

Original article

IFOMPT's Educational Standards and International Monitoring: A member survey and review

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ABSTRACT

Background: The International Federation of Manual and Musculoskeletal Physical Therapists (IFOMPT) membership requires accreditation of countries postgraduate musculoskeletal physiotherapy programmes to meet IFOMPT's Educational Standards through International Monitoring. The Educational Standards and International Monitoring are both being reviewed.

Objectives: To seek insight and feedback from IFOMPT's membership on the Educational Standards and International Monitoring to inform the current review.

Design: Online survey of registered members, external assessors, programme leaders, international delegates.

Method: IFOMPT members were invited to participate in the Educational Standards and International Monitoring survey, between December 2023–January 2024. Content validity was assessed to refine the survey. The survey was offered in 14 languages. Descriptive and inferential analyses were used for closed questions; content analysis was used for open questions.

Results: 869 participants were eligible and completed the survey. IFOMPT's membership clearly valued both the Educational Standards and International Monitoring, and believe they are contemporary and evidence-informed. However, opinion was divided regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring and whether the Educational Standards represented a minimum or maximum standard. Constructive recommendations were provided for the improvement of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring, including reduction of size and complexity, with increased flexibility to ensure they are fit for purpose into the future and serve towards the growth of IFOMPT.

Conclusions: This was the largest member-wide survey of IFOMPT examining the Educational Standards and International Monitoring. The findings of the survey are extremely valuable to inform the current review of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring, particularly given the divided opinion concerning the useability and content of the Educational Standards.

1. Introduction

The International Federation of Orthopaedic Manipulative Therapy

(IFOMT, now known as the International Federation of Manual and Musculoskeletal Physical Therapists (IFOMPT)) became the first subgroup of the World Confederation of Physical Therapy (WCPT, now

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known as World Physiotherapy (WP)) in 1974 (IFOMPT, 2016; Lonnemann et al., 2017; Reid and Jull, 2024). Rather uniquely, Educational Standards have been a criterion for a country's membership from the outset. They were first written in 1975 (Lonnemann et al., 2017; Reid and Jull, 2024), presented at the IFOMPT General Meeting in 1977, and ratified at the WPCT Congress in 1978 (IFOMPT, 2011, 2016). Revised Educational Standards were ratified in 1992 (Lonnemann et al., 2017) and in 2001 it was agreed that the Educational Standards would be reviewed regularly. Accordingly, further revisions of the Educational Standards were ratified in 2000, 2004, and 2016 (IFOMPT, 2016).

In 2024, the Educational Standards is under the 6th review. There are precedents (2008 and 2014, unpublished surveys) to survey 'Member Organisation' delegates, to inform the Educational Standards review. This current survey was expanded to include Member Organisations, 'Associate Member Organisations', and 'Registered Interest Groups' of IFOMPT to ensure that comprehensive views were gained. Amongst several recommendations from the *Task Force on Standards Review and International Monitoring* in 2022, were a review of the International Monitoring process along with the Educational Standards to ensure both were fit-for-purpose into the future. International Monitoring describes the process by which international postgraduate programmes are reviewed against the Educational Standards to gain or maintain IFOMPT membership (IFOMPT, 2005, 2016). Questions have been raised as to whether the entry requirements into IFOMPT (i.e., the Educational Standards and International Monitoring) may be barriers to the growth of IFOMPT (Reid and Jull, 2024).

The aim of this research was to generate collective views from IFOMPT's membership to inform the current review of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring. This study posed two research questions, framed directly from IFOMPT's vision and mission statement (IFOMPT, 2023):

1. How can IFOMPT's Educational Standards evolve to ensure that they continue to promote and maintain high standards of specialist education and clinical practice in manual/musculoskeletal physiotherapy?
2. How can IFOMPT's International Monitoring process evolve to ensure that high standards of practice amongst manual/musculoskeletal physiotherapists are maintained with international conformity?

2. Materials and methods

This was an anonymous, cross-sectional, observational, online survey. Survey design, performance, and reporting were guided by the CHERRIES checklist, which encourages standardised methods of reporting internet-based surveys (Eysenbach, 2004). Ethical approval was provided by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (reference: 23/309).

2.1. Participants

To be eligible, participants needed to be members of IFOMPT Member Organisations, Associate Member Organisations, or Registered Interest Groups. While the exact number is unknown, the number of people who belong to IFOMPT member organisations (Member Organisations, Associate Member Organisations and Registered Interest Groups) is estimated to be 22,000 (IFOMPT, 2024). We did not have a target sample size for this survey but estimated a target of 700–1000 participants based on the recruitment of a previous similar international survey of musculoskeletal physiotherapists (Ellis et al., 2020). Network (or snowball) recruiting was utilised as specific groups of participants were identified. Members within these three groups (International Delegates, External Assessors, and Programme Leaders) were invited to participate, and were encouraged to invite others to participate (Lee, 2008).

Anecdotally it is known that members of IFOMPT interact with the Educational Standards and International Monitoring in different ways, some engage fully whilst others not at all. Some have specific roles within IFOMPT where their engagements with the Educational Standards and International Monitoring are specific. As such, three groups were 'targeted groups' (International Delegates, External Assessors, and Programme Leaders) along with a General Member group.

