

Learning and development standards for pre-registration education

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Phoenix House, 106–114 Borough High Street
London SE1 1LB
www.rcot.co.uk

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Author: Royal College of Occupational Therapists
Writer: Samantha Turner – Project Lead, Royal College of Occupational Therapists
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Other enquiries about this document should be addressed to the Education team: hello@rcot.co.uk

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Project Lead	Samantha Turner, Independent Occupational Therapist
Project Manager	Carolyn Hay, Head of Education, RCOT
Project Team	Anna Clampin, Education Enhancement Manager, RCOT

Expert Advisory Group members

Dr Vikki Barry	Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, University of Huddersfield
Joanna Beveridge	Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, Queen Margaret University
Kay Bolton	Director of Clinical Education, Cygnet
Dr Liz Cade	Principal Lecturer Allied Health (Research), Wrexham University
Anna Fischer	Former RCOT Carnduff Learner Forum member and Newly Qualified Occupational Therapist (Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership; Discharge to Assess/Prevention of Admission), City of Edinburgh Council
Dr Kee Hean LIM	Associate Professor in Occupational Therapy, St Mary's University
Jessica Loxam	Occupational Therapy Clinical Educator, Calderdale and Huddersfield Foundation Trust
Shirley Masterson-Ng	Associate Head of School Health and Social Care, Sheffield Hallam University
Sarah Mcginley	Principal Teaching Fellow (Occupational Therapy) and School of Health Sciences Lead Admissions Tutor, University of Southampton
Dr Sarah-Jayne Rowe	Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy, London South Bank University
Elaine Stewart	Principal Lecturer for Occupational Therapy, Robert Gordon University
Dr Kim Stuart	Associate Professor: Curriculum Lead AHP Professional Development, Coventry University and Head of Health Professions, Coventry and Warwickshire ICB
Professor Lisa Taylor	Professor of Employability and Learning Innovation, University of East Anglia
Karen Tudge	Head of Specialist Services, Great Western Hospitals NHS Trust
Anita Volkert	Senior Lecturer in Occupational Therapy/Deputy Head of Department/SHLS Allied Health, Practice Placements Lead, Glasgow Caledonian University
Dr Susie Wilson	Principal Lecturer and Professional Lead for Occupational Therapy, University of Cumbria
Ayra Yoosufani	Former RCOT Carnduff Learner Forum member and Occupational Therapist, NHS University Hospitals of Liverpool Group

Purpose

The *Learning and development standards for pre-registration education* (the Standards) describe the expectations of the profession that education providers must meet when delivering an occupational therapy pre-registration programme.

The concepts and ideas expressed in this document are a development of previous work and are intended to reflect the vision of our *Occupational therapy workforce strategy* (Royal College of Occupational Therapists 2024a), current and future practices and service contexts, and to equip newly registered occupational therapists to lead and evolve the profession into the future.

Context

A lot has changed since the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) last published the Standards in 2019, both across the profession and in the wider system we operate within.

In occupational therapy pre-registration education, there has been a 42% increase in the total number of occupational therapy pre-registration learners, with over 8,500 learners enrolled in programmes in the 2024-25 academic year. The number of graduates has also risen sharply, with a 71% increase resulting in 2,657 new professionals entering the workforce in the same year. Apprenticeship programmes, first introduced in 2019, are now offered by 26 of England's 47 education providers. At RCOT, we're working with 56 education providers delivering over 115 programmes.

Over the past five years, the United Kingdom's (UK) higher education sector has faced a complex mix of significant challenges that continue to affect its operations, sustainability and the learner experience. This includes:

- financial pressures often resulting in restructuring and fewer academic and support staff
- increased regulatory and policy complexity
- the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and changes to student immigration rules
- rising demand for learner support and welfare services
- rapid digital innovations including integrating artificial intelligence.

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped how we learn and work, accelerating the shift to remote and hybrid models and deepening inequalities in access to education and technology. Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, there has been a renewed and necessary focus on racial equity, inclusive curricula and institutional accountability.

We're working in a period of major change across occupational therapy, health and social care and the wider systems we're part of. Our profession must not only respond to change – we must lead it. To do so, our diverse population of learners and early career occupational therapists must develop a strong professional identity, grounded in core knowledge and skills, underpinned by professionalism and strengthened by leadership capabilities.

The vision of our *Occupational therapy workforce strategy* (RCOT 2024a) is to grow and position the occupational therapy workforce to have maximum impact on improving people's health and quality of life. We've revised these Standards to support this vision, reflecting the current and future needs of the profession, shaped by insights from our members and key stakeholders. Our *Early career principles and standards for occupational therapists* (RCOT 2026) support the embedding of pre-registration

learning and practice in the first three years of registration, with the goal to increase retention through the development of a strong professional identity and sense of belonging to the occupational therapy profession.

