

Royal College of Occupational Therapists Strategy 2026–2029

Championing and
enabling high quality
occupational therapy
across the UK



Introduction

A strategy shaped by you, our members

The RCOT is its members, and that’s why our new strategy has been developed by the conversations and feedback received from thousands of members across the year. You have been clear on your priorities and how RCOT can provide the most value and impact for the profession.

Over the next three years (2026-2029), we will be investing in our representation of occupational therapy, developing our advocacy work and growing the political, media and public awareness of occupational therapy.

We are committed to enabling excellence in occupational therapy, and via the resources we develop, providing members with the skills, knowledge, and support to enhance standards and innovation.

Our new strategy has emphasis on supporting career and workforce development for members across all stages of their career, including enabling leadership opportunities.

Our ambition is to increase membership voice within our governance, harnessing the expertise and knowledge across our community of 37,000 professionals, ensuring that diverse voices inform the decisions we make. We will continue to demonstrate the power of occupational therapy through evidence and impact data, curating the fantastic work delivered by our members in the UK and beyond.

All our activity will be underpinned by social accountability, financial sustainability and ensuring a welcoming, accessible and inclusive member experience.

Importantly, we will measure our progress and impact through clear objectives and agreed outcomes across the three year period. As we approach each objective and action, we will first focus on the ‘doing’, addressing the task ahead and making members aware. The second stage will mirror the ‘being’ phase, implementing initiatives and actively working with members to deliver outputs. The third phase will be about ‘becoming’, as we enhance our outputs and impact as the authoritative voice for the profession, reporting regularly to our members the difference our strategy is making.

We are excited about the next three years ahead, which we firmly believe will not just grow RCOT’s impact and representation now, but also lay a strong foundation for many years to come.

“
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Odeth Richardson
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Gary Waltham
Chief Executive Officer

About RCOT

Our purpose

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) is the UK’s professional membership body for occupational therapy. We lead, uphold and advance excellence within the profession through research, the development and delivery of evidence-based standards and guidance, the provision of professional development, and the accreditation and enhancement of education. We champion and advocate for the professional standing of occupational therapists and position the profession to have maximum impact in improving people’s health and wellbeing, participation through occupations and quality of life now and for future generations.

Our strategic aims

Our 2026–2029 strategy is underpinned by six strategic aims:



Aim 1: Strengthening member community and voice

We will create a welcoming, inclusive and connected community where members feel heard, supported and able to shape our work.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Embed the perspectives of members at all career stages within RCOT governance and operations through the development of committees, advisory groups and other representative structures that influence organisational outputs and decision-making.
- Strengthen the mechanisms through which members can regularly share their views, experiences and priorities, ensuring member insight informs organisational decision-making, service development and our wider work.
- Implement a coordinated and inclusive member experience across all stages of the membership journey, offering timely and relevant opportunities and support that build community connection, enable development, enhance engagement and support RCOT membership growth.
- Review and develop the RCOT membership model, the member categories and the benefits offered, to help ensure a sustainable, relevant and long term proposition across every career stage.

How will we measure success?

- Report on the number of new governance entities established, the extent of career-stage representation and the proportion of recommendations adopted by RCOT.
- Conduct membership surveys and use the findings to improve our offer, measuring member satisfaction and the percentage of members who agree that RCOT listens and acts on feedback, facilitates professional connection, and provides valuable, timely and relevant support.
- Track and report on key membership performance indicators, including membership growth, retention, member engagement with and utilisation of RCOT benefits and services.



Aim 2: Advocating with and for the profession

We will work alongside members and stakeholders to raise the profile of occupational therapy, influence policy and strengthen our political voice and deepen public understanding of the profession.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Deliver a flagship campaign centred on neighbourhood and community health across the UK to position occupational therapy as integral to designing models and delivery of services.
- Strengthen member influence and professional representation through expanded networks of RCOT experts and spokespeople, increasing member participation in national policy, strategic workstreams, and external stakeholder engagement.
- Continue to enhance the RCOT advocacy web and social presence to support member engagement and reflect the vital importance of our advocacy work.
- Raise the profile and public understanding of occupational therapy through integrated media, digital, influencer and thought leadership activity.

How will we measure success?

- Monitor and report on member awareness, understanding and engagement with RCOT's advocacy activity, including interaction with campaign resources and advocacy communications.
- Track member participation and representation in advocacy activity, including number of members who opt to receive advocacy updates, actively engage with campaigns, and represent RCOT in national policy and strategic forums.
- Measure the profile and reach of RCOT's advocacy activity through audience reach, digital performance and quality media coverage featuring RCOT and occupational therapy.
- Assess the influence of RCOT's advocacy activity through engagement with decision-makers and stakeholders, opportunities to contribute to policy development, and evidence of occupational therapy being reflected in national conversations and decision-making.



Aim 3: Enabling excellence in practice

We will provide members with the tools, resources, education and CPD they need to provide outstanding occupational therapy.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Tailor CPD events and resources to support occupational therapy practice and professional development.
- Secure collaborations that will enhance our CPD offer and support funding of research activity and awards to celebrate members' service and achievements.
- Tailor activities and tools aligned with our campaigns to support our members to drive forward innovation and new models of delivery.
- Develop and publish a professional development framework that supports occupational therapists to build the capabilities required to deliver impact at practitioner, service and population levels, and enables workforce planning to meet current and future needs.
- Work with members to develop a range of resources such as guidelines, good practice guides and evidence summaries to enable evidence-based practice.
- Develop an accessible digital experience that makes it easier for members to find and use the resources, learning and professional development opportunities most relevant to them throughout their membership and career journey.