2.1.1. International delegates

At the time of the survey, IFOMPT had 25 Member Organisations, 1 Associate Member Organisation, and 15 Registered Interest Groups (IFOMPT, 2024). Each of these organisations appoints an International Delegate to represent it within IFOMPT (IFOMPT, 2021). Depending on the membership status (i.e., Member Organisation, Associate Member Organisation, or Registered Interest Group) of the organisation they represent, the International Delegates will interact with the Educational Standards differently.

2.1.2. External assessors

All postgraduate programmes are independently moderated against the Educational Standards by External Assessors appointed by the respective organisation (IFOMPT, 2005). Therefore, the External Assessors must have good knowledge of the Educational Standards; be a member of an IFOMPT Member Organisation; have a qualification equal or above that of the programme(s) being assessed; and have teaching, curriculum, and clinical experience (IFOMPT, 2005).

2.1.3. Programme leaders

Programme Leaders coordinate and oversee the postgraduate programme(s) for their host institution. Those Programme Leaders who instigated, developed, and implemented an individual programme using the Educational Standards for benchmarking, have a very good knowledge of the Educational Standards. Conversely, those Programme Leaders that did not develop or implement the programme itself may have less working knowledge of the Educational Standards.

2.1.4. General Members

Participants who did not belong to the three targeted groups are referred to as General Members. Most General Members will likely have limited knowledge of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring unless they have held a previous role within IFOMPT that required specific engagement with the Educational Standards (e.g., International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders). This is the largest beneficiary group, and it is worthwhile to seek their feedback on the Educational Standards and International Monitoring.

2.2. Survey development

Survey development was conducted according to previously published guidelines (Smith, 2004; Tsang et al., 2017), with guidance from previously published surveys of IFOMPT members and/or groups (Carlesso and Rivett, 2011; Froment et al., 2019; Heneghan et al., 2020; Hutting et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2018; Thoomes-de Graaf et al., 2017) and the earlier unpublished IFOMPT delegate surveys (2008 and 2014).

The survey was hosted on Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA) and included a mix of open and closed questions (Supplementary material). Closed questions used nominal responses while multiple-choice responses and Likert scales used ordinal responses. There were three sections to the survey: 1) demographics, 2) Educational Standards, and 3) International Monitoring. Within the Educational Standards section, there were three additional domains: usability, content, and value to gain more in-depth data.

2.3. Content validity and pilot testing

Content validity and pilot testing were conducted with a panel of 10

experts who reviewed the survey to provide feedback on (i) whether items were clear, unambiguous, and allowed the research questions to be answered, and (ii) whether the survey domains were appropriate. Further, the experts were asked to provide feedback on survey logic and flow (Story and Tait, 2019; Tait and Voepel-Lewis, 2015; Tsang et al., 2017). The experts were a mix of previous IFOMPT Executive Committee (n = 1), Standards Committee (n = 3), life members (n = 2), previous International Delegates (n = 3), and musculoskeletal physiotherapy academics (including those with expertise in survey research) (n = 3). Following the initial expert review, changes to the survey were made accordingly. The revised survey was returned to the same experts for a final review, without further changes.

2.4. Survey translation

To encourage participation, the survey was offered in 14 languages - Arabic, Dutch, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish. Other languages were not offered as their country delegates indicated that the English version would be appropriate for their members.

A three-step translation process was employed: establish an expert translator committee, conduct forward and independent backward translation (Tsang et al., 2017). Forward translation of the survey from English to the relevant language was achieved using Google Translate (Google LLC, Mountain View, CA, USA). For each language, two independent translators performed the backwards translation to ensure accuracy. Each of the translators were members of the relevant IFOMPT member organisation, who claimed proficiency in their native language and English, and were not members of either of the targeted groups.

2.5. Survey distribution and collection of data

The Qualtrics platform allowed anonymity of participation and data collection. For the targeted group participants (International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders), whose email addresses were already held by IFOMPT, an email invitation with the survey link came directly from the IFOMPT office, independent of the research team. One follow-up reminder was sent one month before closing the survey. Targeted participants were also encouraged to extend the invitation to participate through their own networks. Further, notifications of the survey link were made via the IFOMPT newsletter and social media posts, along with posts by the Member Organisations, Associate Member Organisation, and Registered Interest Group groups.

The security settings within Qualtrics used "Prevent multiple submissions" and "Bot detection", to ensure only one response per participant. To boost participation, an incentive of a prize draw (\$1,000 USD Amazon.com gift voucher) was offered. The survey was open between December 1, 2023 – February 1, 2024.

2.6. Statistical analysis

Nominal and ordinal variables/answers were presented in frequency and percentage. The demographic profiling (geographical location/region, age, highest qualification, years of practice, and years as an IFOMPT member) of each group (International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders, General Members) was compared descriptively. The Educational Standards and International Monitoring questions were summarised descriptively within each role. For demographic variables between the groups, a 2x2 association analysis (demographic variables x participant group) was performed using Chi square tests, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. Unbalanced regional distribution between survey respondents and the study population was found after comparing the participant characteristics to the global IFOMPT members' characteristics. Thus, post-stratified analyses based on the region were used for the key questions to adjust for potential sampling bias and non-responses.

