

Occupational therapy workforce strategy action plan

2024–2027



Workforce Strategy action plan

We'll deliver our first-ever UK wide occupational therapy Workforce Strategy using action plans for each of the four nations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

In these plans, we'll include actions that can be applied in each nation and detail:

- the position of the OT workforce using current and available data from NHS Skills for Care and the Health and Care Professions Council
- actions to transform and modernise the OT workforce
- examples of workforce modelling that can help organise skills and make sure staffing levels in services are safe.

Delivering our Workforce Strategy will be a team effort. Our action plans detail individual and collective roles and responsibilities for RCOT, our members, our stakeholder and partners, and everyone.

The tables on pages 3–10 present our overall action plan for delivering our Workforce Strategy.

Each workforce priority has actions with measures and timings. We'll share our nation-specific plans by the end of 2024.



Workforce priority one: Optimising occupational therapy



- We will support occupational therapy practitioners to be changemakers, using their skills and knowledge to lead and co-design innovative products, interventions and services that improve people’s lives and wellbeing.
- We will champion innovative service delivery models that improve access to occupational therapy and achieve health equity for all.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will highlight the value and impact of OT practitioners working at enhanced, advanced and consultant levels of practice.</p> <p>We will get employers ready to retain an upskilled OT workforce following study at enhanced, advanced and consultant levels of practice.</p>	<p>Number of occupational therapists working at enhanced, advanced and consultant levels of practice.</p> <p>Number of enhanced practice apprenticeships established and cohort size.</p>	2027
<p>We will work with our members to use the Innovation hub as a digital platform to build knowledge and confidence to drive innovation and demonstrate the impact of occupational therapy.</p> <p>We will create opportunities for funding, mentorship and networking which can help innovators turn their ideas into reality.</p>	<p>Number of improvement journeys submitted to the Innovation hub.</p> <p>Number and demographics of members who are part of the Innovation hub community.</p> <p>Quarterly summary of evidence trends and gaps from improvement journeys.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will work with our members to collect case studies and impact examples across primary care, children, young people and families and community rehabilitation.</p> <p>We will use these to show external stakeholders the value of improved access to occupational therapy for local populations and to wider health and social care delivery.</p> <p>We will promote the use of improvement journeys and the benefits of applying impact examples to cascade learning.</p>	<p>Number of case studies and impact examples collected from our members, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number of improvement journeys and Innovation hub case studies about our workforce priority areas.</p> <p>Activity with external stakeholders will be reported in our internal scorecards and shared with members via our governance boards.</p>	2024 to 2027

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will offer our members resources that help them measure and communicate the value and impact of their practice in one of three ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economically (for example, using return-on-investment models). 2. Socially (for example, using realist evaluation methodology). 3. Experientially (for example, using people's stories). <p>These resources will be applicable across the UK and across all areas of practice.</p>	<p>Number of members who download resources to evaluate impact of occupational therapy provision economically, socially and experientially.</p> <p>Number of submissions to the Innovation hub by our members.</p> <p>Steady increase in the quality of submissions of improvement journeys to the Innovation hub by our members.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>Together with our members, we will map where, how many and to what extent the OT workforce exists within the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital healthcare space.</p> <p>We will work with our members, partners and stakeholders to explore the potential for OT practitioners to be co-designers of AI and digital healthcare tools.</p> <p>We will use this map to monitor growth, regional distribution and demographics of the OT workforce within the AI and digital healthcare space by updating the map every three years.</p>	<p>Number and quality of responses to our mapping exercise.</p> <p>Changes in our map of how many, where and to what extent the OT workforce exists in the AI and digital healthcare space.</p> <p>Number and demographics (career level, regional distribution and job title) of practitioners who submit an AI and/or digital healthcare improvement journey to our Innovation hub.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will gather digital technology leaders across research, business, education and healthcare to explore and agree the role of OT in AI and digital healthcare.</p>	<p>Roundtables held with digital technology leaders across research, business, education and healthcare.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>



