Royal College of Occupational Therapists

RCOT Merit Awards
Guidance notes 2027

What is an RCOT Merit Award?
An RCOT Merit Award shines a light on the achievements of RCOT members at any stage of their career. Merit Awards are open to all membership categories (excluding students and apprentices).

Merit Awards recognise individuals whose achievements or contributions have advanced occupational therapy through practice, education, research, leadership, service development or other professional activity. They celebrate innovation, improvement, expertise and meaningful impact at local, regional, specialist or emerging levels.

Merit Awards are often a first step towards an RCOT Fellowship.

Eligibility criteria
The nominee must:
1. Be a current RCOT member
2. Have been an RCOT member for a minimum of two consecutive years immediately prior to nomination
3. Be in good professional standing
4. Be working or using their skills within occupational therapy practice, education, research and/or professional activity
5. Have made a significant achievement or contribution within their area of work
6. Demonstrate commitment to RCOT's Values
7. Have positively influenced occupational therapy practice, services, education, research, workforce development or people accessing services

Multiple nominations for the same member
To recognise the distinct difference between the levels of achievement represented by Fellowship and Merit Awards, RCOT introduced a three-year interval between receiving either award from 2025 onwards.

This means that individuals who have received a Merit Award from 2025 must wait three years before becoming eligible to be nominated for a Fellowship Award. If you are unsure whether your nominee is eligible, please contact RCOT before submitting a nomination.

What makes a strong nomination?
Strong nominations typically demonstrate:
- A significant achievement or contribution
- Excellence within a particular area of practice
- Innovation, improvement or development
- Positive impact on people accessing services, carers, colleagues or communities
- Contribution to occupational therapy practice, education, research or workforce development
- Local, regional, specialist or emerging influence
- Evidence that the nominee's work has made a measurable difference

- Recognition by colleagues, stakeholders and/or those who have benefited from the nominee's contribution
- Achievement at any stage of a professional career

Strong nominations focus on achievement, innovation, impact, outcomes and evidence rather than job titles, responsibilities, length of service or committee membership alone.

Assessment criteria summary

To understand how nominations are reviewed by the Fellowship and Merit Awards Committee (FMAC), refer to the **Merit Award Assessment Criteria Summar**y. This document outlines the key areas considered during assessment and the types of evidence that help support a strong nomination.

Examples of contribution

Significant achievements may be demonstrated across a wide range of occupational therapy roles and settings, including:

- Clinical practice
- Independent and private practice
- Education and academia
- Research and innovation
- Leadership and management
- Professional consultancy
- Service development
- Workforce development
- Community and voluntary sector activity
- Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB) initiatives

The Fellowship and Merit Awards Committee recognises that merit-level achievements can be demonstrated through many different career pathways and practice settings. Nominations are assessed on the impact, influence and significance of the achievement rather than the setting in which it was achieved. Examples may include:

- Development of innovative services
- Specialist clinical expertise
- Service improvement initiatives
- Educational innovation
- Workforce development projects
- Research implementation
- Development of inclusive practice
- Leadership within a specialist field
- Innovation within independent practice
- EDB leadership and initiatives

Demonstrating impact

When describing achievements, consider:

- What was the challenge, opportunity or need?
- What contribution did the nominee make?
- What changed as a result?
- Who benefited?
- What evidence demonstrates the impact?

Where possible include:

- Measurable outcomes
- Service improvements
- Educational impact
- Workforce development
- Research impact
- Improved outcomes for people accessing services
- Community impact
- Professional recognition
- Development of inclusive practice
- Local or regional influence
- Impact on Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB)

Preparing your nomination

Before starting the nomination:

1. Check that the nominee meets the eligibility criteria.
2. Identify two RCOT members who will support the nomination
3. Obtain the nominee's agreement to be nominated
4. Gather evidence, examples and supporting information
5. Where nominations reference RCOT volunteering, committees, advisory groups, RCOT Communities, campaigns or other RCOT activities, nominators should provide sufficient detail and examples of contribution and impact. RCOT may verify participation in these activities where possible and where required

Important notes:

- Nominators must be in good professional standing
- Nominators must not be a spouse, partner or close relative of the nominee
- RCOT will only communicate with the lead nominator throughout the process
- You will need contact details for the nominee and supporting nominator

When completing the nomination:

- Assume the FMAC knows nothing about the nominee
- Include clear examples and evidence of the nominee's contribution and impact throughout the nomination.
- Avoid repetition between sections
- Explain acronyms in full when first used
- All information must be submitted electronically

The nominee must sign the relevant sections of the nomination form to:

- Confirm the information provided is accurate
- Provide consent for their information to be shared and assessed in line with the RCOT Privacy Notice

Electronic signatures are acceptable.

Supporting documentation

1. Nominee statement

The nominee must provide a personal statement of up to 500 words outlining their achievements and contribution. This helps ensure important information is not missed during the nomination process.

The statement should cover:

- Career journey

- Key achievements
- Contribution to RCOT
- Contribution to occupational therapy
- Impact of their work
- Why their contribution is important to the profession

2. Letters of support/testimonials

The nomination must be supported by **two letters of support or testimonials**.
Each letter should:

- Be written by individuals with first-hand knowledge of the nominee's contribution
- Provide evidence of impact and achievement
- Be submitted as separate documents
- Be no longer than 500 words each
- Be provided on appropriate letterhead where possible

Letters of support may be written by:

- Occupational therapy colleagues
- Other healthcare professionals
- Senior managers
- People accessing services or their carers
- Non-RCOT members familiar with the nominee's work

The letter **must not** be provided by:

- The nominators
- A spouse or partner
- A close relative

Please note:

- Only two letters/testimonials will be considered
- Additional letters will not be reviewed
- Testimonials are confidential and should not be shared with the nominee

Equity and Diversity

RCOT actively encourages nominations from individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and is committed to ensuring Fellowship and Merit Awards reflect the diversity of the profession.

Assessment process

1. Step 1 (Committee review) - The Fellowship and Merit Awards Committee (FMAC) reviews all nominations against the published criteria and supporting evidence and determines whether the nomination meets the Merit Award criteria
2. Step 2 (Board approval) - The FMAC makes recommendations to the RCOT Board, who approve or reject each nomination. The Board's decision is final
3. Step 3 (Outcome notification) - The Chair of the Board informs nominees and lead nominators of the outcome. Please note that RCOT cannot provide detailed reasons where a nomination is not approved
4. Step 4 (Administration) - RCOT acts as administrator to the FMAC and supports the nomination and assessment process

Data protection

1. Personal data is managed in accordance with the RCOT Privacy Notice
2. Nomination documentation is reviewed by the FMAC. Personal contact details, such as addresses and telephone numbers, are removed before review, including from letters of support

and testimonials where appropriate
3. Information will be securely destroyed after the awards process in accordance with the RCOT Privacy Notice

Help and support
If you have any questions about the process, need support completing a nomination, or anticipate barriers to participation, please contact: hello@rcot.co.uk

Requesting advice, guidance or support will not affect the assessment of a nomination.

Dated: October 2026