Inferential analyses compared member roles for the three Educational Standards survey domains of 1) useability, 2) content, and 3) value, adjusted for their demographic profiling using multiple logistic regression (for binary response) and generalised logistic regression (for ordinal responses). SAS Software (Version 9.4, SAS Institute, North Carolina, USA) was used in the analysis.

Participants were encouraged to provide answers to open items in English if they felt confident to do so. Those responses that were provided in languages other than English were translated using the same method as for the survey itself (i.e., forward translation using Google Translate, independent backward translation from the same expert translators). All open responses were initially analysed in English by one researcher (RE), using qualitative content analysis (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020; Story and Tait, 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Responses were deducted into themes based on similar coded responses, and their frequencies and percentages were calculated (Gläser-Zikuda et al., 2020). For those items where inferential analysis showed significant differences between member groups, the respective open responses were independently assessed by a second, blinded assessor. The resulting themes were then compared and agreed upon by both assessors. Where conflicts remained, the full research team discussed to reach a consensus.

For the remaining open response items, the themes identified were independently reviewed by another unblinded research team member in terms of their relevance and saturation. Finally, the top 5 themes (regarding the frequency of responses and ranking based on a tally of responses) for all open items were discussed and agreed to by the full research team.

3. Results

3.1. Survey response

A total of 898 people responded to the survey, of whom 869 (96.8%) met the eligibility criteria. The largest group was International Delegates (287), followed by General Members (250), External Assessors (153), and Programme Leaders (150) (Table 1). A statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) was observed in all demographic variables between the different targeted groups (Table 1).

To enable analysis of response rate by region, the total number of registered members, as provided by IFOMPT, was pooled for each region. The majority of responses (53.3%) came from North America (Fig. 1). However, the region with the highest response rate (calculated from the responses/member numbers) was South and Central America with 21.7% (n = 93/429), followed by North America 10.2% (n = 443/4338), Europe 2.2% (n = 205/9492), Africa 2.2% (n = 18/812), Asia 1.4% (n = 31/2270), and Australasia 1.0% (n = 42/4286).

3.2. Useability of the Educational Standards

The majority of International Delegates, External Assessors, and Programme Leaders members stated their main use of the Educational Standards was for *curriculum design and development* (Table 2). We asked what changes were recommended to improve the useability of the Educational Standards; the top responses were a simplified structure with a clear and concise layout and language (Table 3).

We asked participants about the *size and level of detail* of the Educational Standards. The participant groups viewed this question differently ($p = 0.004$). The majority within the targeted groups (International Delegates 66.0%, External Assessors 55.0%, Programme Leaders 57.7%) believed the size of the Educational Standards was 'just right' while 30% or more (International Delegates 30.5%, External Assessors 37.1%, Programme Leaders 40.6%) believed they were 'too big' (inclusive of 'too big' and 'far too big' responses), while a minority of the respondents considered them 'too small' (inclusive of 'too small' and 'far too small' (International Delegates 3.8%, External Assessors 7.8%, Programme Leaders 1.5%) (Fig. 2). The only demographic variable that was

Table 1
Participant characteristics.

