Advancing occupational therapy: Research and Innovation Strategy action plan
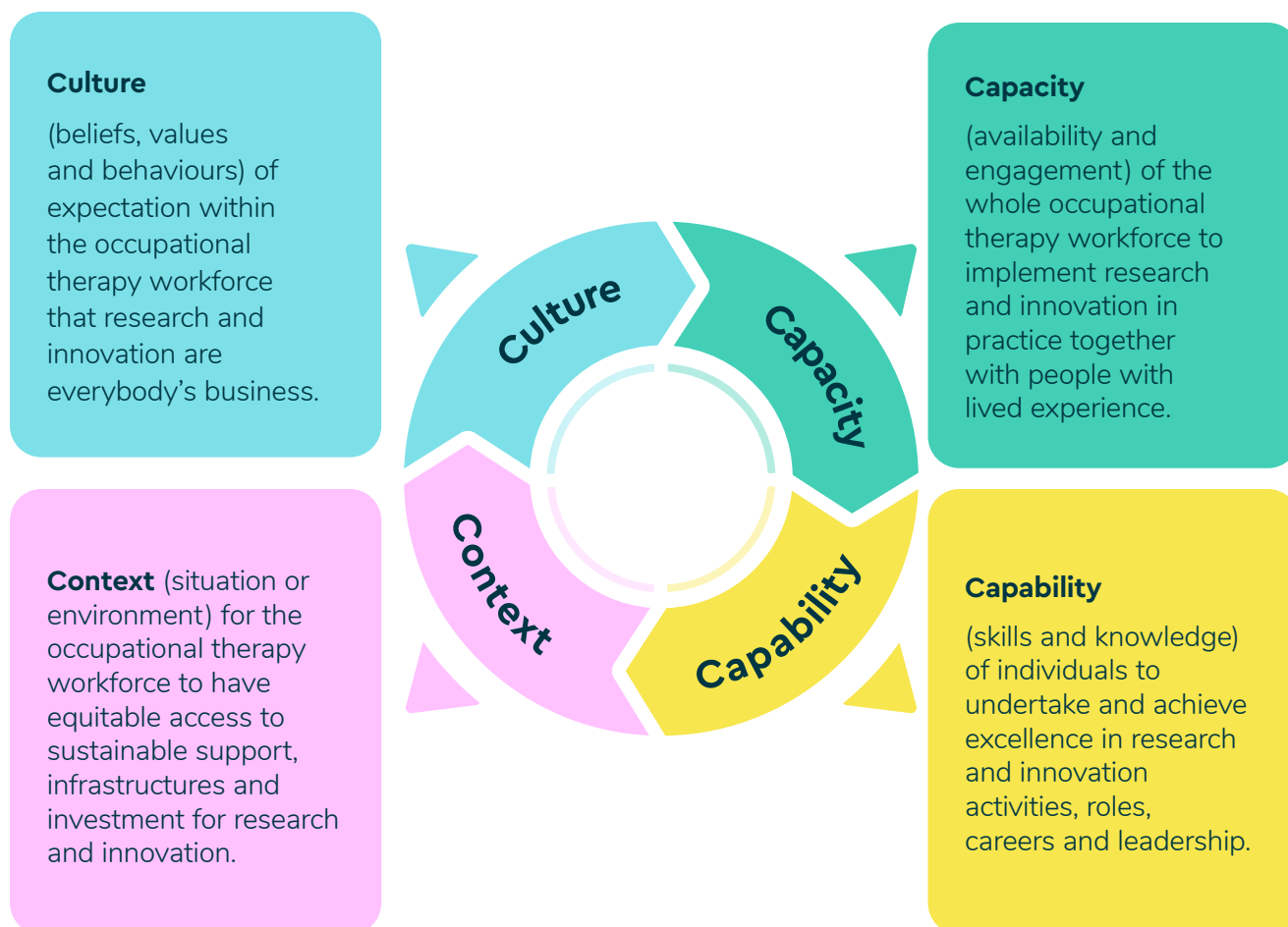
2025–2028

Royal College of
Occupational
Therapists

Introduction

Our Advancing occupational therapy: Research and Innovation Strategy outlines our vision for the occupational therapy workforce to develop and integrate evidence from research, innovation and quality improvement into practice. Aligned with other national research and innovation policies and strategies, our strategy includes four action areas.

These are inter-dependent and are equally important to achieve transformational impact and lasting change.

Culture

(beliefs, values and behaviours) of expectation within the occupational therapy workforce that research and innovation are everybody's business.

Capacity

(availability and engagement) of the whole occupational therapy workforce to implement research and innovation in practice together with people with lived experience.

Context (situation or environment) for the occupational therapy workforce to have equitable access to sustainable support, infrastructures and investment for research and innovation.

Capability

(skills and knowledge) of individuals to undertake and achieve excellence in research and innovation activities, roles, careers and leadership.

