

Royal College of
Occupational Therapists

Scottish Election Manifesto 2021

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Occupational therapy provides solutions that enable people to live fulfilled lives. We practise across physical and mental health with a focus on occupation (people's everyday activities) – working in the NHS, social services, housing, schools, prisons, care homes, employment services, and the third sector.

There are over 3,500 occupational therapists in Scotland. This workforce is a valuable resource which can shift the balance of care from acute to community services. The profession provides practical support to people of all ages with physical and mental health problems, long term conditions, and those experiencing the effects of ageing. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) believe that occupational therapists are key to helping people to live longer, healthier lives at home or in a homely setting.

Our 2021 manifesto identifies the following areas which we believe should be key priorities for the new Scottish Government:

1

Building a multi-disciplinary workforce within GP practices to support people within their communities

2

Increasing the presence of occupational therapy in children and young people services to address physical and mental health needs early

3

The right to community rehabilitation

4

Ensuring parity between health and social care



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We are asking your party to improve health and social care in Scotland and recognise the contribution of occupational therapists through the following actions:

1 Building a multi-disciplinary workforce within GP practices to support people within their communities

To continue transforming primary care there needs to be a move to person-centred care which is focused on what is important to the individual. We are advocating for occupational therapists to be based within GP practices as core members of multidisciplinary teams. By doing this, the next Scottish Government would empower people to manage their own health and independence by using tools and strategies to enable them to live independently.

Primary care in Scotland is changing with a view to expanding services, having less reliance on GPs, and creating a wider team supporting more people to remain at home and in their local community. The Health and Sport Committee's 2019 public survey on the future of primary care confirmed support for a change with most surveyed indicating they would like to be able to see a greater range of health professionals without having to go through a GP. The transformation of primary care is already underway and we are beginning to see access to a wider range of health professionals as well as reduction in transition and visits between services. This new model of primary care promotes early intervention for those who need support and provides professionals with more time to spend with patients in need of their specific expertise. Occupational therapists are a key part of this right person, right place, and right time model.

In 2018, the revised Scottish GP contract set out additional provisions for pharmacy, musculoskeletal physiotherapy services and mental health support workers. This has improved multi-disciplinary working and integrated services. However, we believe that this can be developed further.

The results of an improvement project in **NHS Lanarkshire** have revealed that having an occupational therapy service within GP settings can reduce the number of repeat appointments and prescriptions, with initial findings demonstrating a reduction in the number of return appointments to a GP by up to 55%. Having an occupational therapist attached to a GP practice provides an alternative offer for people seeking support. It also means occupational therapists are ideally placed to provide prevention and early intervention solutions to help people regain the skills they need to get on with their lives. We call on the new Scottish Government to review the results of this improvement project and provide this service across Scotland.

Having an occupational therapist attached to a GP practice provides an alternative offer for people seeking support

NHS Tayside has developed a similar model for individuals having difficulty managing their usual day to day activities as a result of COVID-19 or lockdown restrictions. Patients are urged to contact their COVID-19 related Assessment, Rehabilitation, Enablement and Support (CARES) team, rather than their local GP, where they can receive an initial virtual appointment with an occupational therapist or physiotherapist who can help manage a range of symptoms such as fatigue, muscle weaknesses or cognitive issues. Feedback of its early stages suggest it is being well received and is worthy of further study.

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We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:

Better support people in their local community and expand the multi-disciplinary team within general practice by:

- **Expanding the improvement project in Lanarkshire to further clusters of GP practices in Scotland to demonstrate the patient and wider service benefits of having direct access to occupational therapy.**
- **Ensuring direct and greater access to occupational therapy services, to support self-management and rehabilitation, through self-referral such as the Dundee CARES model which offers direct access to support to people who have had COVID-19.**



2 Increasing the presence of occupational therapy in children and young people services to address physical and mental health needs early

As a society we want our children to:

- Lead full and happy lives, participating in the activities (occupations) they need and want to do at home, at school and at play.
- Realise their potential by developing the skills and resilience they need to access education and perform activities of daily living.
- Participate as valued members of their community regardless of physical, learning and mental health needs.

Yet in the UK more children are starting school without the foundation skills and resilience they need to succeed in education and life.¹ Addressing the impact of adverse childhood experiences and other health and social inequalities on childhood outcomes is a Public Health Scotland priority and early intervention is essential to prevent mental health problems from escalating. Despite this, referrals to specialist mental health services increased 22 per cent between 2013/14 and 2017/18², and waiting lists for young people seeking mental health support continue to increase. While the suspension of services due to coronavirus resulted in a 57 per cent reduction in referrals between April and June 2020, as services resume and society recovers, this pent-up demand could lead to overwhelming pressure upon mental health services. We believe occupational therapists can be part of the solution to this problem.

In order to meet this increased demand for support, we believe there needs to be greater collaboration between health, social care, education and the voluntary sector. The Scottish Government's 2016 strategy Ready to Act – a transformational plan for children and young people, their parents, carers and families who require support from allied health professionals (AHPs), promoted a collaborative approach and encouraged partnership working across these sectors. Increasing the presence of occupational therapy in these sectors and adopting a partnership approach extends the reach of occupational therapy services to more children, young people and families, freeing-up specialist occupational therapy capacity to support children and young people with the most complex needs and circumstances.

We are calling for occupational therapy services to be redesigned so children and young people can have direct access to occupational therapy skills and expertise when they need it.

Shifting occupational therapy resources to focus on health promotion and prevention in schools, early years and community settings will ensure that opportunities to promote physical and mental health are embedded into every aspect of a child or young person's life, optimising their development, health and wellbeing. Furthermore, by embedding occupational therapists and their knowledge into schools, staff will be better supported to recognise and tackle early difficulties, decreasing the need for onward referral to specialist services.