	Total sample (n, %)	International Delegates (n, %)	External Assessors (n, %)	Programme Leaders (n, %)	General Members (n, %)	Missing respondents (n)
Total sample	869 (100)	287 (34.2)	153 (18.2)	150 (17.9)	250 (29.8)	29
Geographical location/region						37
North America	443 (53.3)	165 (58.3)	86 (57.7)	79 (52.7)	113 (45.2)	
South or Central America	93 (11.1)	39 (13.8)	30 (20.1)	17 (11.3)	7 (2.8)	
Asia	31 (3.7)	15 (5.3)	3 (2.0)	5 (3.3)	8 (3.2)	
Australasia	42 (5.1)	12 (4.2)	11 (7.4)	9 (6.0)	10 (4.0)	
Africa	18 (2.2)	6 (2.1)	1 (0.7)	2 (1.3)	9 (3.6)	
Europe	205 (24.6)	46 (16.3)	18 (12.1)	38 (25.3)	103 (41.2)	
Age (years)						36
21–30	160 (19.2)	66 (23.2)	28 (18.8)	18 (12.0)	48 (19.2)	
31–40	351 (42.1)	131 (46.1)	74 (49.7)	43 (28.7)	103 (41.2)	
41–50	177 (21.2)	53 (18.7)	26 (17.5)	47 (31.3)	51 (20.4)	
51–60	82 (9.8)	24 (8.5)	11 (7.4)	20 (13.3)	27 (10.8)	
60+	63 (7.6)	10 (3.5)	10 (6.7)	22 (14.7)	21 (8.4)	
Highest qualification						38
Diploma (pre-registration)	47 (5.7)	21 (7.4)	10 (6.8)	2 (1.3)	14 (5.6)	
Bachelors (pre-registration)	200 (24.1)	81 (28.5)	45 (30.4)	26 (17.5)	48 (19.2)	
Masters (pre-registration)	153 (18.4)	65 (22.9)	28 (18.9)	18 (12.1)	42 (16.8)	
Professional doctorate (pre-registration)	75 (9.0)	16 (5.6)	13 (8.8)	31 (20.8)	15 (6.0)	
Postgraduate diploma	44 (5.3)	16 (5.6)	13 (8.8)	7 (4.7)	8 (3.2)	
Postgraduate masters	138 (16.6)	39 (13.7)	20 (13.5)	22 (14.8)	57 (22.8)	
Postgraduate doctorate	157 (18.9)	40 (14.1)	18 (12.2)	40 (26.9)	59 (23.6)	
Other	17 (2.1)	6 (2.1)	1 (0.7)	3 (2.0)	7 (2.8)	
Years practising as a physiotherapy/physical therapist						40
Less than 5	199 (24.0)	93 (33.0)	33 (22.3)	28 (18.7)	45 (18.1)	
6–10	260 (31.4)	88 (31.2)	61 (41.2)	38 (25.3)	73 (29.3)	
11–20	154 (18.6)	48 (17.0)	25 (16.9)	21 (14.0)	60 (24.1)	
21–30	102 (12.3)	32 (11.4)	11 (7.4)	27 (18.0)	32 (12.9)	
31–40	86 (10.4)	15 (5.3)	11 (7.4)	29 (19.3)	31 (12.5)	
41–50	28 (3.4)	6 (2.1)	7 (4.7)	7 (4.7)	8 (3.2)	
Years as an IFOMPT member						36
Less than 5	335 (40.5)	128 (45.4)	57 (38.5)	36 (24.3)	114 (45.8)	
6–10	233 (28.2)	81 (28.7)	49 (33.1)	46 (31.1)	57 (22.9)	
11–20	146 (17.7)	46 (16.3)	19 (12.8)	30 (20.3)	51 (20.5)	
21–30	68 (8.2)	19 (6.7)	12 (8.1)	19 (12.8)	18 (7.2)	
31–40	36 (4.4)	4 (1.4)	8 (5.4)	16 (10.8)	8 (3.2)	
41–50	9 (1.1)	4 (1.4)	3 (2.0)	1 (0.7)	1 (0.4)	
Institutional level of postgraduate programme/s						64
University-based	290 (52.3)	160 (59.9)	51 (35.7)	79 (54.5)	* GM not asked this question	
Community-based (i.e., non-university)	130 (23.4)	41 (15.4)	51 (35.7)	38 (26.2)		
Both (if more than one programme)	135 (24.3)	66 (24.7)	41 (28.7)	28 (19.3)		

statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) regarding the size of the Educational Standards was region. The majority of participants from North America (68.4%), Asia (75.0%), and South/Central America (51.3%) believed the Educational Standards size was 'just right'. However, half or more of participants from Africa (62.50%), Europe (51.19%), and Australasia (50.0%) believed the Educational Standards size was 'too big' (inclusive of 'too big' and 'far too big').

Findings for the 'level of detail' of the Educational Standards were much closer between those stating they were 'just right' (International Delegates 46.5%, External Assessors 46.8%, Programme Leaders 50.7%) compared to 'too detailed' (inclusive of 'too detailed' and 'far too detailed') (International Delegates 44.8%, External Assessors 41.8%, Programme Leaders 41.3%). Those that said the level of detail was 'not enough' were less (inclusive of 'not enough detail' and 'minimal detail') (International Delegates 8.7%, External Assessors 10.75%, Programme Leaders 11.0%). No demographic variables nor participant grouping were significantly different regarding the level of detail of the Educational Standards.

3.3. Content of the Educational Standards

Participants were asked about their beliefs on 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' of the Educational Standards (Table 3). Opinions were divided. What some people saw as a strength, others saw as a weakness.

The majority of participants within the targeted groups (International Delegates 86.9%, External Assessors 78.5%, Programme Leaders 81.2%) ($p = 0.34$) believed that the Educational Standards reflect contemporary evidence-informed practice within manipulative/musculoskeletal physiotherapy. Regional differences were evident ($p = 0.03$); North American, Asian, and African participants were more likely to agree (>80%) compared to European, South/Central American, and Australasian (71.2–75.7%). The opposite was observed for 'partly' responses (Table 3), with a higher response rate in Europe, South/Central America, and Australasia (15.2–27.3%) compared to North America, Asia, and Africa (10.0–16.7%).

