Learning and development standards for pre-registration education and early career occupational therapists

June 2025

Contents

The Standards' layout

We want our Learning and development standards for pre-registration education and early career occupational therapists (referred to as 'the Standards' to be straightforward to read and understand. To achieve that, we have made a couple of changes to how they are presented.

- The theme of each group of standards is now called **Scope** (previously Domain).
- There are then one or more **standards** relevant to the Scope (shown in a blue box with white text).
- Lastly, there are **Supporting standards**, which provide more detail relevant to the overarching standard (shown in the text boxes below the standard).

Scope 7, Early career support, is a new scope. This has six standards, each having a different theme. Before the details of each standard, we have highlighted the theme in teal.

Further **Guidance, evidence and requirements** will be provided in a separate document, relevant to each standard. This details what we are wanting to 'see' to have confidence that the standard has been met. This change means we can proactively update the guidance, evidence and requirements, ensuring the Standards can be applied in a contemporary context.

A list of definitions and terminology, references and bibliography has also been provided.

Learning and development standards for pre-registration education and early career occupational therapists

Scope 1: Level of award for entry into the profession

Standard 1.1
To be eligible to join the HCPC register and in line with WFOT requirements, learners successfully complete a minimum of a Bachelor's degree with honours.

1.1.1	Programme documentation states graduate eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist with the HCPC and for professional membership with RCOT, those who have completed a programme at one of the following award levels: • Bachelor's degree with honours • Post-graduate diploma • Master's degree • Doctorate.

Scope 2: Programme admissions

Standard 2.1	
The admissions process is inclusive, transparent and supportive, ensuring both the applicant and the education provider have the information they require to make an informed choice about taking up or making an offer of a place on a programme.	
2.1.1	There is accessible and inclusive information available to applicants about the values, responsibilities and professional expectations of being an occupational therapist, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether the profession is the right fit for them.
2.1.2	There is clear information about the academic, practice-based learning and assessment requirements of the programme accessible to applicants, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether the programme is the right fit for them.
Standard 2.2	
The selection and entry criteria include appropriate academic and professional entry standards.	
2.2.1	The admissions process reflects the professional conduct, performance and ethics consistent with RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).
2.2.2	Academic entry requirements are clearly defined, inclusive of a range of qualifications and proportionate to the nature and demands of the programme.
2.2.3	Applicants offered a place in an apprenticeship programme meet the clearly communicated needs, expectations and criteria of the employer, education provider and the profession.
2.2.4	A foundation programme designed as an entry route to an occupational therapy programme is a coherent programme of study in its own right and clearly demonstrates relevance to the learning outcomes of the occupational therapy programme.
2.2.5	Where a generic foundation programme is used as an entry route to an occupational therapy programme, the applicant still undergoes the admissions process and will be subject to the standard recognition of prior learning requirements for that programme.
Standard 2.3	
The admissions process ensures that applicants are proficient in written and conversational English.	
2.3.1	Applicants are informed of the English language expectations required to engage with and complete the academic and practice-based components of the programme.
2.3.2	Applicants are required to demonstrate proficiency in written and spoken English at a level appropriate for academic study.
Standard 2.4	
The admissions process assesses the suitability of applicants, including criminal conviction checks.	
2.4.1	The admissions process ensures applicants offered a place in the programme demonstrate personal and professional attributes required for safe and effective occupational therapy practice.
2.4.2	An occupational therapist employed by the education provider is designated as the Admissions Tutor, holding overall responsibility for the admission of suitable applicants to the programme.

Standard 2.5 The admissions process ensures that applicants are made aware of, and comply with, any health requirements.	
2.5.1	Applicants offered a place are informed of the health requirements of the programme, including (but not limited to) occupational health clearance and immunisations.
2.5.2	Applicants are required to meet the health requirements of the programme, with reasonable adjustments in place where needed.
2.5.3	Where health related requirements are disclosed, the education provider works collaboratively with the applicant to identify reasonable adjustments that support equitable access to the programme.
Standard 2.6 There is a transparent, fair and supportive process for assessing applicants' prior learning and experience.	
2.6.1	Recognition of prior learning is offered to all learners and is fair and transparent and involves reasonable academic judgement.
2.6.2	Applicants are supported by the education provider through the application process for recognition of prior learning.
Standard 2.7 The admissions process is guided by principles of equity, diversity and belonging and conducted through inclusive and fair practices that holistically assess applicants' potential.	
2.7.1	Admissions criteria and processes are designed to evaluate a broad spectrum of applicant qualities, including academic achievements, relevant experience, personal attributes and potential to contribute to the occupational therapy profession.
2.7.2	Everyone involved in admissions receives role-appropriate training and support, informed by equity, diversity and belonging principles, to ensure inclusive and equitable decision making, including the recognition and mitigation of bias.
2.7.3	Education providers ensure that everyone involved in admissions demonstrates inclusive behaviours, an understanding of equity, diversity and belonging principles, and is committed to anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice.
2.7.4	Education providers have a process in place that ensures they respond appropriately and offer reasonable adjustments when an applicant discloses a disability or specific learning need during the application process.
2.7.5	Admissions data is regularly monitored, reviewed and acted on to ensure processes reflect the professional values of fairness, transparency and accountability, promoting equitable access for all applicants.

