial, 24 hours ahead of any planned 'formal' announcement.

We also note that the astute news staff of *McCoy Press* have reported the story. (8) And a '*story*' this matter is, as it speaks loudly to the devolution of Chiropractic as a profession which remains reliant on quality education delivered with respect for the principles of the profession as established by DD Palmer and currently reinforced by Richards (9) but unfortunately published behind the costly paywall of a history association

I have previously termed Chiropractic Education as the profession's '*killing fields*' (10) and *Anglo-European College*, not matter how they style themselves, have become the current killing fields of our profession.

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 9. Richards DM, Emmanuel E. Recovering Chiropractic through Systems Thinking. *Chiropr Hist*. Winter 2022/23;42(2):14-26. By subscription only.
 10. Ebrall P. Changing chiropractic's subluxation rhetoric: Moving on from deniers and vitalists to realists, post-realists, and absurdists. [Revised]. *Asia-Pac Chiropr J*. 2023;3.3. URL apcj.net/Papers-Issue-3-3/#EbrallRhetoric.

The truth about AECC

The *Anglo-European College of Chiropractic* stems from the efforts of Robert Beech in the 1960s. (11) It accepted its first students in September 1965, graduating some in 1969, with many having left due to being disheartened '*by early teaching problems*'. (11, p. 76). Perhaps its more noted academic is Alan Breen, a 1967 graduate of CMCC who moved to AECC in 1986 to eventually become a *Professor of Musculoskeletal Research*. (12) Among his publications are some 50 held in the *Index to Chiropractic Literature*.

Eventually the private college as AECC gained 'Taught Degree Awarding Powers', and in turn *University College* status from 05 September 2017: (13) '*These achievements indicate a mature institution, and one that no longer requires another higher education institution to validate the courses it offers*'. (14)

To reach the status of a University College the Chiropractic program became just one of many to be delivered. In the one hand this appeared healthy as the institution is well-resourced to teach and research across many fields of human endeavour, while on the other it outgrew the purpose of Chiropractic education, sublimating it to be just another program alongside physiotherapy, and now also osteopathy.

It was around 2015 that AECC took the position to deny the existence of the subluxation in Chiropractic. (15) I am not surprised by this now I understand that the Vice Chancellor of this sub-university institution is not a Chiropractor, but a physiotherapist. (16)

Can a Chiropractic College teach Osteopathy?

The first answer to whether a former Chiropractic college can now teach Osteopathy lies in understanding Palmer's writings and his on-going distancing from Andrew Still, the American founder of Osteopathy. Palmer made abundantly clear the distinction between his methods and those of Still; the two are incompatible and the philosophies divergent.

The second answer lies in appreciating the crude history of bone-setting in the UK as given by Wilson (1) and the appreciation that British Osteopathy is a completely different beast to American Osteopathy. The American stream arose from the teachings of Still and built its own professional pathways with educational institutions before selling out to the medical juggernaut and becoming an integrated stream of the medical behemoth. In contrast British Osteopathy was developed slowly by eccentric bonesetters who coalesced to form the *British School of Osteopathy* which in a grandiose gesture also became a *University College* and now finds itself in an unsustainable position due to a lack of students. (6)

The AECC University College has made the simple business decision to absorb the remnants of British osteopathy in the belief it will strengthen its own profile in the form of the programs and courses it delivers.

This is not the first time

In Australia in the late 1980s the Head of the School of Chiropractic at *Phillip Institute of Technology*, Andries Kleynhans, decided it could 'strengthen' the School's position within that institution by commencing a program of osteopathy. We know how this has ended up; following

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12. 019- SPINE DYNAMICS, SPINE CONTROL AND CHIROPRACTIC WITH DR. ALAN BREEN. *Chiropractic Science*. n.d. <https://chiropracticsscience.com/tag/dr-alan-breen/>.

13. We built a University College. AECC University College. <https://www.aecc.ac.uk/news/archive/we-built-a-university-college/>.

14. AECC University College. About us. <https://www.aecc.ac.uk/about/>.

15. Innes S. European Schools Sign Anti-Subluxation Position Statement and Declare Subluxation a Historical Concept and High Volume Wellness Not Acceptable. *COCA News*. 2015;June:14.

16. Lesley Haigh. AECC University College. Biography. <https://www.aecc.ac.uk/about/who-we-are/executive-staff/lesley-haig/>.

absorption into RMIT the Chiropractic program was killed-off while the osteopathic program has been retained.

Mind you, this is a far better outcome for the Chiropractic profession as I have previously stated; (17) it would have been untenable had RMIT suggested the two disciplines merge.

However Australia also provides the lesson of the *Sydney College of Osteopathy*, which became the *Sydney College of Chiropractic and Osteopathy*, (18) and is now the *Department of Chiropractic* (19) in an organisational unit at *Macquarie University* alongside medicine. (20) Small-c chiropractors see this as proof our status is now equal to that of medicine; I see it as being shark food and one step away from absorption.