The role of practice-based learning

Practice-based learning is an essential and critical component of occupational therapy pre-registration programmes. It provides learners with opportunities to integrate education provider-based knowledge into authentic, real-world settings, bridging the gap between theory and practice. These experiences are not only about applying skills, they shape professional identity, foster confidence and confirm career choice.

As Taylor (2023) highlights, practice-based learning plays a pivotal role in influencing learners' career aspirations, which impacts the future of the profession. Ensuring a breadth of high-quality, inclusive learning experiences across diverse settings and the four pillars of practice is key.

Our revised Standards align with the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' (WFOT) requirements (2026a), requiring assessed experience across a range of practice-based learning experiences that reflect the breadth and diversity of occupational therapy practice. This approach prepares learners for varied roles and introduces them to opportunities they may not have previously considered. Exploring non-traditional settings broadens access and reflects the evolving landscape of occupational therapy. Cade's (2023) work also identifies that non-traditional settings support learners to grow personally and professionally, strengthening their sense of identity and building resilience through challenging experiences.

Quality practice-based learning depends on strong collaboration between education and practice-based learning providers. Our *AHP principles of practice-based learning*, jointly developed with the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) (CSP 2023), emphasise co-production and support for those delivering practice-based learning. This ensures learning opportunities are well-structured, inclusive, and designed to embed and expand on education provider-based studies.

Beyond practice skills, practice-based learning nurtures professional behaviours, communication and ethical decision-making. Grant et al. (2023) found that a learner's first practice-based learning experience encompasses not only knowledge of the profession and practice, but also significant personal development, helping learners better understand themselves and their future role.

Inclusive and welcoming practice-based learning opportunities are vital for fostering a sense of belonging within the profession and workplace. Practice-based learning environments must be actively anti-discriminatory and anti-racist, embracing diversity and promoting equity. They should provide supportive spaces where learners feel safe to disclose health or learning needs and receive appropriate adjustments. This seeks to ensure that every learner can thrive and succeed.

While practice-based learning is integral to education, it is not without challenges. Learners need to adapt to unfamiliar environments, sometimes away from their usual support systems. This makes collaboration between education providers and practice-based learning sites vital to design experiences that are supportive, inclusive and appropriate for the learner's stage and level of study. Shared learning and peer support can reassure learners that, despite differences in setting or structure, they are gaining comparable experiences and outcomes (Grant 2023).

Embedding the four pillars of practice explicitly within all practice-based learning opportunities is encouraged (CSP 2023). By embracing these principles, practice-based learning becomes not only a method of education but a transformative experience, developing competent, confident professionals ready to meet the needs of a dynamic profession.

How to use these *Standards*

The *Standards* describe our expectations for the development, delivery and evaluation of occupational therapy pre-registration programmes. Our Education Enhancement Service uses these *Standards* to assess occupational therapy pre-registration programmes and ensure quality in their design and delivery. You can find out more about this via our [website](#).

While we work directly with education providers to ensure the application of these *Standards*, we encourage our wider membership, prospective and current learners, practice-based learning providers and employers to be familiar with their content. We encourage stakeholders, including people who access occupational therapy services, to engage in the development, delivery and evaluation of pre-registration programmes to ensure their ongoing ability to prepare learners for contemporary occupational therapy practice.

At the point of publication, all pre-registration occupational therapy programmes in the UK have, or are actively working towards, RCOT accreditation. This accreditation is a quality mark. Our *Standards*, developed in consultation with our members, determine 'fitness for the profession', which is above and beyond the expectations of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

The HCPC determines 'fitness to practise' and the HCPC approval of a pre-registration programme is a pre-requisite for RCOT accreditation. Both RCOT and the HCPC have a shared commitment to the quality of education for health and care professionals (HCPC 2024).

RCOT is the UK member of WFOT, the global body representing occupational therapy. WFOT sets the standard for occupational therapy education internationally and promotes excellence in research and practice. It is recognised by the United Nations and World Health Organization. RCOT has delegated authority from WFOT to accredit UK pre-registration programmes, meaning RCOT accreditation also confers WFOT approval. Graduates from these programmes hold qualifications recognised by all WFOT member organisations.

How we developed the *Standards*

Our *Standards* are member informed. Education summits with a range of stakeholders identified areas requiring refinement and exploration. We undertook deep dives into topics such as simulated practice-based learning and staffing levels, drawing on both published and grey literature. This reflects our commitment to developing *Standards* that not only support current practice but also anticipate and prepare learners for the changes needed for the future of occupational therapy.