Scope 3: Programme governance, management and leadership

Standard 3.1 The programme is sustainable.	
3.1.1	Learners are offered a programme that has the commitment of the education provider to be sufficiently resourced throughout the accredited period.
3.1.2	Sustainability principles including social, environmental and economic dimensions are explicit in programme design, delivery, staffing, resource use and stakeholder collaboration.
Standard 3.2 The programme is effectively managed.	
3.2.1	All learners are offered the same quality of education and equitable opportunities for learning, regardless of the mode of delivery or type of award.
3.2.2	The roles, responsibilities and expectations of the education provider and learner (and employer, in the case of apprenticeship programmes) are upheld.
Standard 3.3 The education provider ensures those holding overall professional responsibility for the programme are appropriately qualified and experienced.	
3.3.1	The occupational therapy-specific suite of programmes is led by an occupational therapist in the role of Professional Lead (see definition).
3.3.2	Each programme offered by the education provider is led by an occupational therapist in the role of Programme Lead (see definition).
Standard 3.4 The programme has regular and effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place.	
3.4.1	The quality monitoring and enhancement processes outlined by the education provider consider the rigour and integrity of the programme, regularly enabling continuous development.
3.4.2	Evaluation processes include feedback from learners, graduates, educators, practice educators, people who access occupational therapy and employers, and are used by education providers to inform continuous improvement.
Standard 3.5 People who access occupational therapy services are meaningfully involved in the development, enhancement and delivery of the programme.	
3.5.1	People who access occupational therapy services are meaningfully involved in the deliberative and decision-making processes related to admissions, curriculum design and delivery, practice-based learning and ongoing programme review.
Standard 3.6 Learners are meaningfully and actively involved in the development and enhancement of the programme.	
3.6.1	Clear processes are in place for learner representation at programme level.
3.6.2	Learners are meaningfully and actively involved in collaborating with the education provider and providing feedback that informs decision making across admissions, curriculum design and delivery, practice-based learning and ongoing programme review. Graduates may also contribute to these processes where appropriate.

Standard 3.7	
There are an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff in place to deliver the programme.	
3.7.1	Qualified and experienced educators, practice educators and administration and support staff adequately support learners to undertake all elements of the programme.
3.7.2	The number of learners is in proportion with the number of appropriately qualified and experienced educators, with a ratio of one qualified and experienced educators to a maximum of twenty learners.
3.7.3	The diversity of the educators and practice educators aligns with the philosophy and purpose of the programme.
3.7.4	Education provider's policies and processes support the wellbeing of educators.
Standard 3.8	
Subject areas are delivered by educators with relevant specialist knowledge and expertise.	
3.8.1	Educators demonstrate appropriate knowledge and expertise for delivering curriculum content covering the four pillars of the RCOT Career Development Framework (RCOT, 2021a).
3.8.2	Educators and practice educators use local and global knowledge of occupational therapy, health, disability, society and education to support learners.
3.8.3	Occupational therapy-specific knowledge and skills are delivered by occupational therapists.
Standard 3.9	
An effective strategy is in place to ensure the continuing professional and academic development of educators, appropriate to their roles in the programme.	
3.9.1	Workload allocation and planning reflects the breadth of the educator role, supporting engagement in teaching, scholarship and/or research, while also accommodating associated administrative responsibilities.
3.9.2	The design and delivery of a contemporary and evidence-based curriculum is directly impacted by the continuing professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning activities that educators engage in.
3.9.3	Educators are supported to actively engage in scholarship and/or research that directly influences the programme and the profession.
3.9.4	Processes are in place demonstrating the education provider's commitment to supporting the wellbeing of educators.
Standard 3.10	
The resources to support learning in all settings are effective and appropriate to the delivery of the programme and are accessible and inclusive for all learners and educators.	
3.10.1	Resources fit well with the philosophy and purpose of the programme.
3.10.2	Facilities, equipment and resources are accessible, well maintained and fit for purpose, supporting the achievement of learning outcomes and fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging within the learning environment.
3.10.3	Learning materials, resources and activities are accessible and inclusive, reflecting the diverse learning needs of both learners and educators.

Standard 3.11 There are effective, accessible and inclusive arrangements in place to support learner wellbeing, learning needs and development of agency of learners across all settings.	
3.11.1	Learners are supported to develop agency in managing their own health and wellbeing, through curriculum content and learning opportunities that promote self-awareness, self-management and reflection.
3.11.2	Each learner is allocated a named Tutor responsible for providing general academic advice, mentoring and support for professional development, wellbeing and agency.
3.11.3	Learners are aware of, and have access to, support services provided by the education provider.
Standard 3.12 Principles of equity, diversity and belonging are embedded in all aspects of programme design, delivery and review, supporting inclusive learning, and anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice.	
3.12.1	Equity, diversity and belonging principles are clear, transparent and demonstrated throughout the programme.
3.12.2	Educators and practice educators demonstrate the skills, values and commitment to support inclusive learning and challenge oppression, contributing to a more participatory and equitable society.
Standard 3.13 There are thorough and effective processes in place for ensuring the ongoing suitability of learners' conduct, character and health.	
3.13.1	The learning strategy and methods assure fitness for the profession.
3.13.2	Future employers are confident that graduates are fit for the profession and for employment and enter the workforce as autonomous yet novice practitioners, irrespective of the level of their qualification.
3.13.3	Learners are supported to develop and maintain the personal and professional attributes suitable for practice as an occupational therapist.
Standard 3.14 The education provider ensures learners, educators and others are aware that only successful completion of an approved programme leads to eligibility for admission to the HCPC Register.	
3.14.1	Programme documentation contains clear information about step-off or exit awards and whether these provide eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist.
3.14.2	Learners are provided with information about RCOT membership, including its purpose and the benefits of joining the professional body.

