



## Advanced Clinical Practice

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**Lead Group:** Professional Development, Education and Research

**Country relevance:** UK wide

### Introduction

Although Advanced Clinical Practice (ACP) is not a new level of practice within the health and social care workforce, it has been predominant in the NHS rather than social care and perceived as the domain of professions with legal prescribing status (Cooper and Tempest 2018). However, there is now greater clarification on the definition of ACP and the capabilities associated with it, which presents new opportunities for occupational therapists to explore and embrace ACP as a career development route.

There are already a number of occupational therapists working as or studying at the Advanced Clinical Practice level and doing so within different roles. Some are working as Advanced Clinical Practitioners, using advanced knowledge and skills from occupational therapy as their base profession. Some are working as Advanced Occupational Therapists. This highlights how Advanced Clinical Practice – as a level of practice – can be enacted through a number of different roles.

This briefing provides an overview, across all four UK countries, of the current ACP context including the challenges faced by occupational therapists and guidance on ways to address them. This overview is written at a particular point in time, within the context of a fast-paced and ever changing agenda. Further references within the briefing seek to support members to maintain their contemporary knowledge.

### Background information

The devolution of health and education means that ACP differs in nature across the four UK countries. The term 'Advanced Practice' has also emerged recently, which incorporates ACP and Consultant levels of practice. Work is also underway in England to explore the level before advanced which involves occupational therapists working at an enhanced level. This briefing focuses purely on ACP. RCOT has been and continues to be involved in the development work and consultations across the four UK countries including:

Wales: The Framework for Advanced Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional Practice in Wales was published in 2010. A steering group has been formed to review and update this Framework.

Scotland: Work continues in Scotland to review the ACP agenda including the proposed development of two frameworks for nursing and AHPs respectively, as part of the Transforming AHP roles work.

Northern Ireland: At the time of writing, the new Northern Ireland AHP Advanced Practitioners Framework is due for publication on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

England: The Multiprofessional Framework for Advanced Clinical Practice was launched in November 2017 and provides the following consensus definition:

*“Advanced clinical practice is delivered by experienced, registered health and care practitioners. It is a level of practice characterised by a high degree of autonomy and complex decision making. This is underpinned by a master’s level award or equivalent that encompasses the four pillars of clinical practice,*



*leadership and management, education and research, with demonstration of core capabilities and area specific clinical competence.*

*Advanced clinical practice embodies the ability to manage clinical care in partnership with individuals, families and carers. It includes the analysis and synthesis of complex problems across a range of settings, enabling innovative solutions to enhance people's experience and improve outcomes." (pg 8 Health Education England 2017)*

Additionally, in March 2018, the approval of the Level 7 ACP apprenticeship in England means that occupational therapists can utilise a funded pathway to ACP via approved Masters courses with the same title. Health Education England has recently invited interested parties to join a virtual reference group to develop Advanced Practice, including ACP and Consultant levels of practice, further details are at: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/advanced-clinical-practice/virtual-reference-group>.

Health Education England (HEE) is currently establishing the Academy for Advancing Practice in part to provide a systematic way to recognise individuals who work at the advanced clinical practice level.

## Current challenges

- The proliferation of titles to describe advanced practice is potentially confusing for funders of services and service users alike.
- There will be four different frameworks for ACP's across the UK countries, with some variation in content. However, the core elements of the level of practice seem congruent at present e.g. no mandatory prescription requirements and all emphasise MSc or equivalent level study.
- In some areas of practice, there is a false assumption that ACP is purely a separate role rather than a level of practice and only available to those disciplines with independent or supplementary prescribing rights.
- Some occupational therapists have been precluded from applying for, or working as an advanced clinical practitioner on the basis of the profession's current legal prescribing status.
- A significant number of ACP job descriptions require registration with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) precluding other professions from applying for these posts.
- Some occupational therapists have been advised not to apply for specific MSc Advanced Clinical Practice courses where prescribing is currently a core module (i.e. a compulsory rather than an optional module within the MSc).
- There is a low uptake of places on some MSc Advanced Clinical Practice courses by occupational therapists even where the course content is accessible to all professions.
- Advanced Clinical Practice opportunities remain predominately within the NHS.

## Guidance

- Consider having discussions with senior managers regarding job titles; the use of a standardised title, i.e. ACP occupational therapist, in the job descriptions of occupational therapists who can demonstrate they meet the capabilities set within their national ACP framework, presents an opportunity to clarify expert level skills and knowledge.
- Use the relevant national framework to support local discussions about the eligibility to apply for an ACP role, as they clarify that prescribing status is not a pre-requisite.
- Use the relevant national framework to reinforce ACP as a multiprofessional opportunity and open to professionals who belong to a range of professional bodies.
- Analyse the course content when considering an MSc in Advanced Clinical Practice as there is variation. Seek to ensure that the course selected does not have prescribing as a core module. Alternatively, challenge the rationale for core modules in prescribing as these courses



inappropriately make learning and professional development via the ACP route inaccessible for a number of the health and social care professions they are meant to support.

- Promote uptake of an MSc Advanced Clinical Practice within your services as a viable professional development option for relevant occupational therapy team members. Beyond the clear advantages for the experiences and outcomes of service users and the development of services offered by the department, there are benefits for individual members of staff which may aid retention of employees with expert level skills and knowledge.
- In England, consider the possibility of the Level 7 Advanced Clinical Practitioner Apprenticeship as a funded, employed route: (<https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/advanced-clinical-practitioner-degree/>)
- Explore options and, where necessary, challenge assumptions and the status quo to support the creation of ACP roles across sectors, using the relevant national framework to support your justification.
- Clarify within your teams the unique contributions that occupational therapy brings to advanced clinical practice.

## Implications for occupational therapy

The availability of national frameworks support occupational therapists to highlight to senior managers and decision makers, within and beyond the NHS, the expectations for working at the level of Advanced Clinical Practice. Used alongside the Career Development Framework (RCOT 2017), appropriately skilled and qualified occupational therapists can demonstrate they have the required knowledge, skills and experience to work at this level.

## References

Cooper, P; Tempest, S. (2018) Spotlight on Advanced Clinical Practice. OTNews (6) 24-26

Health Education England (2017) Multiprofessional framework for advanced clinical practice

<https://hee.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Multi-professional%20framework%20for%20advanced%20clinical%20practice%20in%20England.pdf>

National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (2010) Framework for Advanced Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professional Practice in Wales

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/documents/829/NLIAH%20Advanced%20Practice%20Framework.pdf>

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2017) Career Development Framework: guiding principles for occupational therapy <https://www.rcot.co.uk/cpd-rcot>

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2018) Medicines Optimisation

<https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/occupational-therapy-topics/medicines-optimisation>