To ensure the *Standards* reflect the realities of occupational therapy practice, we established an Expert Advisory Group (EAG) and appointed a dedicated Project Lead. Recognising the close link between education and practice, the EAG brought together a wide range of voices including academics, occupational therapists, employers, learners, recent graduates and our Education Enhancement Manager (who ensures the standards are upheld). Jointly chaired by RCOT's Head of Education and the Project Lead, the EAG ensured the *Standards* were shaped by diverse expertise and experience.

A 16-week consultation generated over 100 responses. Two focus groups were also held with people who have lived experience of occupational therapy and are actively involved in admissions and delivery of pre-registration education. Our inclusive approach ensured the *Standards* are grounded in both professional and service user perspectives.

Feedback from the consultation, EAG members and RCOT's Education Enhancement team was carefully analysed to inform the final publication, which has been approved by RCOT's Board of Trustees.

Our *Standards* are designed to support high-quality education without prescribing specific curriculum content. Instead, they set clear expectations for the processes and structures that underpin effective pre-registration programmes. This enables education providers to create distinctive programmes that reflect their strengths and respond to the needs of learners, employers and local communities.

This flexibility fosters diversity across programmes and graduates, celebrating the richness of the profession and the varied contexts in which occupational therapy is practised. At the heart of every programme, however, is a shared commitment to ensuring graduates develop the core values, beliefs, professional attributes, knowledge and skills essential to contemporary occupational therapy.

How the *Standards* have changed

The document looks quite different:

- there is a desire to ensure they are both reader-friendly and provide clarity for quality assurance
- there are no overarching standards. We found that these were not used and the focus was on the supporting standards
- there is no separate guidance and evidence. Each standard states its requirements
- key roles and their requirements are defined
- we've provided a reference list within this document and a bibliography, reflecting the range of informing evidence which is available on our website.

In terms of content:

- there is a stronger emphasis on occupation and occupational justice
- the equity, diversity and belonging principles identified in our *Equity, diversity and belonging strategy* (RCOT 2024b) run through each Scope
- there is a stronger focus on research and innovation to drive inclusive change
- we refer specifically to WFOT's *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists* (WFOT 2026a) and *Minimum competencies of occupational therapists* (WFOT 2026b), supporting the request for a balance in requirements for learning across the four pillars of practice
- we have removed reference to other quality assurance stakeholders, recognising the uniqueness and boundaries of our roles.

Consistent with our continuous quality enhancement approach, we will review and update these *Standards* after five years.

Learning and development standards for pre-registration education

Scope 1: Level of award for entry into the profession

Standard

- 1.1 The programme's academic award is a bachelor's degree with honours or above.

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.
- 2.2 An occupational therapist employed by the education provider is designated as the Admissions Lead.
- 2.3 Information about the academic, practice-based learning and assessment requirements of the programme is accessible to applicants, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether the programme is the right fit for them.
- 2.4 The admissions process references principles of equity, diversity and belonging and is conducted through inclusive and fair practices that holistically assess applicants' potential and is regularly reviewed to ensure the professional values of fairness, transparency and accountability are maintained.
- 2.5 The selection and entry criteria include appropriate academic and professional entry standards.
- 2.6 There is a transparent, fair and supportive process involving academic judgement for assessing and recognising applicants' prior learning and experience.
- 2.7 When a foundation degree, whether generic or profession-specific, is used as a route into the programme, it aligns appropriately with the occupational therapy programme. For generic foundation degrees, applicants also meet the providers recognition of prior learning requirements.
- 2.8 The admissions process assesses that applicants are competent in written and conversational English.
- 2.9 The admissions process assesses the suitability of applicants, including the personal and professional attributes they hold, and includes criminal conviction checks.
- 2.10 Applicants who have previously been enrolled in an occupational therapy pre-registration programme, or any other health professional education programme, submit a self-declaration confirming no previous fitness to practise concerns.
- 2.11 The admissions process ensures that applicants are made aware of, and comply with, any health requirements.
- 2.12 Education providers have a process in place to respond appropriately and offer reasonable adjustments when an applicant discloses a disability, health need or specific learning need during the application process.