We will implement this 10-year strategy through a series of 3-year action plans. This is our first action plan covering 2025–2028 and we'll report quarterly to RCOT Council on progress.

Action area one: Capacity of the whole occupational therapy workforce to implement research and innovation in practice together with people with lived experience.

Number	Focus	Action	Measure	Timescale
1	Research and Innovation	Develop research and innovation case studies that showcase the leadership opportunities and activities available at different career levels.	Number of case studies available per year.	2025–2028
			Number of case studies that reference inclusion of people with lived experience.	2025–2028
2	Research and Innovation	Map career development opportunities including research, innovation, secondments and leadership roles at all levels, across all devolved nations.	Each devolved nation has a map of opportunities available.	2025–2026
			Opportunities are promoted to members through RCOT Communities.	2025–2028
3	Innovation	Identify innovation priorities and develop targeted calls to action to submit improvement ideas to the Innovation Hub.	Number of examples related to national and strategic priorities are available via the Innovation Hub.	2025–2028
			Number of opportunities to showcase work within RCOT Communities and more widely.	2025–2028
4	Innovation	Co-facilitate webinars/cafés highlighting innovative practices in priority workforce areas.	Number of webinars/cafés available per year.	2025–2028
5	Innovation	Develop guidance for members on involving people with lived experience in innovation.	Guidance is available for members.	2025–2026
			Number of downloads and/or feedback from members.	2026–2028

Action area two: Capability of individuals to undertake and achieve excellence in research and innovation activities, roles, careers and leadership.

Number	Focus	Action	Measure	Timescale
6	Research and Innovation	Contribute to the review of the Career Development Framework (CDF) to strengthen research components and incorporate innovation.	Number of changes to CDF incorporating research and innovation skills.	2025–2026
7	Research	Collaborate with RCOT Education and Professional Development teams to identify and fill gaps in research methods resources.	Number of resources including cafés and webinars, and engagement with these.	2026–2028
8	Research and Innovation	Develop resources including webinars/cafés/workshops/video guides on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research and innovation activities.	Number of resources, events and opportunities, attendance rates and feedback.	2025–2028
9	Research and Innovation	Provide resources to members on full breadth of economic evaluation in research and quality improvement.	Guidance is available for members.	2026–2027
			Number of resources, events and opportunities available to members.	2027–2028
10	Innovation	Provide 'Getting started' support as an introduction to using systematic improvement methodologies.	Guidance/support is available for members.	2025–2026
			Number of members who have received support (individual, drop-ins and webinar/cafés).	2025–2026
11	Research and Innovation	Signpost members to opportunities that develop research and innovation leadership skills and behaviours.	Number of resources, events and opportunities available to members.	2026–2028
			Number of enquires received via digital contact centre.	2026–2028

12	Research and Innovation	Build our research and innovation communities where all members can develop confidence, support and learn from one another.	Agree community platform engagement metrics.	2025–2026
			Collect engagement metrics from communities.	2026–2028
			Number of members within research and innovation communities.	2025–2028
13	Research and Innovation	Recruit, support and develop Research and Innovation volunteers across the RCOT Communities platform.	Develop a forum for research and innovation leads to network across communities.	2025–2026
			Develop relationship between Research and Innovation Advisory Group and research and innovation community volunteers.	2025–2026
			Develop relationship between Research and Innovation Advisory Group and other RCOT advisory groups.	2025–2028
14	Innovation	Recruit volunteer network innovation leads with experience in using systematic improvement methodologies.	Number of RCOT community volunteers with systematic improvement methodology experience recruited.	2025–2028
15	Innovation	Provide members with access to opportunities to share and learn from experiences and failures.	Number of engagement metrics on the Improvement database.	2025–2028
			Number of webinars/cafés and drop-ins providing opportunities to share experiences.	2025–2028
			Number of downloads of implementation guides and/or feedback from members.	2025–2028
16	Innovation	Collaborate with members to use the Innovation Hub to build knowledge to drive innovation and demonstrate the impact of occupational therapy.	Number of improvement journeys submitted to the Innovation Hub.	2025–2028
			Insights are used to develop evidence implementation guides for members.	2026–2028
17	Innovation	Provide opportunities for RCOT colleagues to access systematic improvement methodologies education.	Number of colleagues accessing opportunities per year.	2025–2028