The Chiropractic program now delivered beside medicine is headed by an Osteopath, Rosemary Giuriato, 'Doctor of Osteopathy, Sydney College of Chiropractic and Osteopathy'. (21) Giuriato remains registered as an Osteopath in Australia at the time of writing.

Australia's other weaknesses lie in the program at CQUniversity sitting under a Dean who is a Doctor of Physical Education, (22) and with Murdoch University where the program is led by a graduate of the *University of Johannesburg*, (23) a signatory to *The European-South African-Australian Education Collaboration statement* (24) which denies the existence of subluxation.

What does this all mean?

At the time of writing this Editorial opinion the political tragi-comedies of the global Chiropractic profession are winging their way to Australia's Gold Coast for a week of self-congratulatory feel-good at the WFC Congress designed with a Scientific meeting to add political gravitas. Many will leave believing in the invincibility of Chiropractic in this, its 'Shiny new millennium'. (25)

As noted 28 years ago, I am not so sure and hold fast to my caution we are close to a new Dark Ages where Chiropractic education in particular loses its Palmerian validity.

There is great momentum in many existing clinical practices around the world but these will see out their life-span over the next 30 or so years.

To ensure the profession maintains a strong steam of new graduates who will carry forward those ideals held dear by about 80% of the profession who are Conventional, (26) Realist (27) Chiropractors, the discipline needs to step back and take a serious look at the small unravellings which have happened in this month alone.

RMIT's extinction and AECC's shift into obscurity must be heeded as the early warning signs of the emerging success of the Iowa Plan and the profession's pending demise. On the other hand ...

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The profession's blessings

In this same month the *Scotland College of Chiropractic* (28) commenced with its first, solid cohort of students. Its mission is 'to educate, empower, and inspire great people to excel as chiropractors'. This Journal celebrates the work of Dr Ross McDonald and notes the College is an approved Academic Partner of Buckinghamshire New University (BNU), which validates its MChiro degree programme. This is an excellent symbiosis where Chiropractors retain control of their curriculum under the auspices of a reputable university.

We also note the *Barcelona College of Chiropractic* (29) has, this month, welcomed its newest cohort, perhaps the largest yet. Having just graduated its 10th (30) it is clearly here to stay. We celebrate their mission 'to inspire and educate chiropractic professionals'. It is very positive to know that British and European students have two strong, purpose-driven colleges to choose from to become a principled Chiropractor.

Those in Australasia also have two private colleges to choose between, first the well-established *New Zealand College of Chiropractic* (31) which has been 'Graduating hands, hearts and minds' since 1994. Second, the *Australian Chiropractic College* (32) which is no longer the new kid on the block now that Scotland is open. As noted previously (17) the ACC has greater expectations thrust upon it with the closure of RMIT. We all hope it can manage this with great success.

Our future is precious

While closures and mergers may suggest doom and gloom with a drift towards political medicine achieving its stated goal to eliminate Chiropractic, I personally hold the view that what we are seeing is a weeding out of the weak and irrelevant, leaving those colleges with a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to the fundamental premise of Conventional Chiropractic in the realist manner of the Palmerian system of thinking, to become our profession's thought leaders and the incubators of our future.

We must do all we can to support their work.

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29. Barcelona College of Chiropractic.. Home. <https://bcchiropractic.es/en/>.

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31. New Zealand College of Chiropractic. Home. <https://chiropractic.ac.nz/>.

32. Australian Chiropractic College. Home. <https://acc.sa.edu.au/>.

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGO

News release is under strict embargo until 3pm Monday 9th October 2023

AECC University College and University College of Osteopathy Announce Proposed Merger

Specialist health sciences institutions AECC University College (AECC UC) and the University College of Osteopathy (UCO) are delighted to announce a proposal to merge the two institutions.

The proposal is announced following Board of Governor approval at both institutions to seek to bring together two unique specialist providers to offer a unique inter-disciplinary environment for education, clinical practice and research in osteopathy, chiropractic, and across a wide range of allied health and related disciplines.

The partnership is set to unlock significant opportunities for growth and development by bringing together the two specialist institutions' significant expertise and resources across two locations – in Dorset and central London.

As a joint statement, Chair of the Board of Governors at AECC UC, Jeni Bremner and Chair of the Board of Governors at UCO, Professor Jo Price commented:

“We believe the proposed merger would further the institutional ambitions for both of our organisations and the related professional groups, by allowing us to expand our educational offering, grow student numbers and provide a unique inter-disciplinary training environment, providing students the opportunity to be immersed in multi-professional practice and research, with exposure to and participation in multi-disciplinary teams.

