The Career Development Framework: guiding principles for occupational therapy (RCOT 2017) was launched last year. It evolved from and replaced two previously separate frameworks, the Post Qualifying Framework (COT 2006) and the Support Worker Framework (COT 2009).

The new framework provides one inclusive resource for the entire occupational therapy profession, including support workers, students and registered professionals. It aims to support people to identify their on-going learning and development needs, while helping them to recognise and articulate their current levels of knowledge and skills.

The work to co-produce the Career Development Framework involved collaboration with hundreds of members over a 15-month period. Participants at a workshop debated and decided on the structure, choosing to adopt the four pillars of practice from NHS Education for Scotland (2016) and the nine career levels within the Skills for Health Career Framework (2016).

Two hundred people, across all occupational therapy roles, sectors and UK countries, formed a virtual advisory group in order to share their expertise with the project team, comprised of Dr Stephanie Tempest and Dr Karina Dancza.

The virtual advisory group was also instrumental in the development of the implementation guide (RCOT 2017), an additional resource published at the same time to support the framework into practice.

More resources have been developed over the last year, guided by members who have used the Career Development Framework, and who have provided inspiration for an introductory PowerPoint presentation, a 12-month learning plan, a career wheel and a five-year vision plan. All of these tools are aimed at supporting self-directed learning for members.

A multi-layered approach has also been undertaken to promote and support the implementation of the Career Development Framework into practice. In addition to developing the extra tools and templates, work has involved: featuring the Career Development Framework in the RCOT roadshow programme for 2018; articles and promotional material published in OTnews; paper and poster presentations, including at the RCOT Specialist
Section – Independent Practice conference, RCOT annual conference and WFOT congress, and social media campaigns (RCOTCareerFramework) such as the New Year Resolution challenge and an RCOT podcast using the four pillars to reflect on career learning to date (www.rcot.co.uk/promoting-occupational-therapy/podcasts).

Opportunities have also been taken to present the new resource to broader audiences, including at a continuing professional development forum, with representation from over 40 different professional bodies, most outside of health and social care.

This led to an invitation to feature the framework in the Professional Associations Research Network (PARN) Sector Review 2018, a global organisation that supports best practice within the wider professional body sector (Tempest 2018).

Progress so far
As part of the implementation plan, the professional development team, part of the broader RCOT education and research team, was also keen to evaluate the progress so far. Therefore, in May this year, an informal review was undertaken in order to understand who has implemented the Career Development Framework into practice and evaluate the ways people are using it and their thoughts on it.

Information was collected in two ways: informally – from the conversations and discussions held through promotion at various events, workshops, networks and social media; and formally – through a survey seeking opinions from early adopters. Relevant RCOT governance permissions were in place to enable the latter.

The Career Development Framework is being used by occupational therapists across career levels and sectors. Data from the survey (n=151), shown in figure one, indicates that the Career Development Framework is being used by occupational therapists in a practice-based setting, line managers, service managers, lecturers, students, support workers, researchers, retired members and others, for example assistant director, project manager and clinical educator.

In relation to employment sectors, as shown in figure two, the Career Development Framework is being used in: the NHS, higher education, social care, the charitable sector and independent practice.

Practical, useful and empowering
Respondents to the survey gave the Career Development Framework an average score of seven out of 10; a good response to the first edition, but also leaving the message that there is room for improvement when it is reviewed in 2019-2020.
Informal discussions also add weight to the perception that the Career Development Framework is useful. While acknowledging that any form of self-evaluation can be a bit challenging to start with, the process of mapping ourselves into the framework is providing opportunities to reflect on what we have achieved so far.

Figure three shares data compiled from the survey question – What three words would you use to describe the Career Development Framework? – featuring words like aspirational, reflective and dynamic.

There is also another useful reminder contained within the word cloud with the appearance of the word ‘unaware’. This tells us there is still work to be done to continue to raise awareness of the resource to support its use in practice.

Support under three broad themes

Three themes have emerged from the survey data, and from the informal discussions to date, that indicate the Career Development Framework helps to ‘support myself’, ‘support others’ and ‘support transitions’.

Support myself: figure four outlines the ways the Career Development Framework is being used by individuals to support themselves, including identifying learning opportunities, to map and emphasise their range of current skills and experience; and to reinforce an occupation-centred identity.

Not surprisingly, the theme of ‘support myself’ is the most prominent of the three. On reflection, the work done so far to develop resources, such as the Learning Plan, has focused primarily on the individual.

Support others: the Career Development Framework is being used in a number of ways to support others, including appraisals and supervision, in the development of job descriptions, and to effectively articulate the broad knowledge and skills that occupational therapy personnel can offer (see figure five).

Respondents working in the NHS provided most of the survey data related to ‘support others’. Further work is needed to explore how the Career Development Framework is being used in other sectors.

Additionally, the RCOT professional development team is looking at ways to create resources and templates to be used by groups and teams and work is underway in this area.

Support transitions: the third and final theme is that the Career Development Framework is currently being used to support people through periods of transition. Data from the survey, and especially from the informal discussions, show that it is being used at the following transition points: through different educational levels at university; the transition from student to newly qualified occupational therapist; when changing jobs within or across a sector (for example promotion, new applications or moving from clinical to academic settings); and even stepping into retirement (Sainty 2018).

The reasons why the Career Development Framework is being used to support transitions are first, because it is designed to be used across different career levels, employment sectors and countries. Second, it provides a structure to help people discover the transferable skills and knowledge they can bring to a new opportunity. And finally, the Career Development Framework supports people to maintain their occupational therapy identity, regardless of the setting they are moving to or the role title on their name badge.

Where next?

Respondents to the survey have asked for more articles, such as this one, to promote the Career Development Framework. Further articles are
planned, which will share stories on how the Career Development Framework is being used in specific ways.

Video materials and additional templates, such as the team learning and development template, will also be produced and added to the website as we continue to support the knowledge translation process. It is hoped that all of this work will continue to be member driven, including the formal review of the framework planned for 2019-2020.

References

Lucas Morais, Kinza Ahmad and Stephanie Tempest, RCOT education and research team. We would really like to know your thoughts on the Career Development Framework and any ideas for tools to support you to use it in practice. Email us your comments at: Prof.Dev@rcot.co.uk