

The Objectives, Activities and Structure of the European Shiatsu Federation

Objectives

The aim of the European Shiatsu Federation is to advance Shiatsu as a method for promoting self-healing throughout Europe, to establish the legal right to practise Shiatsu as an independent, self-regulating health-care method and to promote high standards of professional practice.

To achieve this, the ESF has four broad areas of policy and action: 1) Professional Development, 2) Research, 3) Political work and 4) Promotion. Policies and actions are geared to be mutually supportive and to further its objectives.

Organisation

The ESF, as it is commonly known, is a democratic and non-profit-making organisation. Its members are national professional Shiatsu associations. The ESF is a formal membership organisation registered in Sweden with membership rules, fees, and decision-making protocols. Their purpose is to facilitate agreement on and adherence to common policies and actions, and to empower the ESF to act on these policies.

The ESF developed more or less informally from a meeting between five national associations in 1994, namely the Shiatsu Society UK (SSUK, Great Britain), the Federazione Italiana Shiatsu (FIS, Italy), the Shiatsu Gesellschaft Schweiz (SGS, Switzerland), the Gesellschaft für Shiatsu in Deutschland (GSD, Germany) and the Österreichische Dachverband für Shiatsu (ÖDS, Austria). In 1999, new statutes were developed in order to establish the ESF formally as a non-profit organization under Swedish law. This solution was chosen for reasons of convenience (simple bureaucracy) and cost (no charge, no taxes).

A key innovation of the late 1990's was the inauguration of an ambitious fee structure. Each national member organization was to pay 10€ for each of its own members. This was designed to give the ESF financial autonomy. The amount was later raised to 15€ per individual. This fee structure was modified in 2004, with the intention of reducing the financial burden for the larger members associations. It was recently modified once again to take account of the current economic situation facing the Shiatsu associations and their members.

The fee structure was modified once again in 2022, in view of the debilitating effect the past two years of restrictions and lockdowns have had on our profession, its practitioners and their associations. Information about the ESF membership fees structure is available on request from: secretary@europeanshiatsufederation.eu

The ESF is a founding member of EFCAM, the European Federation for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. EFCAM's purpose is to provide a unified voice for the CAM profession in Europe, since politicians cannot communicate with individual modalities and require a united voice for any constructive dialogue to take place.

ESF Representatives

The role of the ESF representative is a pivotal one. Within it there are two distinct but complementary components: 1) the rep brings a mandate and a set of intentions from the national association to the ESF board; equally 2) the rep conveys the will and decisions of the ESF back to the national association.

The communication skills required - above and beyond language competency - are considerable and can take some time to develop. That is because their task is to facilitate communication back and forth between the ESF as a European federation and the association tasked with representing the interests of its members at the national level.

Email is the most useful medium of communication between meetings. Virtual board meetings are also a regular occurrence. Additionally, it is common practice for virtual meetings to be held between two or more reps currently working on specific projects within working groups.

The Role and Status of ESF Representatives

- The ESF Representative has a dual role of National representative and ESF Ambassador.
- The National Association should give the ESF Representative a constitutional role and responsibility whose job is to give priority to the European dimension of the National Association's work
- National Associations should ideally have an ESF sub-group chaired by the ESF Representative.
- Representatives should always be mandated, but with a defined authority to change position when there is a notified deadline to make a decision.
- National Association Committees should give a minimum of 10% of their time to the European dimension and ESF work.
- Each National Association Annual General Meeting (AGM) must have an ESF report and make ESF policy decisions.
- Each National Association President should receive all ESF documents.
- Each National Association Newsletter should have an ESF report in every issue.
- The National Associations should adequately fund the internal work connected to the ESF.
- National Association Committees should adopt a Standing Order to meet the financial deadlines of ESF projects.

ESF Strategy from 1995 to Present

- The starting point was to aim for professional recognition in the medical field, which began very successfully with the inclusion of Shiatsu in the Lannoye Report, where the goals and possibilities to achieve professional recognition via CAM were clearly laid out.
- This was undermined by the non-acceptance of the Lannoye Report in the proposed version. This in itself was due to the situation at that time, which was largely attributable to R. Hammer, who mobilised medical associations across Europe against CAM.
- Research therefore entered the core of ESF strategy. It became apparent that without evidence in the form of recognised research, there was no possibility of inclusion in the European health system. This led to the ESF enlisting Prof. Andrew Long at Leeds University and the study that was produced there and to participation in the CAMbrella, Europe-wide, University-led research project that was designed to chart CAM in Europe.
- The increasing influence of the medical associations on the EU health system ultimately led to the realisation that Shiatsu as CAM will not be accepted in the EU without the necessary evidence, which is simply not yet available. This insight resulted in a change of strategy away from CAM as health promotion and towards lobbying for the Europe-wide right to practice Shiatsu for appropriately trained Shiatsu practitioners.
- However, here too the lever to demand Shiatsu as a European profession was found to be lacking - the lobbying carried out so far has brought no usable/implementable results.
- We now believe we have found this lever in the EQF: in the establishment of a European qualification with the same content throughout the EU. Analogous to the entitlement to practice a profession within the EU, we expect such a qualification to become a European qualification when it is anchored in three European countries.
- A prototype of this application for EQF level 6 is being developed in Austria. If successful, other European Shiatsu associations can adapt it and use it for recognition in their own countries, which is much easier if there is already a qualification classification in Europe.
- Although this does not yet guarantee professional practice, it does provide the necessary starting point. The ESF's energy therefore is currently concentrated on this point. Lobbying and research have therefore been moved into the background for the time being.
- The right to practise one's profession throughout the EU is embedded in several fundamental EU charters, though it is unfortunately not yet enacted into specific law in any country. Recognition will be sought first via successful EQF application, as evaluated by EU certified authorities in presumably three countries. Once the EQF work is done, the right to work will be sought from the appropriate EU authorities.

A Cross-section of ESF Activities since 1996

- convincing the centre-right group of the European Parliament to vote for the Lannoye Report, eventually passed as the Collins Report.
- conceiving and co-developing the methodology, fundraising for, managing and co-publishing the research study on the uses and benefits of Shiatsu with Professor Andrew Long of Leeds University, UK.
- establishing a voice for CAM in EPHA, eventually leading to a CAM representative on the EPHA Board (EPHA = European Public Health Association).
- creating EFCAM as an organisation for non-medical CAM professionals (EFCAM = European Federation for Complementary and Alternative Medicine).
- membership on the Advisory Board of the CAMbrella research project (CAMbrella = European Research Network for Complementary and Alternative Medicine).
- developing appropriate language for communicating the characteristics, role and benefits of CAM to politicians and health administrators.
- arranging the first ever meeting from a CAM stakeholder with an EU Health Commissioner.
- co-organising the only conference held so far on CAM in the European Parliament.
- becoming the only non-medical member of the European Union Health Policy Forum.
- holding the secretariat of the European Parliament CAM Interest Group for several years
- organising several European Parliamentary meetings on CAM.
- developing a political strategy for attaining the codified legal right to work for CAM professionals across Europe.
- launching Shiatsu Resources Worldwide, a project to build a data base of successful Shiatsu projects worldwide
- initiating Shiatsu Awareness Month as part of Shiatsu Without Borders in June 2022.
- hosting virtual international events, including global meditations and live events with multiple Shiatsu practitioners.

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