Due to their direct use of the Educational Standards, External Assessors and Programme Leaders were asked to reflect on the 10 dimensions of the Educational Standards. The majority said that 10 dimensions was 'just right' (External Assessors 63.8%, Programme

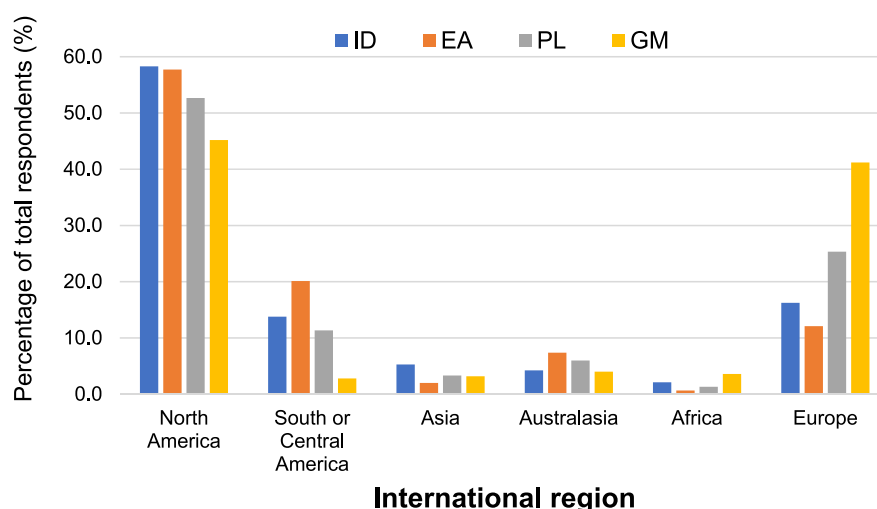


Fig. 1. Participant numbers by region and targeted group (note: ID = International Delegates, EA = External Assessors, PL = Programme Leaders, GM = General Members).

Table 2

Uses for the IFOMPT Educational Standards (n = number of responses, note: multiple options could be selected).

	International Delegates	External Assessors	Programme Leaders	TOTAL
Curriculum design and development	159	67	99	325
Accreditation of existing programme/s	126	69	69	264
Research purposes	117	64	42	223
Mapping to external core competencies/frameworks	104	56	62	222
Quality and governance issues	96	40	47	183
Preparation of IFOMPT international monitoring submissions	74	30	56	160
Other	9	1	0	10

Leaders 64.5%), compared to 'too many' and 'far too many' (External Assessors 26.7%, Programme Leaders 33.1%, pooled) or 'too few' and 'far too few' (External Assessors 9.5%, Programme Leaders 2.4%, pooled) (Table 3).

Fulfilling the Educational Standards represents a minimum standard to achieve membership of IFOMPT. We asked participants whether they believed the Educational Standards represent a 'minimum or a maximum standard for manipulative/musculoskeletal physiotherapy training?', given recent concerns raised about the potential barrier of this criterion for membership entry (Reid and Jull, 2024). Opinions were divided, with a trend ($p > 0.20$) for member groups to favour the Educational Standards as a 'minimum' standard (International Delegates 61.0%, External Assessors 50.5%, Programme Leaders 56.8%). Region was the only demographic factor where opinion differed. Participants from North America, Asia, and Africa were significantly ($p < 0.03$) stronger in their opinion of 'minimum' (range 83.9–88.9%) compared to participants from Europe, Australasia, and South/Central America (range 71.2–75.6%).

3.4. Value of the Educational Standards

The Educational Standards are undoubtedly highly valued by the

wider IFOMPT membership (Table 3). Further, acknowledging the growth of physiotherapy over recent decades, the Educational Standards were revised in 2016. As a consequence, we asked whether there had been any change or evolution in how the Educational Standards are used (Table 3). The top-ranked response indicated that the Educational Standards are not being used differently despite the evolution of the profession and of the Educational Standards.

3.5. International Monitoring

We asked External Assessors and Programme Leaders about their 'likes' and 'dislikes' of International Monitoring given their direct involvement in the International Monitoring process (Table 4). Divided opinion within the cohort was apparent. What some liked about International Monitoring, others disliked. Improvements to International Monitoring were offered in open responses (Table 4).

Each Member Organisations undergoes a full-review of their educational programmes every 6 years (IFOMPT, 2005). In terms of frequency of International Monitoring from International Delegates and External Assessors, the majority (International Delegates 49.5%, External Assessors 40.8%) preferred the status quo of a 6-yearly full review. Yet 34.5% of International Delegates and 35.9% of External Assessors while favouring a 6-yearly review, preferred a reduced or bespoke review of only those aspects of the programmes where changes were made since the previous review.

A range of benefits to their institutions and/or programmes from International Monitoring were identified by Programme Leaders (Table 5). The majority (87.5%) stated that their own institution had independent and external programme monitoring in addition to IFOMPT's International Monitoring. From open responses, the majority said that their own institutional process was similar to the IFOMPT's International Monitoring, however six Programme Leaders (North America 4, Australasia 1, Europe 1) stated that their institutional process was more rigorous.

3.6. Post-stratification analysis

Post-stratified by regions analysis was used to adjust for potential sampling bias and nonresponses. Analysis identified similar results between unweighted and weighted percentages for questions: 'size' and 'level of detail' of the Educational Standards, number of dimensions of the Educational Standards, supporting International Monitoring, and

Table 3
Summary of open responses from all groups (unless otherwise stated) for items related to the Educational Standards.