Workforce priority two: Demonstrating value and impact

- We will build our real-world and research evidence for occupational therapy to justify investment in the occupational therapy workforce by quantifying the impact.
- We will work with our leaders to put the case for how and where to deploy our expertise to add the most value for people and their families, the wider health and care system and to avoid critical shortages within the OT workforce.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will create a suite of resources to help systems make best value decisions about the positioning of the OT workforce. This will include a data sources repository for building business cases and evidencing impact.</p> <p>We will host a virtual platform that shares the common information needed for successful OT business cases and cases for change.</p> <p>We will use these examples at a national and regional level to argue for best value positioning of OT services in systems.</p>	<p>Numbers of engagement with resources by members, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number and themes of business cases and cases for change in development.</p> <p>Number of business cases presented in our idea clinics and the feasibility of the innovation idea being adopted by the system.</p> <p>Number of examples included in national and regional reports by our members, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Adoption and wider roll out of recommendations from improvement journeys by our partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number of improvement journey recommendations that have led to financial investment as reported by our members.</p>	2027
<p>We will work with our regional and national leaders to build on workforce transformation conversations that began in 2022.</p> <p>From 2023, we will co-deliver workforce reform workshops to support and accelerate workforce transformation.</p> <p>These annual workshops will build on previous years' workshop actions and pledges to sustain and embed ways to grow, reform and retain the OT workforce.</p>	<p>10 workforce reform workshops co-delivered annually across the four nations of the UK.</p> <p>Number of leaders at each workforce reform workshop, measured using our stakeholder mapping tool.</p> <p>100% of the annual workforce reform workshops will build on the actions agreed at the previous year's workshop.</p>	2024 to 2027

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will monitor and raise critical shortages in occupational therapy with the relevant government, NHS, and social care bodies.</p>	<p>Quarterly reports presented to RCOT's Council, outlining our policy and public affairs activities to raise OT workforce shortages with our stakeholders and partners.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will publish a new Research and Innovation Strategy to build the capacity and capability of our current and future workforce to embrace and actively engage with research and innovation.</p> <p>We will work with our members, partners and stakeholders to have a baseline understanding of our members' capacity and capability for research that we'll use to measure changes over time.</p>	<p>Number of downloads of our Research and Innovation Strategy.</p> <p>Number of members attending our Research Cafés.</p> <p>Number of members in our Research Connect community.</p> <p>Number and demographics of OTs working in evidence, research and development roles.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will collect and draw on data through our workforce survey, membership database and workforce maps to understand the size, distribution, career levels and skills mix of the OT workforce. This will allow us to monitor and report on trends to inform decisions about where we should be positioned within our healthcare systems.</p>	<p>The distribution of our members across statutory, private, independent, social enterprise and charity areas of practice.</p> <p>The distribution of our members across career levels (early to late) and levels of practice (novice to consultant).</p> <p>Trends in the demographic characteristics and skills of our members.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>Through our events and networks, we will host sessions on the theme of OT workforce to share learning, celebrate successes and stimulate provocative debate around opportunities and challenges.</p>	<p>Number of annual events held on the theme of OT workforce.</p> <p>Number of delegates who attend the OT workforce sessions at Annual Conference.</p> <p>Number of presentations on OT workforce at external stakeholder events.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will work with our commercial partners and employers to create opportunities for OT practitioners to develop and sustain careers across economic sectors.</p>	<p>Tri-annual OT workforce survey and member database to monitor the distribution of the OT workforce across economic sectors.</p> <p>Number of independent practitioners.</p> <p>Number of practitioners who self-identify as having a portfolio career.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>