Scope 3: Programme sustainability, governance, management and leadership

Standard

- 3.1 The education provider holds the Health and Care Professions Council approval for the duration of the programme, demonstrating learners will meet the *Standards of proficiency for occupational therapists* (Health and Care Professions Council 2023) on graduation.
- 3.2 The programme has the commitment of the education provider to be sufficiently resourced throughout the accredited period.
- 3.3 Equity, diversity and belonging principles, including inclusive learning, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice, are clear, transparent and demonstrated throughout the programme.
- 3.4 The education provider has processes in place to ensure educators and practice educators demonstrate the skills, values and commitment to inclusive learning, incorporating equity, diversity and belonging principles and contributing to a more inclusive, participatory and equitable society.
- 3.5 Occupational therapists employed by the education provider are designated as Professional Lead and Programme Lead.
- 3.6 The education provider ensures those with overall responsibility for the programme (as defined by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists) are appropriately qualified, experienced and supported to carry out their role.
- 3.7 There are an adequate number of appropriately qualified and experienced educators in place to deliver the demands and structure of the programme, with a recommended maximum ratio of one full-time equivalent educator to twenty learners.
- 3.8 The mix of professional backgrounds, qualifications and experience of educators enables delivery of an education programme that fits its stated philosophy and purpose.
- 3.9 Educators demonstrate appropriate knowledge, expertise and excellence in their area of teaching, ensuring programme delivery reflects contemporary occupational therapy practice.
- 3.10 Educators hold qualifications at a level higher than, or equivalent to, the one they are teaching and demonstrate quality and currency in their area of teaching.
- 3.11 A strategy is in place to support educators' active engagement in scholarship, research and continuing professional development to impact programme delivery and professional practice.
- 3.12 Workload allocation and planning reflect the breadth of the educator role, supporting balanced engagement in teaching, scholarship, research and administrative responsibilities.
- 3.13 There are policies and processes in place designed to support the wellbeing of educators.
- 3.14 Facilities, equipment and learning resources are accessible, inclusive, well maintained and fit for purpose, supporting effective programme delivery and the achievement of learning outcomes across all settings.
- 3.15 The roles, responsibilities and expectations of the education provider and learner (and employer, in the case of apprenticeship programmes) are clearly communicated to all parties and used to guide discussions.
- 3.16 Learners are aware of, and have access to, support services provided by the programme team and the education provider.
- 3.17 Throughout the programme, learners are supported to identify effective strategies to manage their wellbeing.

- 3.18 The programme includes effective processes to empower and support learners to raise concerns about their own safety and wellbeing.
- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 People who access occupational therapy services are meaningfully involved in the development, enhancement and delivery of the programme (including admissions, curriculum design and delivery, practice-based learning and ongoing programme review).
- 3.21 There is a process to identify where attendance is mandatory and how engagement is monitored and managed.
- 3.22 There is a fitness to practise process in place to investigate alleged fitness to practise concerns and the potential termination of a learner's enrolment on these grounds.
- 3.23 Programme documentation contains information about step-off or exit awards and whether these provide eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist.
- 3.24 The education provider has systems in place which use academic judgement to establish individual study plans, where needed, for learners re-attempting mandatory assessments, ensuring the programme content remains current.
- 3.25 The programme has regular and effective monitoring, evaluation and enhancement systems that maintain the rigour and integrity of the programme and support continuous development.
- 3.26 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.
- 3.27 At least one appropriately qualified and experienced external examiner is appointed for the programme, with oversight of and access to all components of the award.
- 3.28 There is a process in place for learner representation at programme level.
- 3.29 Learners are meaningfully involved in the development, enhancement and delivery of the programme (including admissions, curriculum design and delivery, practice-based learning and ongoing programme review).
- 3.30 The programme supports learners to develop and maintain the attributes expected of occupational therapists.
- 3.31 For established programmes, graduates and reflections on graduate performance contribute to the development, enhancement and delivery of the programme (including admissions, curriculum design and delivery, practice-based learning and ongoing programme review).
- 3.32 There is regular and effective collaboration between the education provider, practice-based learning providers and employers to ensure mutually beneficial and quality experiences for all involved.
- 3.33 Learners are provided with information about RCOT membership, including its purpose and the benefits of joining the professional body (as a learner and on graduation).

Scope 4: Programme design and delivery

Standard

- 4.1 The programme's aims and learning outcomes are informed by the *Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy* (Royal College of Occupational Therapists In press), enabling learners to understand the behaviours and values they are responsible for upholding.
- 4.2 The programme supports learners to develop and maintain the attributes expected of occupational therapists entering the workforce as autonomous yet novice practitioners, irrespective of level of qualification.
- 4.3 Educational methods used are selected to develop all knowledge, skills and abilities outlined in the *Minimum competencies of occupational therapists* (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2026b).
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 There is a process to ensure learners are prepared for and supported through each transition point in the programme, with an understanding of all associated expectations.
- 4.6 Learning and teaching methods use a range of techniques and technologies to meet the needs of learners.
- 4.7 The programme integrates theory, evidence and practice across both academic and practice elements, ensuring its currency and breadth.
- 4.8 The design and delivery of a contemporary and evidence-based curriculum is directly impacted by the continuing professional development, scholarship and lifelong learning activities that educators engage in.
- 4.9 The programme is designed and developed by occupational therapists, demonstrating academic autonomy.
- 4.10 Occupational therapy specific content including theories, approaches and skills is taught by occupational therapists.
- 4.11 Interprofessional learning constitutes no more than one third of the programme.
- 4.12 Occupational therapy educators collaborate equally with educators from other relevant professions to define the scope and develop educational materials for interprofessional learning.
- 4.13 The learning and teaching methods are evidence-informed, drawing on contemporary education theories to ensure effective alignment with the curriculum and module learning outcomes.
- 4.14 The learning and teaching methods prepare learners for autonomous practice, embed reflective practice and encourage independent thinking, accountability and decision-making.
- 4.15 The learning and teaching methods are designed to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills, enhancing learners' ability to navigate complex professional situations.
- 4.16 The programme includes effective processes for obtaining consent when appropriate, including from people who access occupational therapy services.