Scope 4: Programme design and delivery

Standard 4.1	
Programme learning outcomes ensure learners meet the Standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2023a) for the relevant part of the HCPC register and uphold professional conduct, performance and ethics, consistent with RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).	
4.1.1	Learning outcomes ensure learners understand and meet the HCPC standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2023a) by the end of the programme.
4.1.2	Learning outcomes are shaped by RCOT's Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b), reflecting the behaviours and values learners are responsible for upholding.
4.1.3	Learning outcomes ensure learners understand and meet RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).
4.1.4	The programme is of sufficient duration to ensure learners are fully prepared and fit for the profession, with a minimum of 90 active learning weeks.
Standard 4.2	
The programme places occupation at its core, reflecting the profession's philosophy, values, skills and knowledge base.	
4.2.1	The core principles of occupational therapy and occupation-centred practice are embedded throughout the programme.
4.2.2	Learners develop the skills to identify and address occupational challenges stemming from inequality, discrimination and human rights issues. Using an occupational justice lens, learners are prepared to advocate for inclusivity and support the empowerment of diverse individuals, communities and populations locally and internationally.
4.2.3	Learners develop an occupational perspective that integrates approaches focused on prevention, early intervention and community engagement as essential elements of professional practice.
4.2.4	Learners are supported to draw on knowledge of medical conditions, foundational sciences, the use of the self as therapeutic agents in creating relationships and identifying motivating elements of people who use occupational therapy services, using occupation as the vehicle for intervention.
4.2.5	The programme prepares learners to: • maintain occupation-centred practice • deliver safe, effective, person-centred and ethical practice • use professional judgement and evidence-based critical reasoning to make decisions.
4.2.6	The programme prepares learners to: • teach, mentor, supervise and assess others • facilitate practice-based learning • access, develop and evaluate contemporary practice and learning environments, methods, tools and materials.
4.2.7	The programme prepares learners to: • enhance their own and others' knowledge, skills and critical thinking • lead, guide and facilitate effective teamwork • influence, design and implement professional or organisational change.

4.2.8	The programme provides learners with the skills to: • access, evaluate and apply evidence to inform practice • initiate, design, conduct and disseminate research to advance the profession • be innovators, driving inclusive change through advocacy and occupational justice • engage with and influence broader socio-economic and political agendas relevant to occupational therapy.
Standard 4.3 **The curriculum remains relevant to contemporary occupational therapy practice.**	
4.3.1	Learners are prepared to enter the profession with the skills and knowledge reflected in the evidence base, to meet the current and future needs of people who access occupational therapy services.
4.3.2	Learners develop their knowledge of current and predicted health and wellbeing needs and associated occupations relevant to local, national and international communities.
4.3.3	Learners integrate data on social, economic, organisational, environmental and health disparities to design and prioritise occupational therapy services, promoting occupational justice.
4.3.4	Learners identify professional and policy influences on occupational therapy and are prepared to actively participate in shaping the profession's future, informed by the priorities of the RCOT Workforce Strategy (RCOT, 2024b).
4.3.5	Learners develop the skills to be entrepreneurial and innovative.
4.3.6	Learners develop digital literacy skills to effectively navigate and utilise emerging digital technological advancements, including artificial intelligence, in occupational therapy practice, to drive progress and change.
Standard 4.4 **The integration of theory, evidence and practice underpins the quality and delivery of the programme.**	
4.4.1	The integrity of the curriculum is reflected in the integration of theory, evidence and practice across both academic and practice-based elements, ensuring its currency and breadth.
Standard 4.5 **The curriculum supports learners in developing research and innovation skills, aligned with the academic level of their programme.**	
4.5.1	Learners develop research skills, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, and are prepared to apply these skills in research, evaluation, quality improvement, practice and innovation projects aligned with their academic level.
4.5.2	Learners develop the critical analysis and synthesis skills necessary to collect and interpret data, using research and real-world evidence to apply outcome measures and evaluate the impact of occupational therapy.
4.5.3	Learners develop an understanding of research ethics and governance principles, applying them in research and practice to evaluate the impact of occupational therapy.
4.5.4	Learners develop skills to meaningfully involve people who access occupational therapy services in the design and conduct of research and service improvement.

Standard 4.6 The learning and teaching methods used are appropriate to the effective delivery of the programme and module learning outcomes.	
4.6.1	Learning and teaching approaches are evidence-informed, drawing on contemporary educational theories to ensure effective alignment with curriculum models.
4.6.2	Learning and teaching methods use a range of techniques and technologies to meet the needs of learners.
4.6.3	There is a process to ensure learners are prepared for and supported through each transition point in the programme, with a clear understanding of all associated expectations.
4.6.4	Learners are provided with details of the learning and teaching methods.
Standard 4.7 Programme delivery supports learners to be autonomous, reflective and critical thinkers.	
4.7.1	Learning and teaching methods prepare learners for autonomous practice, encouraging independent thinking, accountability and decision making.
4.7.2	Learning and teaching methods embed reflective practice as a core component of professional development.
4.7.3	Learning and teaching methods are designed to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, enhancing learners' ability to navigate complex professional situations.
Standard 4.8 The programme facilitates interprofessional learning, ensuring learners gain knowledge with, from and about professionals and peers from relevant professions.	
4.8.1	Interprofessional learning across health, wellbeing, social and integrated care systems is embedded in academic and practice-based learning to develop the knowledge, skills and professional conduct essential for collaborative practice.
4.8.2	Interprofessional learning is a productive and relevant educational experience for all learners.
4.8.3	Occupational therapy educators collaborate equally with educators from other relevant professions to define the scope and develop educational materials for interprofessional learning.
4.8.4	Interprofessional learning will constitute no more than one third of the programme.
Standard 4.9 The protection of people is a guiding principle of the programme.	
4.9.1	The programme includes effective processes for obtaining consent when appropriate, including from people accessing occupational therapy.
4.9.2	The programme includes effective processes to empower and support learners to raise concerns about the safety and wellbeing of people who access occupational therapy and others.
4.9.3	The programme includes effective processes to empower and support learners to raise concerns about their own safety and wellbeing.