Useability of the Educational Standards “What changes would you recommend to improve the useability of the Educational Standards?” * (note: International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders only) 1 Presenting the Educational Standards in a more simplified structure, using a clear and concise layout, with clearer language. 2 More visually/aesthetically appealing, including being supported with visual material 3 Allow better searchability and navigation through the document 4 Improve readability by simplifying and translating the Educational Standards, remove redundancies 5 More diversity and adaptability in its representation, to promote inclusivity
Content of the Educational Standards “What do you believe are the STRENGTHS of the IFOMPT Educational standards?” * 1 Excellent for setting high standards of and integration for both theory knowledge and practical skills/practice 2 Consistency and standardisation allows benchmarking and quality assurance 3 Promotes globalisation and shared international standards, which allows international recognition 4 Comprehensive and detailed, and yet easy to navigate; clear structure, learning outcomes, definitions and dimensions 5 Based on evidence, promotes evidence-based practice, evidence demands a high standard
“What do you believe are the WEAKNESSES of the IFOMPT Educational Standards?” * 1 Slow to adapt to changes in contemporary practice, evidence and changes within the profession 2 Regionally biased and lacks diversity, doesn't meet needs of all countries, difficult to apply globally 3 Not user-friendly as standards are too high, too detailed, large and complex 4 Poor applicability for different learners, not flexible or adaptable 5 Too restrictive, particularly within some regions/countries, community programmes, not inclusive etc.
“Do you believe that the IFOMPT Educational Standards reflect contemporary, evidence-informed practice?” ^ (note: International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders only) for the ‘partly’ responses, open responses were sought: 1 Balance too-skewed towards manual and manipulative therapy, lack of clear rationale and evidence for manual therapy/manipulation 2 = Doesn't take into account evidence regarding cultural and social aspects, person-centred care, inclusivity 2 = Educational Standards needs to be strengthened in respect to evidence related to <i>pain and pain science</i> 3 Educational Standards needs to be strengthened in respect to evidence related to <i>practical skills and clinical practice</i> 4 Educational Standards needs to be strengthened in respect to evidence related to <i>psychology theory and practice</i>
Value of the Educational Standards “What value do you believe the Educational Standards provide to IFOMPT members?” ^ 1 Standardisation and consistency of high-quality education, training, and expectations 2 International recognition and high international standards, improved reputation for IFOMPT 3 Quality assurance and accreditation for education and for programmes 4 Reciprocal recognition for members between countries 5 Improves quality of education and training
“In the past 10 years, have you seen any significant evolution or change in how the Educational Standards are used in your country?” ^ (note: International Delegates, External Assessors, Programme Leaders only) 1 No, no change or evolution in how the Educational Standards are used 2 The Educational Standards help guide advanced clinical practice guidelines and accreditation of these 3 The Educational Standards are utilised to guide research and research innovation, particularly clinical research 4 To promote mentorship and leadership 5 To enhance and strengthen existing programmes
“Aside from the IFOMPT Educational Standards, does your country have its own provincial, state, and national educational guidelines” ^ for the ‘Yes’ responses, open responses were sought (if yes, are these country standards well aligned to the IFOMPT educational standards?): 1 Good or complete alignment to IFOMPT's Educational Standards 2 Little or no alignment to IFOMPT's Educational Standards 3 Less detailed and comprehensive compared to IFOMPT's Educational Standards 4 The national/regional educational standards are higher and more stringent compared to IFOMPT's Educational Standards

Note.
= represents tie in the rank.
* Represents 2 blinded, independent assessors.
^ represents 2 non-blinded, independent assessors.

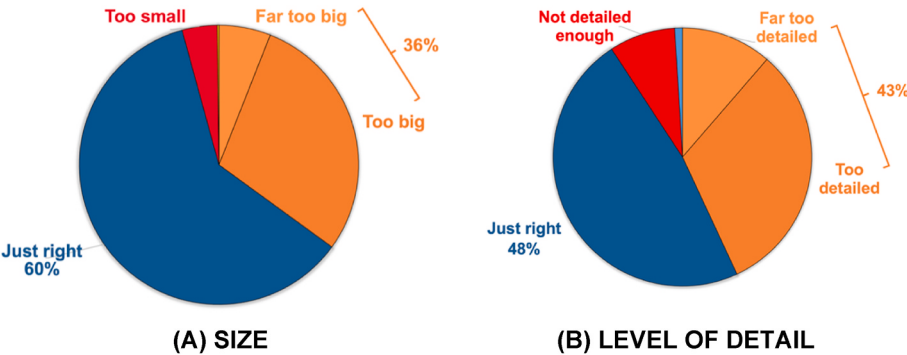


Fig. 2. The (A) size and (B) level of detail of the Educational Standards.

Table 4

Summary of open responses from all groups (unless otherwise stated) for items related to the International Monitoring process.