18	Research	Continue to fund and support research activity through the RCOT Research and Innovation Fund.	Number of grants allocated per year.	2025–2028
			Number of resources and opportunities for members to develop application skills.	2026–2028
19	Research and Innovation	Explore opportunities and partnerships for research and innovation funding across all sectors that align with our values.	Number of opportunities explored.	2026–2028
			Number of partnerships created.	2026–2028
20	Research and Innovation	Provide signposting and resources to endorse meaningful involvement of people with lived experience and diverse communities in research and innovation activities, and support our members to do this.	Number of resources, events and opportunities available to members.	2025–2028
21	Research and Innovation	Host events and produce resources to support our members to understand and recognise barriers to inclusion in research and innovation activities.	Number of resources, events and opportunities, attendance rates and feedback.	2026–2028
22	Research and Innovation	Embed research and innovation capacity building into the revised and expanded Learning and development standards for pre-registration education.	Number of changes to the standards incorporating research and innovation skills.	2025–2026
23	Research and Innovation	Offer prizes for learners engaging in research and innovation projects and promote success.	Number of prizes awarded each year.	2025–2028
			Number of events and opportunities to promote success, attendance rates and feedback.	2025–2028
24	Research and Innovation	Provide access to a collection of resources including online journals, databases and books relevant to occupational therapy to ensure members have access to high-quality, peer-reviewed evidence.	Online collection of high-quality resources increases per year.	2025–2028
			Usage data from publishers increases per year.	2025–2028

25	Research	Develop and publish resources to help members to effectively search for the evidence, for example using specific databases, literature searching and staying up to date with the latest research.	A series of up-to-date information skills guides are available to members.	2025–2026
			Number of downloads per year.	2026–2028
26	Research	Provide a digital library enquiry service to support members to develop search strategies, locate hard-to-find resources and stay updated with the latest research.	Number of enquiries received via digital contact centre related to finding literature per year.	2025–2028
27	Research and Innovation	Celebrate and promote our research and innovation activities, and those of our members, through RCOT Communities and other channels.	Number of promotional activities per year.	2025–2028

Action area three: Context for the occupational therapy workforce to have equitable access to sustainable support, infrastructures and investment for research and innovation.

Number	Focus	Action	Measure	Timescale
28	Research and Innovation	Embed the principles of our Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB) Strategy in all that we do.	Establish link with our EDB community volunteers and develop an action plan.	2025–2026
			An EDB role within the Research and Innovation Advisory Group is established.	2025–2026
			Ringfenced or targeted funding opportunities/ specific mentorship for members from ethnic and minoritised groups are explored.	2026–2028
29	Research	Identify and map key funders and charities that align with our profession's values.	List of key funders is available for all four nations.	2025–2026
30	Research	Work in partnership with the Community for Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR) and other allied health professions networks to develop a stronger voice of allied health professionals together for lobbying and campaigning.	A campaign plan is developed for delivery.	2025–2026
			Mechanisms are agreed to report on progress.	2026–2028
31	Research	Support community research and innovation volunteers to signpost members to relevant funders and charities, and local CAHPR hubs in their region.	Number of volunteers that access lists of key funders and charities.	2026–2028
			Number of occupational therapists that engage with local CAHPR hubs.	2025–2028

32	Research	Lobby for research funding and career development opportunities in all areas of OT practice, including clinical practitioner academic posts and research delivery and leadership roles.	Number of lobbying activities carried out per year.	2026–2028
			Number of occupational therapists in senior research roles, clinical practitioner academic roles, etc.	2025–2028
33	Innovation	Undertake strategic influencing of key stakeholders and funders, including charities.	Number of influencing activities carried out per year.	2026–2028
34	Research	Ensure RCOT representatives actively participate in CAHPR Strategy Committee to coordinate efforts, share resources and align messaging.	RCOT members are represented within CAHPR.	2025–2026
35	Innovation	Collate and share examples of workforce models and skills configurations that have improved outcomes for people, teams and systems.	Number of improvement journeys submitted to the Innovation Hub.	2026–2028
			Insights are used to develop evidence implementation guides for members.	2025–2026
36	Research	Promote awareness of the top 10 occupational therapy research priorities through new engagement activities and refreshed webpage.	Refreshed webpage is available.	2025–2026
			BJOT editorial summarising the top 10 editorial series is available.	2025–2026
			Number of engagement activities within communities per year.	2025–2028
37	Research and Innovation	Raise member awareness of environmental sustainability issues in relation to research and innovation activities.	Number of resources, events and opportunities, attendance rates and feedback.	2026–2028

Action area four: Culture of expectation within the occupational therapy workforce that research and innovation are everybody's business.

Number	Focus	Action	Measure	Timescale
38	Research and Innovation	Drive a transformational shift in awareness, skills and values of research and innovation across the workforce.	Number of promotional activities per year.	2025–2028
39	Research and Innovation	Identify differences between UK nations for research and innovation across all sectors.	Differences between UK nations are acknowledged in resources and opportunities that are available for members.	2025–2028
40	Research and Innovation	Elevate the need for role models and mentorship opportunities through the RCOT Communities platform.	Research and innovation needs are raised with the RCOT Communities team.	2025–2026
41	Research and Innovation	Support and enable our learners to engage in research and innovation opportunities within practice placements.	Research and innovation needs are raised with the RCOT Communities team.	2025–2028
			Number of resources, events and opportunities available to members to encourage research and innovation within placements.	2025–2028
			Number of placements that provide an opportunity for project work, innovation, quality improvement or research (Workforce Strategy survey data).	2025–2026

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 for society as a whole.

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