Standard 4.10 The programme supports learners' progression through clear requirements for assessment completion and attendance, providing individualised support when necessary.	
4.10.1	The education provider clearly identifies and communicates to learners the parts of the programme where attendance is mandatory and establishes monitoring processes to track attendance.
4.10.2	All summative assessments within the programme are successfully completed.
4.10.3	Education providers have a system in place to establish an individual scheme of study for learners who have been unable to complete, or have failed, a mandatory assessment, but are eligible to attempt it again and continue with the programme.

Scope 5: Practice-based learning

Standard 5.1 Practice-based learning is integral to the programme.	
5.1.1	Practice-based learning facilitates the learner's formation of their professional identity as an occupational therapist and develops learners to meet professional conduct, performance and ethics, consistent with RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).
Standard 5.2 The structure, duration and range of practice-based learning supports the achievement of the learning outcomes, the HCPC Standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2023a) and is informed by the AHP principles of practice-based learning (CSP, 2023).	
5.2.1	Learners successfully complete a minimum of 1,000 assessed hours of practice-based learning mandated by WFOT (2016), to become work-ready graduates. This may include: • a maximum of 20% of the programme's total practice-based learning hours completed through assessed simulation. • hours recognised as prior learning. • a maximum of 3.5 hours per week of self-directed study relevant to practice-based learning (or the pro rata equivalent for part-time learners).
5.2.2	Through practice-based learning, the learner has the opportunity to experience or implement the occupational therapy process and gain wider knowledge of service provision.
5.2.3	Practice-based learning follows a scaffolded structure that supports the integration of theoretical knowledge and skills into contemporary, occupation-centred practice.
5.2.4	For learners in apprenticeship programmes, practice-based learning is undertaken outside the learner's own work setting, ideally outside their employer's organisation.
5.2.5	Learners are provided with a range of practice-based learning experiences across the breadth and diversity of occupational therapy practice, enabling them to develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary occupational therapy practice.
Standard 5.3 Practice-based learning takes place in an environment that is safe and supportive for learners and people who access occupational therapy services.	
5.3.1	Supervision models within practice-based learning are flexible, inclusive and tailored to the practice-based learning setting.
5.3.2	Practice educators have completed relevant training preparing them to inclusively support learners undertaking practice-based learning.
5.3.3	The education provider has administrative support in place for the organisation and management of practice-based learning, which includes support for both learners and practice educators.
5.3.4	Education providers have systems in place to support learners, educators, practice educators (and employers and work-based mentors in the case of apprenticeship programmes) at all times, but particularly in circumstances where learners are failing to reach the required learning outcomes or demonstrate fitness for the profession.
5.3.5	Processes demonstrate how education providers, practice-based learning providers and learners share responsibility for creating inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive environments where learners feel safe, valued, supported and a sense of belonging.

5.3.6	Education providers and practice-based learning providers ensure that reasonable adjustments are identified, implemented and regularly reviewed to enable learners to fully engage in practice-based learning.
Standard 5.4 **Collaborative partnerships are in place to ensure quality, breadth and capacity of practice-based learning opportunities for all learners.**	
5.4.1	An occupational therapist employed by the education provider has overall responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of practice-based learning within the programme and ensures that each learner gains the required breadth of experience.
5.4.2	Education providers work in partnership with practice-based learning providers to ensure capacity and quality across a range of settings that reflect the breadth of the profession.
5.4.3	Practice-based learning is supported by sufficient registered and experienced staff to provide learners with the opportunity to meet the practice-based learning requirements.
Standard 5.5 **Practice educators have relevant knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.**	
5.5.1	Practice educators are adequately prepared and supported to facilitate practice-based learning across all routes to registration and the diverse needs of learners.
5.5.2	Education providers work in partnership with practice-based learning providers to enable practice educators to teach, assess and support learners effectively.
Standard 5.6 **Practice educators engage in regular CPD to ensure their knowledge and skills remain contemporary and aligned with learners' needs and the delivery of the learning outcomes of the programme.**	
5.6.1	Education providers work in partnership with practice-based learning providers to ensure practice educators' CPD meaningfully informs the design and delivery of contemporary practice-based learning.
Standard 5.7 **Learners and practice educators are provided with timely information and supported to prepare effectively for practice-based learning.**	
5.7.1	There is a clear and inclusive induction to all practice-based learning that prepares learners and defines the roles and responsibilities of the practice-based learning provider, education provider, practice educators and learners.
5.7.2	There is a system in place to ensure learners have completed the training required by the specific practice-based learning provider, prior to commencing in their setting.
5.7.3	To ensure a depth of learning, practice educators work with learners to use appropriate strategies and resources to support and reflect on practice in their specific practice-based learning setting.

Standard 5.8	
Learners are supported by practice educators and the education provider to reflect on, and learn from, each of their practice-based learning experiences.	
5.8.1	There is a system in place for learners to engage in structured debriefing at the end of each practice-based learning experience, offering space for reflection and consolidation of learning.
5.8.2	Education providers support learners to integrate and transfer knowledge and skills gained during practice-based learning across different settings, promoting progressive development throughout the programme.