Scope 5: Programme content

Programme content is informed by the *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists* (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2026a) and *Minimum competencies of occupational therapists* (WFOT 2026b), supporting learners to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for safe, effective and occupation-centred practice. These Standards and competencies are expected to be embedded throughout the programme, preparing learners to meet the current and future needs of people who access occupational therapy services after graduation.

Programme content is also informed by key Royal College of Occupational Therapists documents including *Advancing occupational therapy: research and innovation strategy* (RCOT 2025), *Career development framework* (RCOT 2022), *Occupational therapy workforce strategy* (RCOT 2024a) and *Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy* (RCOT In press).

Standard

- 5.1 The programme places occupation and the principles of occupational therapy practice at its core, reflecting the profession's philosophy, values, skills and knowledge base. A minimum of 60% of the programme is focused on occupation and occupational therapy, including practice-based learning where the necessary knowledge, related skills and attitudes are integrated within practice (WFOT 2026a).
- 5.2 The programme prepares learners to deliver safe, effective and ethically sustainable practice through occupation-centred, evidence-based and person-centred care.
- 5.3 The programme content addresses the standards and competencies outlined by WFOT (WFOT 2026a and 2026b).
- 5.4 The programme prepares learners 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.
- 5.5 The programme integrates theory, evidence, policy and practice across both academic and practice-based elements, ensuring its currency and breadth.
- 5.6 The programme prepares learners to use an occupational justice lens to identify and consider occupational challenges stemming from inequality, discrimination and human rights issues.
- 5.7 The programme prepares learners to use professional judgement and evidence-based critical reasoning to make decisions.
- 5.8 The programme prepares learners to apply activity analysis, occupational analysis and therapeutic use of self to build relationships, understand motivation and use occupation as the primary means of intervention.
- 5.9 The programme prepares learners to develop an occupational perspective that integrates approaches focused on prevention, early intervention and community engagement.
- 5.10 The programme prepares learners to develop knowledge of health conditions, foundational sciences and bio-psycho-social perspectives of health. 10–30% of the programme is focused on knowledge supporting an understanding of body structures and functions, biomedicine, psychological, anthropological and sociological concepts. 10–30% of the programme is focused on knowledge supporting an understanding of the human and social environment and social perspectives of health. This includes integrating this knowledge, and the related skills and attitudes, into practice through practice-based learning (WFOT 2026a).
- 5.11 The programme prepares learners to develop their knowledge of current and predicted health and wellbeing needs and associated occupations relevant to local, national and international communities.

- 5.12 The programme prepares learners to be effective members of a team, able to guide, facilitate and take on leadership roles to drive professional and organisational improvement.
- 5.13 The programme prepares learners to work in contemporary ways, incorporating digital and technological advancements.
- 5.14 The programme prepares learners to develop digital literacy skills to effectively navigate and utilise emerging digital technologies in occupational therapy.
- 5.15 The programme prepares learners to develop the skills to be intrapreneurial, entrepreneurial and innovative, driving inclusive change through advocacy and occupational justice.
- 5.16 The programme prepares learners to influence, design and implement professional or organisational change.
- 5.17 The programme prepares learners to support the learning of others through supervision and to recognise their future responsibility as practice educators.
- 5.18 The programme prepares learners to develop skills in research, quality improvement and innovation, so they are prepared to apply these skills in research, evaluation, quality improvement, practice and innovation projects to advance the profession, aligned with the academic level of their programme.
- 5.19 The programme prepares learners to develop an understanding of research ethics and governance principles, applying them in research and practice to evaluate the impact of occupational therapy.
- 5.20 The programme prepares learners to 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 occupation.
- 5.21 The programme prepares learners to integrate data on social, economic, organisational, environmental and health disparities to design and prioritise occupational therapy services, promoting occupational justice.
- 5.22 The programme prepares learners to identify and respond to professional and policy influences, evolving trends, external drivers and emerging priorities in occupational therapy, and actively participate in shaping the profession's future, informed by the priorities of the *Occupational therapy workforce strategy (RCOT 2024b)*.
- 5.23 The programme prepares learners to engage with and influence broader socio-economic and political agendas relevant to occupational therapy.
- 5.24 Programme content is informed by UK and international influencing resources, including those developed by organisations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, including the *International classification of functioning, disability and health (World Health Organization 2025)*.
- 5.25 The programme integrates *Sustainability Matters: guiding principles for sustainability in occupational therapy practice, education and scholarship (WFOT 2018)* to prepare learners for sustainable practice that promotes individual, community and planetary wellbeing.
- 5.26 The programme facilitates authentic interprofessional learning, ensuring learners gain knowledge with, from and about professionals and peers from relevant professions.
- 5.27 The programme provides opportunities for learners to learn from local experts as well as people facing barriers to occupational participation.
- 5.28 The programme prepares learners to develop skills to meaningfully involve people who access occupational therapy services in the design and conduct of research and service improvement.