“There is also an exciting and compelling opportunity to expedite the development of a nationally unique, and internationally-leading MSK Centre of Excellence for Education and Research, developed and delivered across our two sites.”

Established as the first chiropractic training provider in Europe, AECC UC has been at the forefront of evidence-based chiropractic education, practice and research for more than 50 years. The institution is on an exciting journey of growth and development, having expanded and diversified its academic portfolio and activity beyond its traditional core offering of chiropractic across a broad range of allied health courses and apprenticeships, working closely with NHS, local authority and other system partners across Dorset and the south-west. The proposed merger with UCO would allow AECC UC to enhance the breadth and depth of its offer to support the expansion and development of the health and care workforce across a wider range of partners.

Now in its 106th year, UCO is one of the UK's leading providers of osteopathic education and research with an established reputation for creating highly-skilled, evidence-informed graduates.

UCO research is recognised as world-leading, delivering value to the osteopathic and wider health care community.

Sharon Potter, Acting Vice-Chancellor of UCO, said:

“As an institution that has long been at the forefront of osteopathic education and research, we are committed to ensuring further growth and development of the osteopathic profession.”

“UCO has been proactively considering options to future-proof the institution. Following a review of strategic options, UCO is delighted by the proposed merger, working closely with AECC UC to ensure that UCO and osteopathy thrives as part of the inter-professional health sciences landscape, both academically and clinically. There is significant congruence between UCO and AECC UC in our strong aligned values, commitment to and delivery of excellent osteopathic education, clinical care and research, and opinion leadership.”

“AECC UC has a strong track record of respecting the differences in professions, evidenced by the autonomy across the 10 different professional groups supported by the institution. The merger will not only mean we are protecting UCO through preserving its osteopathic heritage and creating a sustainable future, but that our staff and students can collaborate with other professional groups such as physiotherapy, chiropractic, sport rehabilitation, podiatry and diagnostic imaging, in a multidisciplinary MSK and rehabilitation environment unlike anywhere else in the UK.”

Professor Lesley Haig, Vice-Chancellor of AECC UC, commented:

“Preserving the heritage of UCO and safeguarding its future status as the flagship osteopathy training provider in the UK will be critical, just as it has been to protect the chiropractic heritage of the AECC brand. UCO is seen as synonymous with, and reflective of, the success of the osteopathy profession and we fully recognise and respect the important role that UCO plays not only as a sector-leading provider of osteopathic education, research and clinical care, but as the UK’s flagship osteopathy educational provider.”

“Overall it is clear that UCO and AECC UC already have a common values base, similar understanding of approaches to academic and clinical delivery, and positive relationships upon which a future organisational structure and opportunities can be developed. It’s an exciting time for both institutions as we move forward in partnership to create something unique and become recognised nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence.”

The proposed merger would continue the already founded positive relations between the institutions, where regular visits, sharing of good practice, and collaborative research work are already taking place. Heads of terms for the potential merger have now been agreed and both institutions are entering into the next phase of discussions, which will include wide consultation with staff, students and other stakeholders to produce a comprehensive implementation plan.

---- ENDS ----

Note to Editors:

AECC University College

AECC University College is a specialist health sciences HE provider, which opened in 1965. For more than 50 years it has been at the forefront of musculoskeletal health and wellbeing. As a specialist

health sciences institution, it offers education in the fields of chiropractic, radiography, rehabilitation, physiotherapy, sport and psychology, and more recently speech and language therapy, podiatry, dietetics and occupational therapy.

The institution also offers a wide range of professional development courses to support and develop the health and care workforce, including apprenticeships. These courses are designed for a diverse range of healthcare professionals, from paramedics to operating department practitioners and nurses.

AECC University College transforms lives through health sciences, education and research. It was the first chiropractic training provider in Europe and has over 40,000 clinic visits a year. It was granted Taught Degree Awarding Powers and University College status in 2017.

AECC University College, on Parkwood Road, Boscombe, works with the NHS and the NHS Dorset, as well as private, voluntary and independent providers, providing clinical and rehabilitation services through a self-referral service for anyone needing support.

Discover more at aecc.ac.uk

University College of Osteopathy

The University College of Osteopathy has been a leading provider of osteopathic education, research and healthcare for over 100 years, playing a significant role in championing osteopathy and furthering the profession both in the UK and internationally.

Formed in 1917 by John Martin Littlejohn, a former student of Andrew Taylor Still, the founder of osteopathy, the UCO has evolved from a small school delivering basic professional training to a highly respected University College delivering education, research and osteopathic care within the community.

Today it delivers specialist undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing professional development courses to develop highly-skilled and evidence-informed osteopaths ready to transform the lives of patients in their care.

The UCO also operates a busy teaching clinic in central London, delivering a range of osteopathic clinical services and providing subsidised care for the community.

Discover more at uco.ac.uk