Scope 6: Assessment

Standard 6.1	
The assessment strategy and design ensure that those who successfully complete the programme meet the RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).	
6.1.1	The assessment strategy and methods ensure that graduates meet the RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b) by the end of the programme.

Standard 6.2	
Assessments provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of learners' progression and achievement.	
6.2.1	The assessment strategy and methods provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of achievement, aligned to the academic level of the programme.
6.2.2	Learners are provided with timely and clear information about assessment strategies and methods, including expectations at each academic level of the programme.
6.2.3	The assessment strategy and methods take an inclusive and robust approach, to ensure learners demonstrate knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required for practice.

Standard 6.3	
Assessment policies clearly specify requirements for progression and achievement within the programme.	
6.3.1	Learners who fail a practice-based learning component on substantiated grounds of fitness to practise concerns are denied a retrieval attempt.
6.3.2	Hours completed within a failed practice-based learning component do not count towards the minimum of 1,000 successfully completed practice-based learning hours mandated by WFOT (2016).
6.3.3	Learners are withdrawn from a programme if they fail their second attempt at any practice-based learning component.
6.3.4	Documentation identifies that when a learner is unable to complete the programme due to exceptional circumstances, such as serious illness or death, an Aegrotat award without classification can be given. This is awarded when there is sufficient evidence that the learner would otherwise have achieved all learning outcomes of the programme. This award does not lead to eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist.

Standard 6.4	
The assessment methods used are appropriate to, and effective at, measuring the learning outcomes.	
6.4.1	The assessment methods utilise a range of techniques and technologies to address the teaching and learning needs of the learners.
6.4.2	The assessment methods support the development of knowledge, skills and professional conduct and are congruent with the educational aims and learning outcomes of the programme, preparing learners for contemporary practice.
6.4.3	Learners are expected to meet all specified learning outcomes to achieve a pass in each assessment component.

Standard 6.5
There is a process in place for learners to make academic appeals.

6.5.1	Learners are provided with sufficient information about the process to follow when making an academic appeal.

Standard 6.6
The education provider ensures that at least one external examiner for the programme is appropriately qualified and experienced.

6.6.1	An external examiner has oversight of, and access to, all components of the award.

Scope 7: Early career support

Establishing a sense of belonging and inclusion	
Standard 7.1 Employers create inclusive and supportive environments that foster a sense of belonging for early career occupational therapists, enabling them to feel welcomed, connected and valued as they begin their professional journey.	
7.1.1	A culture of inclusion is actively promoted through team engagement, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice, use of inclusive language and recognition of diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.
7.1.2	Induction processes support integration into the team, profession and wider service, with emphasis on occupational therapy identity and values.
7.1.3	Employers facilitate access to peer support networks, both locally and nationally, including early career communities and occupational therapy- specific groups.
7.1.4	Employers recognise each early career occupational therapist as an individual and adjust levels of responsibility, autonomy and support to match their skills, experience and learning needs.
Structured supervision and support	
Standard 7.2 Employers ensure that early career occupational therapists have access to consistent, structured supervision that supports their transition into autonomous, safe and confident practice.	
7.2.1	Early career occupational therapists receive protected, regular and structured supervision from an occupational therapist, aligned with RCOT supervision guidance (RCOT, 2015) and HCPC Standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2023a), as part of a tailored support programme that promotes safe, confident and autonomous practice.
7.2.2	Early career occupational therapists are supported to safely and independently manage a caseload through focused supervision and structured guidance as they adjust to the demands of autonomous decision making.
7.2.3	Supervision includes space for reflective practice, feedback and discussion of confidence, challenges, professional growth and identity, including ongoing career conversations about development, engagement and long term retention.
7.2.4	Supervision arrangements and expectations are clearly communicated from the outset of employment.
7.2.5	Employers ensure that individuals providing supervision to early career occupational therapists are supported and prepared for this role, with access to appropriate training, resources and protected time to deliver high-quality, developmental supervision.
7.2.6	Supervisors provide inclusive, developmental oversight that supports reflective learning, facilitates safe skill development and enables shadowing opportunities across the occupational therapy process.
7.2.7	Where structured early career programmes are available, occupational therapists are offered timely access as part of their overall support and development.
7.2.8	A range of supervision models are used to appropriately meet the individual needs of early career occupational therapists.

Professional development and lifelong learning	
Standard 7.3 Employers support early career occupational therapists to engage in professional development, establish individual career trajectories and contribute to the development of the profession.	
7.3.1	Early career occupational therapists take an active role in identifying their individual learning needs and set development goals in line with the RCOT Career Development Framework (RCOT, 2021a).
7.3.2	Early career occupational therapists actively engage with professional development opportunities across the four pillars of practice of the RCOT Career Development Framework (RCOT, 2021a). This includes both structured learning activities and learning embedded in day-to-day practice.
7.3.3.	A minimum of half a day protected time is allocated per month for CPD, structured reflection and professional development activities, tailored to the individual learning needs and development goals of the early career occupational therapist.
7.3.4	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged and supported to engage in the role of practice educator.
7.3.5	Employers collaborate with education providers to understand the knowledge, skills and values developed during pre-registration education and ensure this learning is built upon in the workplace.
7.3.6	Employers collaborate with education providers to inform the development of a contemporary curriculum, supporting alignment between evolving service needs and graduate readiness.
7.3.7	Early career occupational therapists have access to mentorship opportunities that provide tailored guidance, promote professional growth, and support exploration of individual career aspirations beyond supervision structures.
7.3.8	Employers actively promote equitable access to mentorship opportunities for early career occupational therapists, ensuring these reflect and value diverse identities, perspectives and lived experiences across the profession.
Sustaining personal health and wellbeing	
Standard 7.4 Employers proactively promote the wellbeing of early career occupational therapists through supportive working practices that enable sustainable, reflective and self-directed engagement in the profession.	
7.4.1	Early career occupational therapists develop agency in managing their health and wellbeing, through access to resources, supportive workplace practices and opportunities for self-awareness, self-management and reflection.
7.4.2	Resources and signposting are available to promote mental health and wellbeing, particularly in response to stress and transition-related challenges.
7.4.3	Employers regularly review and adjust workload expectations to support wellbeing and enable sustainable engagement, ensuring caseloads are manageable in relation to the occupational therapist's stage of practice, available support and case demands.
7.4.4	Employers promote practices that contribute to the long term sustainability of the occupational therapy workforce, including career progression pathways and retention strategies.