How will we measure success?

- Track member satisfaction, uptake and engagement across RCOT's CPD provision, ensuring learning opportunities and resources remain relevant and valuable throughout members' careers.
- Demonstrate the adoption and impact of innovative occupational therapy practice through the engagement with tailored resources and the volume of member-contributed evidence and case studies.
- Monitor downloads and member engagement with the Professional Development Framework and other practice-enabling resources.
- Track member perceptions of the ease of finding, accessing and using RCOT's support, resources and guidance.



Aim 4: Showcasing the impact of occupational therapy

We will help members demonstrate the value of their work by gathering and sharing evidence, impact data, research and real-world stories that support practice improvement and local advocacy.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Collaborate with members to build knowledge to drive research and innovation and demonstrate the impact of occupational therapy.
- Collect and curate research and evidence to help members address local needs, build their business case and advocate for their services locally.
- Provide guidance, training, and resources to help members collect quantitative and qualitative evidence from their work.
- Equip members with briefings and summaries to help them engage with local decision-makers.
- Commission research and evidence of impact and return on investment to support our advocacy campaigns.
- Strengthen how RCOT communicates, celebrates and showcases the value and positive impact of occupational therapy, ensuring our communications clearly demonstrate the contribution the profession makes to individuals, communities, health and care, and wider society.

How will we measure success?

- Track the contribution, curation and sharing of member-generated impact content, including data and research case studies and monitor member engagement with all published evidence-based resources, the digital library and the innovation hub.
- Report on member attendance, engagement and satisfaction with research training events and resources.
- Monitor member confidence in demonstrating the value of occupational therapy and advocating for the profession, together with member perceptions of how effectively RCOT promotes and celebrates the impact of occupational therapists and their contribution to society.



Aim 5: Supporting careers at every stage

We will support occupational therapists to flourish in their career, enabling occupational therapists to be innovators and to build their leadership capability.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Strengthen the support available to members throughout their career journey, ensuring they can access relevant, tailored resources, opportunities and guidance that respond to their changing professional needs and support their ongoing development.
- Collaborate and consult with members to provide development and leadership opportunities for those from underrepresented groups.
- Work with education partners and stakeholders to support the growth of advanced practice occupational therapy.
- Provide a practice-based learning programme at RCOT for occupational therapy learners and interns.
- Introduce a mentoring programme that helps members build their skills, confidence and professional networks.
- Evolve new networks and groups on RCOT Communities to meet member's needs at each stage of their career and area of practice.
- Ensure standards for pre-registration occupational therapy education and early career support through our accreditation and quality assurance programmes.

How will we measure success?

- Monitor member feedback on the quality, relevance and accessibility of RCOT CPD opportunities and resources, alongside levels of utilisation and engagement.
- Track the diversity, representation and participation of members from underrepresented groups in volunteering, leadership and professional development opportunities.
- Monitor accreditation status of pre-registration programmes against the RCOT learning and development standards for pre-registration education.
- Measure engagement, participation and member sentiment across RCOT Communities, networks and groups, including recruitment, uptake and ongoing involvement in new initiatives such as the mentoring programme.



Aim 6: Being purpose-led, sustainable and accountable

We will deliver our purpose through robust governance, a positive and inclusive culture, financial sustainability, environmental responsibility and social accountability.

How we will achieve this aim:

- Develop and implement a robust 10-year financial plan aligned to the organisational purpose, including the diversification of income streams.
- Maintain effective and compliant governance through continuous improvement, best practice and external expertise.
- Develop and embed a streamlined, data-driven continuous improvement approach that enhances efficiency, processes and how we use technology, enabling teams to deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes.
- Develop and implement a practical framework that assesses, monitors and reduces the environmental impact of organisational activity.
- Strengthen digital platforms and marketing communications, building roadmaps of system, channel and process improvements to enable more tailored member services and help drive operational efficiencies.
- Build a high-performing, inclusive and values-led workforce by strengthening leadership, embedding effective performance and development practices, supporting wellbeing, and investing in future capability, workforce planning and systems.

How will we measure success?

- Demonstrate financial sustainability through delivery of annual financial plans, effective budget management and progress towards agreed long-term reserve targets.
- Monitor governance effectiveness through compliance performance, implementation of improvement recommendations, independent governance reviews, and stakeholder confidence in RCOT's governance arrangements.
- Monitor and report on the use of environmental impact assessment findings in decision-making and risk mitigation, alongside delivery against baseline measures and environmental performance targets from Year 2 onwards.
- Track and report on workforce performance, colleague engagement and progress against performance and development objectives, ensuring alignment with RCOT's strategic priorities.



Our values

An enabler to the strategy are our organisational values that inform how we work and the culture in which we operate:

We Impact

- We make meaningful differences with all our work.
- We prioritise work that achieves our shared purpose and strategy.
- We go above and beyond for people who need us.

We Challenge

- We find new and better ways to make things happen.
- We are brave and bold in our ideas and actions.
- We challenge ourselves, each other and the status quo.

We Elevate

- We lift and support others to be and do their best.
- We are accessible and collaborative.
- We are united and move forward together, even if we sometimes disagree.

We Respect

- We value each other and celebrate our differences.
- We are approachable, genuine and trustworthy.
- We listen to others and believe everyone's views should be heard.



Thank you for being part of RCOT. Together, we will deliver this strategy, champion occupational therapy and build a stronger future for our profession and the people we serve.