“What value do you believe International Monitoring provides to IFOMPT members?” [^] (note: General Members only)	
1	Provides international standardisation of postgraduate education
2	Maintains a high standard of training and education
3	Increases opportunity for international collaboration and sharing
4	Improves the standard of physiotherapy practice
5	Proof of reaching an international standard, reciprocal recognition
“What DO you like about the International Monitoring process?” [^] (note: External Assessors and Programme Leaders only)	
1	Helps to maintain and improve programme quality and high standards of education
2	= International Monitoring is easy, clear and concise
2	= Maintains consistency, fairness and transparency of monitoring
2	= International Monitoring provides data and feedback allowing quality control of programmes/education
3	Establishes and maintains a uniform international standard
“What DON'T you like about the International Monitoring process?” [^] (note: External Assessors and Programme Leaders only)	
1	Excessive, complex, laborious, and time consuming with a high administrative burden
2	Consumes a lot of resources, both ‘man-power’ and financial
3	Duplication of internal accreditation processes
4	Insufficient resources and a lack of guidance from IFOMPT to navigate the International Monitoring
5	Lacks consistency between countries, isn't flexible to adapt
“If you were to make improvements to IFOMPT's International Monitoring, what changes would you make?” [^] (note: External Assessors and Programme Leaders only)	
1	Decrease the complexity, make the process more efficient, reduce time and costs
2	Trust the Member Organisations to self-monitor against their own internal accreditation processes to reduce duplication
3	Improved external assessor training in applying the Educational Standards and for the International Monitoring process
4	More targeted, flexible monitoring options for programmes/countries that are already
5	Utilise technologies and move to online assessment to improve the process
“How much value do you think the IFOMPT Educational Standards and International Monitoring have to your program/s?” [^] (note: Programme Leaders only)	
1	High international standard useful to attract/recruit students and improve programme marketing
2	None, not a lot
3	Adds to the reputation, credibility and prestige of the programme
4	= Allows quality improvement over time and into the future
4	= Sets standards internationally, uniformity between programmes and countries

Note.

= represents tie in the rank.

[^] represents 2 non-blinded, independent assessors.**Table 5**

Benefits that programmes and/or institutions gain from IFOMPT International Monitoring (n = number of responses, note: multiple options could be selected).

	n	Proportion (%)
Programme accreditation	74	61.7
Educational standards to inform your programme	73	60.8
International recognition and standing	46	38.3
Physiotherapy content specific	38	31.7
Increased remuneration and/or status for graduates	30	25.0
Funding – financial viability for the programme	28	23.3
Other	4	3.3

frequency of International Monitoring. The regions were weighted more heavily in North America (response rate 10.2%) and South/Central America (response rate 21.7%). The most different weighted responses (>5%) were in size of the Educational Standards (*‘just right’*: 5.6% lower; *‘too big’*: 6.5% higher), number of dimensions (*‘too many’*: 8.1% higher), and level of detail of the Educational Standards (*‘too detailed’*: 6.2% higher).

4. Discussion

This study represents the largest survey of IFOMPT members to date. The survey was guided by two overarching research questions, one concerning the Educational Standards and one International Monitoring.

4.1. Educational Standards

Usability: Accreditation of programme(s) against the Educational Standards represents the entry requirement for countries to become IFOMPT Member Organisations and for existing Member Organisations

to maintain membership. The Educational Standards are used in a variety of other ways including curriculum design and development, mapping and benchmarking to external frameworks, and quality assurance.

Two key factors for useability that were explored included the *‘size’* and *‘detail’* of the Educational Standards. Opinion was divided for both. Whilst 55.6% of participants said the size of the Educational Standards was *‘just right’*, 36.1% believed it was *‘too big’*. Similarly, 48% said the detail was *‘just right’*, countered with 42.7% who believed the Educational Standards are *‘too detailed’*. The weighted responses by region and the divided opinion were reinforced with open responses indicating that both the size and detail of the Educational Standards were, for some, a strength and, for others, a weakness. Interestingly, the only demographic variable with a significant variation in opinion was *region*, with North America, Asia, and South/Central America (4/24 Member Organisations) who were more accepting of the size of the Educational Standards being *‘just right’* compared to participants from Europe, Africa, and Australasia (20/24 Member Organisations). The top-ranked recommendations for improvements in the useability of the Educational Standards were a reduction of its size, clearer and more concise, easier to navigate, and aided by visual material.

Content: Opinion was again divided regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Educational Standards content. For example, while some saw their consistency and standardisation as a strength, others saw this as a weakness, wanting more flexibility and inclusivity. Some saw the ability of the Educational Standards to promote globalisation as a strength, while others believed they are regionally biased and lacked diversity.

Generally, most (78%) IFOMPT members surveyed believed the Educational Standards reflect contemporary evidence-informed practice. The remaining 22% believed the Educational Standards only *‘partly’* reflected contemporary, evidence-informed practice. Some reasons for this belief were that the Educational Standards were too skewed

to manual and manipulative therapy, lacked in areas such as pain science, psychologically informed care, and clinical practice. Interestingly, there were significant regional variations regarding whether the Educational Standards reflects contemporary, evidence-informed practice, with stronger support from participants from North America, Asia, and Africa (5/24 Member Organisations), and with less agreement from Europe, Australasia, and South/Central America (19/24 Member Organisations).

Value: The survey clearly highlights the Educational Standards are highly valued, in standardisation of high-quality education, consistency in international standards, allowing quality assurance and international recognition. Many IFOMPT accredited programmes also require accreditation by their own institutions or other national bodies. The opinion of Programme Leaders regarding the value of the Educational Standards to their institutional accreditation process varied from significant value to little or no value (many citing duplication and redundancy).