Professional identity and networking	
Standard 7.5 Employers support early career occupational therapists to develop a strong professional identity, engaging with the wider profession through networking, leadership and peer learning opportunities.	
7.5.1	Employers encourage early career occupational therapists to engage with the wider profession through networks, events and professional communities such as RCOT, WFOT and other occupational therapy forums.
7.5.2	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to explore and articulate the value of occupational therapy within multidisciplinary settings.
7.5.3	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to join RCOT to strengthen their professional identity, access tailored support and engage with the wider community.
7.5.4	Early career occupational therapists are supported to engage in peer learning and early leadership opportunities that develop confidence, collaboration and professional growth.
Developing professional capabilities	
Standard 7.6 Employers support early career occupational therapists to develop professional capabilities for safe, inclusive and evidence-based practice, including critical thinking, professional reasoning and advocacy.	
7.6.1	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to foster a culture of curiosity and advocacy by critiquing practice, supporting innovation and championing occupation-centred language and approaches within their services.
7.6.2	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to strengthen their professional reasoning and apply evidence to justify decisions, in line with RCOT Professional standards (RCOT, 2021b).
7.6.3	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to engage in opportunities to develop core communication and interpersonal skills that support reasoning and collaboration, as well as safe and ethical practice in a range of environments.
7.6.4	Early career occupational therapists are supported to develop confidence in using digital tools and technologies relevant to practice, communication and service delivery.
7.6.5	Early career occupational therapists are supported to develop cultural responsiveness and embed inclusive, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory approaches into their decision making and advocacy.
7.6.6	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to apply their skills in research, quality improvement, practice, innovation and real-world evaluation projects, in ways that align with their level of experience and the needs of the service.
7.6.7	Early career occupational therapists are encouraged to access, use and generate the evidence base through research activity.

Definitions and terminology

Admissions tutor	An occupational therapist employed by the education provider who has overall responsibility for the admission of suitable applicants to the programme. The Admissions Tutor is involved in interviewing and/or assessing applicants.
Aegrotat award	An award without classification that may be given when a learner is unable to take their examination because of illness or death, and where it has been deemed that the candidate would have otherwise passed.
Applicant	A potential learner seeking enrolment in an occupational therapy programme.
Apprentice	An occupational therapist apprentice is an individual employed in a health, social care or related setting who is undertaking a structured training degree programme that combines practical, on-the-job experience with academic study.
Apprenticeship programme	An apprenticeship programme enables apprentices to study while working, gaining experience in occupational therapy and progressing towards an academic award.
Autonomous practice	A fundamental element of the occupational therapy standards of proficiency, this is the ability to assess a professional situation and address it appropriately with the relevant occupational therapy knowledge and experience. It is also inclusive of the ability to make reasoned decisions, to be able to justify these decisions and accept personal responsibility for all actions (HCPC, 2023a).
Award	The occupational therapy qualification conferred on a learner following the successful completion of a programme.
Contemporary practice	Current, evidence-informed, person-centred occupational therapy that is responsive to emerging social, technological and political trends, population needs and innovation in service delivery and professional roles.
Continuing professional development (CPD)	The way in which an individual continues to learn and develop throughout their career, including during their programme. CPD is essential and evolves skills, knowledge, professional identity and professional conduct so that individuals stay up to date and practice safely and effectively (Broughton and Harris, 2019).
Curriculum	The planned content, academic and practice-based learning experiences and assessments designed to prepare learners for professional practice as occupational therapists.
Curriculum vitae (CV)	Documentation describing the qualifications, expertise and experience of an individual.
Digital literacy	The ability to effectively navigate, utilise, evaluate and create information using digital technologies in the context of occupational therapy practice. This includes emerging innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI), technology enabled care, digital health tools and virtual environments.