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Teacher training

Occupational therapists are a specialist profession with our members applying their skills across various different policy areas. We are, however, a finite resource, and it is for this reason that we work to educate and upskill other professionals such as teachers, who can use occupational therapy methods to promote fine motor, independence, and play skills. Our colleagues in **NHS Grampian** have already started this work with Aberdeen University and undergraduate Primary Education students.

In partnership with Aberdeen University, the occupational therapy team at Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital created training materials and presented to the students to inform them what help is available for children locally. They have also explained how occupational therapy skills can be used to help children with typical classroom activities such as hand writing skills. The training materials and presentation were well received by the University and the student teachers who stated they had a better understanding of occupational therapy and how this can apply in classroom to assist pupils.

We believe one of the key ways to improve children's health and wellbeing at school is to upskill student teachers in occupational therapy methods to promote fine motor, independence and play skills

We want children in Scotland to realise their full potential by developing the skills and resilience they need to succeed in life. It is for that reason, we recommend extending this pilot across Scotland to ensure that early intervention can be supported in the classroom.

We therefore, welcome that a commitment to develop and deliver a new mental health training and learning resource for school staff was included in the 2020/21 Programme for Government. We believe the implementation of this resource would be greatly improved through occupational therapy-led training.

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The RCOT calls on the next Scottish Government to:

- **Work in partnership with us to provide a Once for Scotland central source of information for parents and teachers that covers:**

Top tips on key childhood occupations such as developing independence skills (e.g. getting changed, using cutlery, toileting), school skills (e.g. using scissors, writing skills, organising equipment, coping with sensory overload) and play/leisure (e.g. riding a bike, swimming, creative activities for well-being)

Webinars for families and professionals (e.g. supporting 'fussy eaters', creating a sensory-smart classroom) and local signposting to support options, which can differ between local authorities.

This Scotland-wide approach would provide families with greater and easier access to occupational therapy tools.

- **Deploy occupational therapists in schools, early years and community settings to ensure children receive earlier focused interventions. By providing solutions-focused support earlier, this will reduce the need for specialist services and referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Support (CAMHS).**
- **Provide funding to expand the University of Aberdeen pilot project to provide essential occupational therapy skills to undergraduate and postgraduate teacher students. We call on the next Scottish Government to work with us to create a national toolkit for teachers and provide annual training to student teachers.**



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3 The right to community rehabilitation

The impact of COVID-19 has highlighted just how important access to high-quality, person-centered community rehabilitation is. It has also emphasised the need to review, expand and invest in rehabilitation services as a matter of urgency.

The true health impact of COVID-19 continues to evolve. NHS England estimates that 49% of people hospitalised with COVID-19 will require rehabilitation. We are expecting to see a significant demand for rehabilitation services in the near future and we believe that occupational therapists are uniquely placed to help. Occupational therapy restores a person's quality of life, giving them back their independence and reduces their need for ongoing health and social care support. As a key health and care profession, occupational therapy is the bridge between getting people from hospital into their communities and being able to get on with life.

We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:

- **Immediately action the 'Framework for Supporting People through Recovery and Rehabilitation during the COVID-19 Pandemic'. There should be regular engagement with AHP professional bodies to ensure the Framework is meeting the rehabilitation needs of patients during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- **We are calling for any new investment or service restructure to include expanding and retaining the occupational therapy workforce. Investment in occupational therapy is an investment in getting people from hospital into their communities and social groups and regaining their life and work roles thus being able to get on with their real life.**
- **Ensure everyone who needs it, has access to timely, high-quality, person-centred rehabilitation after discharge from hospital.**
- **Ensure that rehabilitation for mental and emotional health issues is kept on par with physical health conditions**



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4 Ensure parity between health and social care

A growing number of people are reliant on social care to go about their daily lives. Through the effects of ageing or changing circumstances, everyday activities that many people take for granted can quickly become challenging at best and impossible at worst. Treating social care as equal to healthcare is essential to ensure individuals can manage their symptoms in the community, valuing their independence whilst also relieving pressure on acute services.

Social Care has been seen as the poor relation in the health and social care field, but the work that the service delivers is vital in terms of protection, prevention and rehabilitation to our most vulnerable groups. We support the recent review of adult social care as we believe that parity between health and social care will be key to the success of any restructure of services.

The future of social care should be based around a clear framework of delivery that enables identification of associated knowledge skills and behaviours. To adequately support people we must consider how they live within their home but also their access and ability to integrate and be part of with their wider communities. Elements of an ideal model of social care would include suitable housing, investment in training, technology enabled care, capacity building in communities, funding for community rehabilitation, and a shift away from crisis intervention to a much earlier more enabling, person centered, model of care.

We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:

- **Ensure parity of recognition, esteem and funding between health and social care.**
- **Build upon the advances made in digital delivery of healthcare during the pandemic. We welcome investment in the Near Me consulting service and the 2020/21 Programme for Government commitment to move towards use of Near Me as default, where it is right for the individual. The benefits of digital delivery and technology enabled care should also be implemented in social care.**

Get in touch

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¹ National Association of Head Teachers (2017) *School Ready? A survey of school leaders* by NAHT and Family and Childcare Trust. Available at: <https://www.naht.org.uk/news-and-opinion/press-room/no-clear-government-plan-on-recruitment-and-retention-say-school-leaders/children-are-less-ready-for-school-than-five-years-ago-say-school-leaders/>

² *Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce Delivery Plan* (2018). Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/children-young-peoples-mental-health-taskforce-delivery-plan>

³ Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2018) *Relieving the pressure on social care: the value of occupational therapy*. <https://www.rcot.co.uk/file/4068/download?token=RNJL4Lt6>