Scope 6: Practice-based learning

Practice-based learning is central to the education process. It includes programme content and is an educational method. It is presented within a separate section because additional standards apply.

Practice-based learning is informed by the *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists* (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2026a)

Standard

- 6.1 Practice-based learning facilitates learners' formation of their professional identity as an occupational therapist and develops them to meet professional conduct, performance and ethics, consistent with the *Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy* (Royal College of Occupational Therapists In press) and philosophy of the programme.
- 6.2 All practice-based learning provides an opportunity for the learner to implement an occupational therapy process, or an aspect of an occupational therapy process, involving human interaction with people (individual, family, group or community to business, institution, agency or government).
- 6.3 An occupational therapist employed by the education provider is designated as the Practice-based learning Lead and has overall responsibility for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of practice-based learning within the programme, ensuring each learner gains the required breadth of experience.
- 6.4 The structure, duration, quality and range of practice-based learning support the achievement of the learning outcomes and is informed by the *AHP principles of practice-based learning* (Chartered Society of Physiotherapy 2023) and the *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists* (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2026a).
- 6.5 Practice-based learning follows a logical scaffolded structure that supports integrating theoretical knowledge and skills into contemporary, occupation-centred practice.
- 6.6 Learners are required to successfully complete a minimum of 1,000 assessed hours of practice-based learning. This may include 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 practice-based learning).
- 6.7 A maximum of 20% of the programme's total practice-based learning hours may be achieved through authentic simulated practice-based learning that is designed, delivered and assessed to meet defined learning outcomes.
- 6.8 The programme provides learners with a range of practice-based learning experiences across the breadth and diversity of occupational therapy practice which includes:
 - people of different age groups
 - people who have recently acquired and/or long-standing health needs
 - people with mental health needs, as well as people with physical health needs
 - interventions that focus on people, occupations, and the environment, to develop a comprehensive understanding of contemporary practice and meets the requirements of the *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists* (WFOT 2026a).
- 6.9 Practice-based learning for apprentices is undertaken outside the learner's own work setting, ideally outside their employer's organisation.
- 6.10 Processes are in place to ensure that practice-based learning takes place in an environment that is safe and supportive for all (including learners, practice educators and people who access occupational therapy services).

- 6.11 There are processes in place to ensure practice educators and learners demonstrate equity, diversity and belonging principles including inclusive learning and reasonable adjustments, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice throughout practice-based learning.
- 6.12 There are processes in place to ensure that education providers and practice-based learning providers identify, implement and regularly review reasonable adjustments, enabling learners to fully engage in practice-based learning.
- 6.13 Practice-based learning is supervised and assessed by an occupational therapist (Practice Educator). In settings without an on-site occupational therapist, support may be provided by a named staff member with long-arm supervision and assessment delivered by a Practice Educator.
- 6.14 A supervision contract is in place that entails overseeing a learner's implementation of an occupational therapy process, with the Practice Educator responsible for the quality of practice and safety of people who use occupational therapy services.
- 6.15 The education provider supports practice educators to use practice-based supervision models that are flexible, inclusive and tailored to their setting.
- 6.16 Collaborative partnerships (across a range of settings that reflect the breadth of the profession) are in place to support the quality, breadth and capacity of practice-based learning opportunities, with sufficient registered and experienced staff to provide learners with the opportunity to meet the practice-based learning requirements.
- 6.17 Education providers work in partnership with practice-based learning providers to enable practice educators to teach, assess and support learners effectively.
- 6.18 Practice educators are adequately prepared and supported to inclusively facilitate practice-based learning across all routes to registration and the diverse needs of learners.
- 6.19 Practice educators work with learners to use appropriate strategies and resources to support and reflect on practice in their specific practice-based learning setting, to ensure a depth of learning.
- 6.20 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.
- 6.21 Learners and practice educators are provided with timely information and supported to prepare effectively for practice-based learning.
- 6.22 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.
- 6.23 Education providers have systems in place to support learners, educators, practice educators (and employers and work-based mentors in the case of apprenticeship programmes), particularly in circumstances where learners are failing to reach the required learning outcomes or demonstrate fitness for the profession.
- 6.24 There is a system in place for practice educators and those supporting practice-based learning to engage in evaluation of and reflection on each practice-based learning opportunity.
- 6.25 There is a system in place for learners to engage in structured education provider debriefing at the end of each practice-based learning, offering space for reflection and consolidation of learning.
- 6.26 Education providers support learners to integrate and transfer knowledge and skills gained during practice-based learning, promoting progressive development throughout the programme.