4.2. International Monitoring

Opinion amongst participants concerning International Monitoring was divided - from an easy and clear process to an unclear, laborious, and burdensome process. Similarly, some liked the uniform international standard provided by International Monitoring, while others believed the process lacked consistency and flexibility for individual countries' circumstances. Generally, International Delegates supported the current 6-yearly International Monitoring cycle. However, they were equally split between a full review or an alternative (status quo compared to a more nuanced review). More than half of External Assessors favoured a reduced and bespoke review led either by IFOMPT or by the Member Organisation themselves.

The survey explored ways in which International Monitoring could be improved. External Assessors and Programme Leaders suggested decreasing the complexity of the process, allowing more Member Organisation autonomy to have a more targeted review, and using online technologies to streamline the process. Further, IFOMPT was challenged to facilitate and improve International Monitoring, including increased External Assessors training, provision of user-friendly resources (i.e., templates and checklists), and encouraging more sharing and collaboration between Member Organisations.

4.3. Strengths and limitations

This survey was founded on robust research methods specific to survey design. The survey items were guided by research questions that directly referenced IFOMPT's strategic plan. The content validity analysis was robust, with key recommendations from the experts integrated to enhance the survey. The survey was offered in 14 different languages to promote inclusivity and encourage participation.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. Although 869 eligible people responded to the survey, this represents approximately 0.04% of the estimated 22,000 members within IFOMPT (IFOMPT, 2024). Although post-stratification methods (for a more representative answer) identified only the size and number of dimensions of the Educational Standards were different between regions, it is unlikely that the participants were fully representative of IFOMPT's entire membership. Furthermore, 40.5% of respondents have been members of IFOMPT member organisations for less than five years. Surveys tend to attract participants motivated by the research questions and intent.

Anonymity may have been threatened if participants were asked to identify their country; therefore, regional responses were sought instead. Of the inferential statistical analysis, *region* was a consistent influencing variable, but proportionally each region did not represent the same number of countries. For example, although the greatest number of responses came from North America, this region represented two Member Organisations (USA and Canada), compared to Europe, the

second largest response region, which included 16/24 Member Organisations and 7/16 Registered Interest Groups.

4.4. Looking ahead

The survey clearly demonstrates that members acknowledge the value that Educational Standards and International Monitoring have for IFOMPT. IFOMPT has built a very strong foundation through the promotion of high standards of manipulative therapy and musculoskeletal practice for 50 years and has grown a global community dedicated to this vision.

The survey also highlighted divided opinions regarding important aspects of both the Educational Standards and International Monitoring. This is a vital finding to inform the current review and future planning of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring. It suggests that IFOMPT must come together to discuss, debate, and reach a consensus on the nature and application of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring so that the organisation can move forward together and inclusively for the growth of the organisation.

The survey found an even split between those that perceive the Educational Standards as a '*minimum*' versus a '*maximum*' standard, which needs to be resolved. One view is that the Educational Standards represent a '*minimum*' standard. If so, IFOMPT's growth may be challenged as, for many countries, the level is unattainable. The alternative view is that the Educational Standards are a '*maximum*' standard and above that required for a country's entry into IFOMPT. Indeed, the Educational Standards were recently used as a benchmark for the design of advanced clinical practice frameworks (Noblet et al., 2021).

The challenge for IFOMPT, towards celebrating 100 years, is to make sure that any future iteration of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring processes meets the fine balance between promoting manual/musculoskeletal physiotherapy excellence but at a level that is inclusive and supportive of emerging countries, thereby growing the membership. Getting this balance right is essential so the global musculoskeletal physiotherapy community can grow and become stronger together.

5. Conclusions

IFOMPT's Educational Standards and International Monitoring are valued by its membership. Both provide a foundation on which the organisation was built, and further represent the entry point to membership. The Educational Standards and International Monitoring are currently under review. This research suggests that discussion, debate, and consensus must be reached, to reduce the division of opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the Educational Standards and International Monitoring for the future growth of IFOMPT.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Richard Ellis: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Irene Zeng:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Gwendolen Jull:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Renée de Ruijter:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Laura Finucane:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Rhian Lascelles:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Software, Project administration, Formal analysis. **Pierre Rösch:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Paolo Sanzo:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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Declarations of interest

- At the time of completion of the survey, the following co-authors had substantive roles within IFOMPT including: Laura Finucane (IFOMPT President), Associate Professor Paolo Sanzo (IFOMPT Vice-President), Renée de Ruijter (IFOMPT Executive Committee Member), Dr. Pierre Röscher (IFOMPT Executive Committee Member), Prof. Gwendolen Jull (IFOMPT Life Member).

- At the time of manuscript submission, the following co-authors had substantive roles within IFOMPT including: Associate Professor Paolo Sanzo (IFOMPT President) Dr. Pierre Röscher (IFOMPT Executive Committee Member), Prof. Gwendolen Jull (IFOMPT Life Member), Professor Richard Ellis (Chair, Standards Committee).

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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