Early career	RCOT define the early career of an occupational therapist as the first three years following registration with the HCPC. 'Early career' includes newly registered practitioners, those returning to practice after a prolonged absence and internationally qualified occupational therapists adapting to UK practice. It is characterised by the transition into autonomous practice, consolidation of core professional capabilities, development of professional identity and active engagement in CPD and career planning.
Education provider	The awarding body that delivers or oversees an occupational therapy programme.
Educator	An individual with the relevant specialist knowledge and expertise, employed or engaged by an education provider to teach the programme. Educators may also be known as 'academics', 'tutors' or 'lecturers'.
Employer	A public, independent, private or third sector organisation that employs people to undertake a specific role with legal and contractually acceptable terms and conditions. For apprenticeship programmes, the employer is an organisation that employs an individual to undertake a specific job that includes training or skills development as part of the role.
End-point assessment (EPA)	An independent assessment at the end of the apprenticeship programme, to assess whether the learner has achieved competence and is eligible to be conferred an award leading to eligibility to apply to register with HCPC as an occupational therapist.
Ethical and professional conduct expectations of the profession	These are as defined and detailed in the RCOT Professional standards for occupational therapy practice, conduct and ethics (RCOT, 2021b).
Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB)	**Equity** recognises differences and complexity in circumstances, experiences and needs. It means treating people differently to achieve fairness by being flexible and responsive to access, opportunities and resources. Like occupational therapy, equity is about understanding and recognising individual needs. It's about everyone having what they need, to make the most of life. **Diversity** means recognising, respecting, valuing and celebrating different and intersections in needs, identities, backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. It's the key to breaking down cultural and institutional barriers and fostering a culture of creativity and innovation. **Belonging** is about much more than simply including people. It means proactively welcoming, celebrating, supporting, and empowering every voice, so we're all properly recognised, valued and free to be our true and authentic selves' (RCOT, 2024a, p.10). As stated in RCOT's Equity, Diversity and Belonging Strategy (2024) each of these three concepts is vital, so while 'EDB' is a useful shortform, we don't want it to become a meaningless acronym or minimise the individual elements' importance.

	These terms are defined in RCOT's Equity, Diversity and Belonging Strategy (2024a). A full list of useful terminology related to EDB can be found here: EDB Terminology.
Fitness for the profession	The demonstration of the personal, professional, ethical and academic attributes required to become a safe, effective and inclusive occupational therapist. It encompasses professionalism, reflection, communication, conduct and alignment with the values and behaviours expected by regulatory and professional standards.
Foundation programme	Foundation programmes specifically related to the occupational therapy profession offer awards intended to provide basic knowledge in a subject to prepare a learner to undertake an occupational therapy programme. Generic foundation programmes are non-occupational therapy-specific awards and do not offer any recognition of prior learning for a pre-registration programme.
General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)	In the UK, data protection is governed by the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (UK Government, 2018a) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (UK Government, 2018b). Data protection legislation controls how your personal information is used by organisations, including businesses and government departments.
Graduate	An individual who has successfully met the programme requirements of their education provider and has been conferred the associated award.
Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)	The regulating body in the United Kingdom established to protect the public by regulating a range of health and care professions, including occupational therapy.
Individual scheme of study	A documented and approved variation from the standard progression route through a programme, designed to accommodate the specific needs or circumstances of an individual learner. It is clearly mapped, agreed by relevant stakeholders (including the learner, educators, Programme Lead and employer where applicable) and aligned with the Standards and the education providers requirements.
Interprofessional learning	Learners from different professions actively participating to learn with, from and about each other. The anticipated outcome of interprofessional learning is the development of a working culture of effective collaboration, shared working and integration of care across agencies, sectors and professions within and beyond the health, wellbeing, social and integrative care systems.
Learner	An individual enrolled in an occupational therapy programme. Learners may also be known as 'students' or, in the case of apprenticeship programmes, 'apprentices'.
Learner agency	The capacity and autonomy of learners to actively engage in, influence and take responsibility for their own learning, development and wellbeing. Learner agency encompasses self-awareness, self-directed learning, critical reflection, decision-making and ownership of professional growth.

Lifelong learning	Formal and informal learning opportunities that allow an individual to continuously develop and improve the knowledge and skills they need for employment and personal fulfilment (Broughton and Harris, 2019).
Long-arm supervision	A model of supervision used in practice-based learning settings where no on-site occupational therapist is available and occupational therapy-specific supervision is provided by an occupational therapist from outside the setting. This may be delivered by an educator from the education provider, or an occupational therapist from another service, using a range of communication methods to support and assess the learner.
Mentorship	Mentorship is a voluntary, supportive relationship in which an experienced professional offers guidance, encouragement and space for reflection. Unlike supervision, it is non-evaluative and typically takes place outside formal line management structures, enabling open dialogue and exploration of individual goals. Mentorship focuses on professional identity, confidence-building and long term career development. It fosters a sense of belonging, supports resilience and has been shown to positively influence wellbeing, job satisfaction and retention within the profession.
Occupational justice	'Occupational justice is concerned with ethical, moral and civic issues of what people do in their relationships and conditions for living. It acknowledges that doing, being, belonging, and becoming contribute to health and well-being, and that all individuals and groups have the right to participate in occupations that are meaningful and culturally relevant' (Wilcock and Townsend, 2009).
People who access occupational therapy services	Anyone who accesses or is affected by occupational therapy services, including patients, carers, clients, families or communities. The term is also inclusive of colleagues and peers of the occupational therapist or occupational therapy learner who are being impacted by their knowledge, skills or professional conduct (Broughton and Harris, 2019).
Practice-based learning (PBL)	'Refers to the time learners spend interpreting specific person-occupation-environment relationships and their relationship to health and wellbeing, establishing and evaluating therapeutic and professional relationships, implementing an occupational therapy process (or some aspect of it), demonstrating professional reasoning and behaviours, and generating or using knowledge of the context of professional practice with and for real live people' (WFOT, 2016).
Practice-based learning provider	The service, organisation or business hosting learners during their practice-based learning.
Practice Educator	An occupational therapist who supervises, supports and assesses a learner during practice-based learning. In settings without an on-site occupational therapist, support may be provided by another staff member, with occupational therapy-specific supervision and assessment delivered through long-arm supervision.
Programme	Occupational therapy pre-registration programme of study, approved by HCPC leading to eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist with HCPC.