Scope 7: Assessment

Standard

- 7.1 The assessment strategy and design support the development of knowledge, skills and professional conduct and are congruent with the programme aims and learning outcomes, preparing learners for contemporary practice through ensuring that those who successfully complete the programme meet the *Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy* (Royal College of Occupational Therapists In press).
- 7.2 The assessment strategy and methods provide an objective, fair and reliable measure of achievement and progression, aligned to the academic level of the programme.
- 7.3 Learners are provided with timely and clear information about assessment strategies, methods and progression, including expectations at each academic level and stage of the programme.
- 7.4 The assessment strategy and methods demonstrate an inclusive and robust approach to ensure learners demonstrate knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required for practice.
- 7.5 The assessment methods used are appropriate to, and effective at, measuring the module learning outcomes.
- 7.6 All learning outcomes and summative assessments within the programme must be successfully completed.
- 7.7 Hours completed within a failed practice-based learning component do not contribute to the required minimum 1,000 hours of successfully completed practice-based learning.
- 7.8 Learners are withdrawn from a programme if they fail their second attempt at any practice-based learning component.
- 7.9 Learners who fail a practice-based learning component on fully substantiated grounds of fitness to practise concerns are denied a retrieval attempt. Where concerns relate to a learner's own health and their health improves enough to be deemed fit for practice, then a second attempt may be offered.
- 7.10 There are systems in place that use academic judgement to establish plans for learners needing to complete outstanding components of the programme.
- 7.11 There are systems in place to ensure learners are aware of the academic appeal process.

Key roles

To support clarity and consistency, we've defined the key roles referred to within the standards. These definitions outline the expectations and responsibilities associated with each role and help ensure shared understanding across education and practice settings.

Employed by the education provider	
Admissions Lead	<p>Responsible for the admission of suitable applicants to the programme, the Admissions Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is an HCPC registered occupational therapist • facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT • ensures the admissions process aligns with the <i>Standards</i> and has the authority to influence its design and delivery.
Educator	<p>An individual employed or engaged by an education provider to teach the programme.</p> <p>Educators hold the relevant professional background, qualifications, specialist knowledge and expertise to support the delivery of the programme's philosophy and purpose.</p> <p>Educators may also be known as 'academics', 'tutors' or 'lecturers'.</p>
Practice-based learning Lead	<p>Responsible for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of practice-based learning, the Practice-based learning Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is an HCPC registered occupational therapist • facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT • ensures practice-based learning aligns with the <i>Standards</i>. This includes ensuring each learner gains the required breadth of experience and utilises the education provider's quality assurance mechanisms to provide safe, developmental practice-based learning environments for learners to apply their education provider-based learning.
Professional Lead	<p>Responsible for leading the suite of occupational therapy pre-registration programmes, this is a strategic level role.</p> <p>The Professional Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is an HCPC registered occupational therapist • is an RCOT member • facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT • has a broad range of professional and leadership experience, including a previous substantive academic appointment with an education provider • strategically leads the development and implementation of contemporary, creative and innovative programmes • has the education provider's authority to maintain the programme's alignment with the <i>Standards</i> • works with the education provider's senior management team to ensure they are engaged with, and support, the <i>Standards</i>. <p>Although one person can hold both the Professional and Programme Lead roles, this is uncommon because each carries a significant workload, so they are usually held by different people.</p>

Programme Lead	<p>Responsible for leading the occupational therapy pre-registration programme, this is an operational level role.</p> <p>The Programme Lead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is an HCPC registered occupational therapist • is an RCOT member • facilitates and supports the active involvement of colleagues and learners with RCOT • is directly responsible for ensuring programme delivery is aligned to the Standards • is responsible for co-ordinating programme planning and administration. <p>Although one person can hold both the Professional and Programme Lead roles, this is uncommon because each carries a significant workload, so they are usually held by different people.</p>
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.
Wider roles relevant to the design, delivery and/or review of a 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 combining practical, on-the-job experience with academic study.
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.
External Examiner	An occupational therapist with a thorough understanding and experience of assessment principles and methods in higher education.
Graduate	An individual who has successfully met the programme requirements of their education provider and has been conferred the associated award.
Learner	An individual enrolled in an occupational therapy programme, regardless of which entry route into the profession the learner is enrolled in. Learners may also be known as 'students' or, in apprenticeship programmes, 'apprentices'.
People who access occupational therapy services	Anyone who accesses or is impacted by occupational therapy services, including patients, carers, clients, families or communities (Broughton and Harris 2022). The term also includes colleagues and peers of the occupational therapist or occupational therapy learner who are being impacted by their knowledge, skills or professional conduct.
Practice educator	An occupational therapist who supervises, facilitates integration of education provider-based learning, assesses and supports a learner during the required minimum of 1,000 hours of successfully completed practice-based learning. Most commonly, the practice educator is employed by the practice-based learning provider and engages in the role of practice educator as a component of their substantive position.

