

The Constance Owens Trust Awards – Tips for a successful application

The Constance Owens Trust has been a proud and dedicated supporter of the occupational therapy community for many years. Through its sponsorship of the Barbara Tyldesley Student Award and the Constance Owens Liverpool Award for Service Development, the Trust continues to invest in the future of the field. If you're considering applying, this is your opportunity to shine. The Trust has shared valuable guidance to help you prepare a strong and competitive application.

Background

Constance Owens was a pioneer in Occupational Therapy. She served as principal of the first occupational therapy school in Bristol, established in 1929 by Dr. Elizabeth Casson. In 1947, she founded the Liverpool School of Occupational Therapy and later became the first Occupational Therapist in the UK to earn a PhD, graduating from the University of Liverpool in 1963.

The Constance Owens Trust was established in Liverpool in 1985 following the sale of two college buildings after the occupational therapy course transitioned into a Higher Education Institution. The Trust, a registered charity under the Charities Act of 1993, has since used its investment income to support initiatives that advance the occupational therapy profession.

In 2014, the Trust launched the Barbara Tyldesley Student Award in memory of their late Trustee, Barbara Tyldesley. Her career began with a short-term role in the UK before she moved to work with children at the Sungai Buloh leprosy settlement near Kuala Lumpur. This experience sparked a lifelong commitment to developing occupational therapy in Malaysia, including helping to establish the Malaysian Occupational Therapists Association (MOTA).

Upon returning to the UK, Barbara became the sole occupational therapist at Bolton District Hospital. In 1968, she transitioned into education, joining the Liverpool College of Occupational Therapy—founded by Constance Owens—where she eventually became Vice-Principal in 1971. She played a pivotal role in guiding the course into Higher Education and its eventual integration into the University of Liverpool in 1992. Barbara was deeply respected by her students, particularly in her specialist teaching areas of anatomy and physiology.

She also served as the UK's second delegate to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists in 1986 and later as its President from 1994 to 1998.

1. What makes an application stand out?

- Clear and fluent writing: Ensure your application is well-written, easy to follow, and free of jargon.
- Logical structure: Present a coherent flow from background context to your development or research idea.
- Strong occupational therapy focus: Your idea should be clearly rooted in occupational therapy practice or theory. The most compelling applications are those that could only come from an occupational therapist.
- Feasible and well-planned methods: Demonstrate that your project is achievable within the proposed timeframe and resources.

- Visible support: Include clear evidence of backing from your manager, team lead, supervisor, or organisation.

2. Can you offer any advice specifically for members applying for both The Constance Owens Liverpool Award for Service Development and The Barbara Tyldesley Student Award?

- Do your homework: Learn about Constance Owens and Barbara Tyldesley—understand their contributions to the profession.
- Reflect their legacy: Let your application reflect shared values, interests, or approaches that align with their work.
- Make meaningful connections: Think creatively about your topic and draw links to their impact.
- Plan: Don't leave your application to the last minute. A rushed submission is easy to spot and rarely successful.

3. Advice for our students and apprentice members applying for the first time?

- Seek guidance: Talk to people experienced in writing funding applications—they can offer invaluable insights.
- Embrace the learning: Treat this as a professional development opportunity. Grant writing is a skill that will serve you throughout your career.
- Be courageous: Share your ideas, even if it feels daunting. Your perspective is valuable and putting it forward is a worthwhile step.

4. What's the best piece of advice you have received for grant writing?

- Get feedback: Ask a variety of people to review your application—including those unfamiliar with your topic. They'll help you identify assumptions and improve clarity.
- Be selective with feedback: You don't need to follow every suggestion but consider all input carefully. It's your application—own it.
- Refine relentlessly: Once your content is clear, revise it multiple times to sharpen your message and ensure focus.
- Include a clear budget: Provide a detailed breakdown of how the funding will be used. Transparency strengthens your case.