Workforce priority three: Retention and career development

- We will support and promote the development of all occupational therapy practitioners, especially those from historically marginalised and under-represented communities, to be where they want to be at each stage in their career.
- We will build our profession's capacity, confidence and capability to incorporate leadership, learning, research and innovation into practice.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will review and develop learning and development standards for pre-registration education and early careers. These will be for education providers, practice-based educators and employers to use. Our aim will be to increase how confident graduates and employers are in new graduates' capabilities.</p> <p>We will work with pre-registration placement educators to enhance their capacity and capability to support learners on placement.</p>	<p>Numbers engaging with new pre-registration learning and development standards.</p> <p>Number of providers and programmes with RCOT accreditation.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will work with pre-registration placement educators to enhance their capacity and capability to support learners on placement.</p>	<p>Number of partners and employers attending our Placement Cafés.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will work with employers to spread adoption of work-based mentors to support OT practitioners to progress through career pathways.</p>	<p>Number of work-based mentors among employers of OT practitioners.</p>	2025 to 2027
<p>We will work with education providers to understand the current position and needs of our academic educator workforce. This will help us build the case to expand the capacity and capability of educators in delivering pre-registration and post-registration OT education programmes.</p>	<p>Number of academic educators who respond when we're scoping their needs.</p> <p>Quality of and themes from responses to our scoping work.</p>	2024 to 2027

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will revise the <i>Career Development Framework</i>.</p> <p>We will work with our members to develop a strategy which sets out the actions we will take to support the learning, development and career growth of our members.</p> <p>We will seek to understand how our <i>Career Development Framework</i> best supports employers and members to progress their career. We will support our members and employers to use the <i>Career Development Framework</i> to nurture practice at all levels.</p>	<p>Revised <i>Career Development Framework</i> published.</p> <p>Review of number of active users of the <i>Career Development Framework</i>.</p> <p>Evaluation of the active users' experiences of using the <i>Career Development Framework</i>.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will update our supervision guidance to build the confidence and capability of the occupational therapy workforce to engage in and benefit from supervision.</p> <p>We will publish resources to explain how to use the supervision guidance.</p>	<p>Numbers engaging with the supervision guidance.</p> <p>Reported experiences of using the supervision guidance and resources.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>

Workforce priority four: Effective workforce planning



- We will empower the OT workforce to contribute to, access and use the workforce planning data and intelligence available to them.
- We will empower the occupational therapy workforce to use the data and intelligence to make informed decisions about their positioning within the health and care system.

Action	Measure	When
We will compile a set of nation-specific workforce planning tools and frameworks for systems to use.	Numbers using our workforce planning tools and frameworks.	2024 to 2027
We will signpost our members and partners to resources that support access, use and application of workforce data. Our data sources include Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Skills for Care, NHS England, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), NHS Scotland and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland (HSCNI). We will develop an RCOT learner data dashboard.	Number of visits to our resources signposting web page. Number of engagements with the RCOT learner data dashboard.	2024 to 2027
We will publish co-produced plans for each of our priority areas for workforce growth: primary care, community rehabilitation after a stay in hospital, and in schools.	Numbers engaging with co-produced plans. KPIs achieved in each nation's action plan. Reports by our members through governance boards on their application of recommendations made in priority areas for workforce growth plans.	2024 to 2027

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will gather and share examples of workforce models and skills configurations that have improved outcomes for people, teams and systems. These examples will inspire others to adopt workforce transformation practices.</p>	<p>Number of innovation journeys received via the Innovation hub.</p> <p>Number of improvement journeys submitted that quote Innovation hub as an evidence source.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will establish data-sharing agreements with our workforce data owners to understand the OT workforce in more depth.</p>	<p>Data-sharing agreements established with HCPC, Skills for Care, NHS England, HEIW, NHS Scotland and HSCNI. We will report on these through our governance boards and member events.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will work with our members and their employers to carry out an inclusive survey of the UK's OT workforce every three years. We will use the results to monitor and respond to quantitative, qualitative and demographic characteristics of the workforce.</p>	<p>A UK-wide OT workforce survey will be carried out in 2024 and every three years going forward.</p> <p>Number of times data and intelligence from our workforce survey is used in regional and national reports, conversations and/or campaigns.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>

We're RCOT, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. We've championed the profession and the people behind it for over 90 years; and today, we are thriving with over 36,000 members.

Then and now, we're here to help achieve life-changing breakthroughs for our members, for the people they support and society as a whole.



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