Work-based mentor	An apprentice's work-based mentor provides a support system for the apprentice. They are an experienced, appropriately qualified occupational therapist who delivers or oversees a learning strategy in the workplace, which results in the development of skills, knowledge and professional conduct. They are not the apprentice's line manager. This term is only used in the context of apprenticeship programmes and is aligned closely with the profession-specific education delivered by the education provider.
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Definitions and terminology

Term	Definition
Applicant	A potential learner looking to enrol on an occupational therapy programme.
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 (Health and Care Professions Council 2023).
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 2022).
Curriculum	The planned content, academic and practice-based learning experiences and assessments designed to prepare learners for professional practice as occupational therapists.
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	The first three years following HCPC registration. '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 (Royal College of Occupational Therapists 2026).
Education provider	The awarding body that delivers or oversees an occupational therapy programme.

<p>Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB)</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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 2024b).</p> <p>As stated in the Equity, diversity and belonging strategy (RCOT 2024b), each of these three concepts is vital, so while 'EDB' is a useful shorthand, we don't want it to become a meaningless acronym or minimise the individual elements' importance.</p>
<p>Ethical and professional conduct expectations of the profession</p>	<p>As defined and detailed in the <i>Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy</i> (RCOT In press).</p>
<p>Fitness for the profession</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Foundation programme</p>	<p>A programme specifically related to the occupational therapy profession that offers an award intended to provide basic knowledge in a subject, to prepare a learner to undertake an occupational therapy pre-registration programme.</p> <p>Generic foundation programmes are non-occupational therapy-specific awards and do not offer any recognition of prior learning for a pre-registration programme.</p>
<p>Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)</p>	<p>The regulating body in the United Kingdom established to protect the public by regulating a range of health and care professions, including occupational therapy.</p>
<p>Individual study plan</p>	<p>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 provider's requirements.</p>
<p>Interprofessional learning</p>	<p>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.</p>

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 2022).
Long-arm supervision	A supervision model 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.
Occupational justice	The 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 wellbeing, and that all individuals and groups have the right to participate in occupations that are meaningful and culturally relevant (Wilcock and Townsend 2009).
Occupational therapist (OT)	A HCPC registered professional who carries out occupational therapy.
Occupational therapy	A science-based health and social care profession regulated by the HCPC. Occupational therapy promotes health and wellbeing by supporting participation in meaningful occupations that people want, need, or are expected to do (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2025).
Practice-based learning	Refers to the time learners spend implementing an occupational therapy process, or an aspect of it, involving interaction with individuals, families, groups, communities or organisations. It enables learners to integrate knowledge, professional reasoning and behaviour within practice, and to develop the competence, skills and attitudes required of occupational therapists. (WFOT 2026a).
Practice-based learning provider	The service, organisation or business hosting learners during their practice-based learning.
Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy	The <i>Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy</i> (RCOT In press) outline the expectations for safe, effective and ethical occupational therapy practice, covering professional behaviours, accountability, service user relationships and ongoing development.
Professionalism	Professionalism goes beyond being a capable practitioner. It concerns how a practitioner represents themselves, their employer and their profession to others. It is the way of thinking, values and motivations that underpin the behaviours and interactions seen (RCOT In press).
Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy	The <i>Professional standards of practice, conduct and ethics for occupational therapy</i> (RCOT In press) outline the expectations for safe, effective and ethical occupational therapy practice, covering professional behaviours, accountability, service user relationships and ongoing development.
Programme	Occupational therapy pre-registration programme of study, approved by the HCPC, leading to eligibility to apply for registration as an occupational therapist with the HCPC.

Reasonable adjustments	'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' (Public Health England 2020).
Research	The creation of new transferable knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods (RCOT 2025).
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.
Simulated practice-based learning	The purposeful and authentic use of simulation, designed, delivered and assessed to meet the defined learning outcomes of a practice-based learning module.
Simulation	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).
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, people who access occupational therapy services, employers, education providers, regulatory and professional bodies and wider health, care and community partners.
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 the HCPC as an occupational therapist.
Supervision	A professional relationship and activity which ensures good standards of practice and encourages development (College of Occupational Therapists 2015).
Wellbeing support	Resources and approaches used to promote and maintain mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

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