Programme team	The staff employed by the education provider to develop, deliver and/or evaluate the programme. The programme team includes those teaching the programme as well as the administrative and support staff involved.
Professional Lead	The strategic level role within the education provider responsible for leading the suite of occupational therapy programmes. The Professional Lead: • Is an occupational therapist. • Is an RCOT member • Has a broad range of professional experience, including a previous substantive academic appointment within an education provider. • Will strategically lead the development and implementation of contemporary, creative and innovative programmes. • Is given the authority by the education provider to maintain the programme's alignment with the Standards. • Allocates an occupational therapist, employed by the education provider, to hold overall responsibility for the development of practice-based learning opportunities across a range of practice-based learning settings. • Liaises with the education provider's senior management team to ensure their engagement with, and support for, the Standards. • Recognises the changing needs of the profession and adapts the programme to address these needs. • Recognises the changing needs of the people who access occupational therapy services and adapts the programme to address these needs. • Possesses capabilities at Level 7 (or above) of the Leadership Pillar in the Career Development Framework (RCOT, 2021a). • Facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT. It is possible for the same individual to be the Professional and the Programme Lead simultaneously, although it is likely that the workloads of the respective roles would prohibit this arrangement and therefore it is more commonly the case that the roles are held by different individuals.
Professional standards for occupational therapy practice, conduct and ethics *Referred to a 'RCOT Professional standards'*	The term used to describe RCOT's Professional standards for occupational therapy practice, conduct and ethics (RCOT, 2021b). The RCOT Professional standards outline the expectations for safe, effective and ethical occupational therapy practice, covering professional behaviours, accountability, service user relationships and ongoing development.
Professionalism	Professionalism is a way of thinking, values and motivations that underpin the behaviours and interactions seen. It goes beyond being a capable practitioner and concerns how a practitioner represents themselves, their employer and their profession to others (RCOT, 2021b).
Programme Lead	The operational level role within the education provider responsible for leading the occupational therapy programme. The Programme Lead: • Is an occupational therapist. • Is an RCOT member.

	• Is responsible for ensuring that the Learning and development standards for pre-registration education and early career occupational therapists are met. • Is directly responsible for developing the programme. • Is responsible for co-ordinating the planning and administration of the programme. • Facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT. The Programme Lead role may be a rotational post, providing an opportunity for career advancement and skill expansion for different individuals. It is possible for the same individual to be the Programme Lead and the Professional Lead simultaneously, although it is likely that the workloads of the respective roles would prohibit this arrangement and therefore it is more commonly the case that the roles are held by different individuals.
Reasonable adjustments	Reasonable adjustments are 'changes made to an approach or provision to ensure that services are accessible to disabled people… …there is an 'anticipatory' duty on public sector organisations, meaning the need to think what is likely to be needed in advance' (UK Government, 2020).
Research	Attempts to create new, transferable knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods (RCOT, 2025).
Safeguarding	Safeguarding is about 'protecting a person's health, wellbeing, and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect' (Care Quality Commission, 2022).
Scholarship	An individual's engagement in the systematic development, application, evaluation and sharing of knowledge to advance occupational therapy education, practice or professional development.
Self-directed study during practice-based learning	The defined period of self-directed learning undertaken as a component of practice-based learning which contributes to the required 1,000 hours of successfully completed practice-based learning.
Simulation	Simulation is a learning tool that supports development through experiential learning by creating or replicating…real life situations. It should provide a safe environment where participants can learn from their mistakes without any danger to patients, allowing individuals to analyse and respond to these realistic situations, with the aim of developing or enhancing their knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes (Hawker *et al.*, 2022).
Simulated practice-based learning	Simulated practice-based learning is the use of simulation methodologies to replicate practice-based experiences, enabling learners to engage in realistic scenarios that reflect the practice of occupational therapy, for the purpose of skill acquisition, critical thinking development and professional growth, aligned with curriculum learning outcomes and assessment frameworks.
Shared learning	Learning that takes place collaboratively between individuals or groups, which may occur within a single profession or across multiple professions, but without the structured intent of developing

	interprofessional competencies. Shared learning promotes the exchange of ideas, collective reflection, and mutual understanding, supporting professional development and teamwork.
Stakeholders	Individuals, groups or organisations with a vested interest in contributing to the design, delivery, quality and outcomes of occupational therapy education. This includes (but not limited to) learners, educators, practice educators, service users, employers, education providers, regulatory and professional bodies and wider health, care and community partners.
Step-off award	A lower award is offered in recognition of the attainment of academic credit that is less than that required for the final award. Each education provider will have its own set of regulations about when, or if, this applies to the programmes they deliver, and it should not be assumed that step-off awards are granted by every education provider. An example of a step-off award is when the lower award of a postgraduate diploma is offered where the academic achievement for a master's award has not been reached. A lower award clearly states the academic and practice-based learning achievement required and whether the lower award confers eligibility to apply for registration with the HCPC.
Suite of occupational therapy education programmes	A collection of occupational therapy pre-registration programmes offered by an education provider, with a range of awards or pathways leading to eligibility to register with HCPC as an occupational therapist.
Supervision	A professional relationship and activity which ensures good standards of practice and encourages development (RCOT, 2021a).
Tutor	The term used to describe the role of an educator in supporting the learner's professional development or in providing general academic advice and mentoring.
Wellbeing support	Resources and approaches used to promote and maintain mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.
Work-based mentor	An apprentice's work-based mentor provides a support system for the apprentice. They are an occupational therapist and not their line-manager.

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