The occupational therapist role 4

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THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ROLE

We are all ‘occupational beings’, we like to ‘do’ and ‘be’ and ‘become’. Occupational therapists work with people of all ages to find ways that will enable them to continue to do things that help to define their roles and allow them to live life the way they want.

WHAT ARE OCCUPATIONS?

When occupational therapists talk about ‘occupation’, we don’t just mean paid work or careers. We are talking about the occupations people do every day and affect their health and wellbeing. Occupations may form important and complex routines, roles and daily responsibilities. Occupational therapy is unique, because it is the only profession that uses occupation as a therapeutic tool to improve people’s health, wellbeing and quality of life.

WHEN MIGHT SOMEONE NEED AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST?

Sometimes illness, disability, getting older or even a change in personal living circumstances may mean it becomes more difficult to be involved in the normal everyday routines and occupations which people or groups are used to taking part in. Occupational therapists may be needed if the following arises, for example: a cardiovascular accident (CVA); living with cerebral palsy; age related cognitive impairments; refugees seeking asylum and so on.

Occupational therapists use core skills such as activity analysis and clinical reasoning skills in addition to evidence based practice to formulate the best treatment plan for the individual.

WHERE CAN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS WORK?

- Acute hospitals
- Care homes
- Community centres
- Commercial organisations
- GP surgeries
- Hospitals
- Housing departments
- Job centres
- Mental health
- Overseas
- Prisons
- Refugee communities
- Schools
- Social care settings
- Voluntary and charity settings
- Voluntary settings
- Within patients, and clients’ homes
- With children and families
- With people with learning disabilities
- Independent practice
WHAT DO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS DO?

“I help people with dementia find new ways to continue with their daily routines and to live well.”

“I find ways for children to participate in day-to-day activities, such as playing, dressing themselves, or having lunch at school.”

“I help people who have had an illness learn how to do everyday activities in different ways, like taking a bath, shaving or cooking a meal.”

“I work with people experiencing exclusion from society to develop skills to prepare for re-engaging with their community.”

A CASE STUDY OF AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST’S JOURNEY

“I found the profession of occupational therapy whilst at a careers library at my sixth form college. My 20 year career has given me a range of opportunities and taken my career in exciting directions. I spent a number of years working in large hospitals, including in intensive care, the acute wards and in neuro-rehabilitation. My specialist field is working with people with head injuries and stroke. My knowledge of occupation, how the body works and the role of the environment, helps me to understand how someone might struggle with day to day tasks and also identify what they are capable of doing to enable them to do their day to day tasks.

After completing my Master’s degree in Neuro-rehabilitation, I moved into the university sector where I studied for my PhD and became a lecturer in occupational therapy. I studied for a post graduate certificate to be able to teach in Higher Education. As a researcher I have published a number of articles, presented at international conferences and written various book chapters. My first book is coming out next year and I’m very excited about that too.

Now I work for the professional body, The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT), supporting our members with their own learning. It’s another exciting job opportunity that arose so, when I saw it, I went for it and have been at RCOT since February 2016. I hope my case study shows that, although I don’t have a firm career path beyond being an occupational therapist, the important thing for me is that I find roles where I keep learning and to walk through the right doors when they open.”

Dr Stephanie Tempest, Education Manager for Professional Development at the Royal College Of Occupational Therapists
• You will usually need five GCSE’s at A–C, including English, Maths and often Science.

• Consider your A-level, BTEC, HNC and Baccalaureate choices. Universities sometimes require a Science A-level to study Occupational Therapy.

• Entry requirements obtained at A-level vary between obtaining AAB to CC at A2, depending on the university.

• It’s useful to look at each university’s criteria for the desired attributes of their students. Desired attributes may include: patience, team working skills and good written and communication skills, but also an understanding of key values and purpose of of the 6Cs which ensure that patients are looked after with care and compassion. (6Cs* Care, Compassion, Competence, Communication, Courage and Commitment).

• Are there any experiences that you have that could be useful and make you stand out from other applicants? For example volunteering, community work or overseas experiences.

• Also, you should be aware of any other requirements, such as a period of work experience with a practising occupational therapist or evidence that you have met an occupational therapist, to learn more about the profession.

Each university will set their academic and non-academic requirements, so visit their individual websites.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAMME?

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAMMES COMBINE BOTH ACADEMIC STUDY AND PRACTICAL LEARNING

**Academic study**

• Core principles of occupational therapy
• Occupation- centred practice
• Occupational therapy knowledge & skills
• Professional standards for practice
• Promoting change, embracing risk and enabling choice
• Health inequalities and health promotion
• Working with individuals, communities & populations
• Reflective practice
• Critical thinking and decision making
• Using evidence to inform practice
• Leadership
• Interprofessional working

**Practical learning**

A minimum of 1,000 hours (approximately one-third of the programme) is required to be spent on practice placements, where you put into practice all the theory and knowledge you have learnt at university.

On placement, you may work in physical rehabilitation, learning disabilities, mental health and social care or in the voluntary sector.

During your practice placements, you will normally be under the supervision of a qualified occupational therapist. By the time you are in your final year, you may see service users on your own.
WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED TO BECOME AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST?

• BSc (Hons) full-time and part-time degree programme: 3 to 5 years or 4 years in Scotland
  *other programmes are available in Scotland, see list of universities on page 10 for details
• Post graduate programme (PgDip or MSc): 2 years
• Degree level apprenticeships: 4 years

DEGREE LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY (ENGLAND ONLY)

The pathway to gaining an occupational therapy degree via an apprenticeship is different from the traditional pre-registration route, although both pathways allow the successful learner to apply to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) for registration and to be able to practice using the protected title ‘occupational therapist’.

The degree level apprenticeship route is provided by an employing organisation, for example, the NHS, Social Care Service or an independent company who offers occupational therapy services, and allows people to become fully qualified by spending a portion of time both in paid work (80%) and in a learning environment (20%). The apprentice will sit an assessment called an End Point Assessment (EPA) at the end of their programme.

The apprentice, like an undergraduate student, will also be required to complete 1000 successful hours of practice placement in a setting outside of their workplace. The academic element of degree level apprenticeship in occupational therapy is established in several universities across England now, and you can find these by checking on p. 9-10 of this handbook. To secure a position as an apprentice, you must contact employers who deliver occupational therapy services, scan local newspapers and websites for vacancies and make an application via an advert. Alternatively if you already work in health and social care, you can approach your employer to ask whether they plan to be supporting apprentice occupational therapists. If you have the opportunity to become an apprentice, you will be linked by the workplace employer to the relevant university.

For any further enquiries please contact Sofia.Lypiridou@rcot.co.uk
APPLYING FOR UNIVERSITY

THE PERSONAL STATEMENT
When applying for an occupational therapy programme, either through UCAS or to the university directly, you will be asked to write a personal statement. This is your opportunity to stand out. In your personal statement, so try to make sure you:
• explain why you are interested in occupational therapy as a career;
• describe any experiences you have of working in, and/or visiting, occupational therapy departments, and what you think you gained from the experience;
• outline your personal qualities and skills and try to relate these to what may be required of you as an occupational therapist;
• provide a brief account of your interests.

APPLYING FOR A UNIVERSITY PLACE
Applications to three or four year-full-time pre-registration occupational therapy programmes should be made through UCAS (Universities and College Admissions Service) at the following address:
UCAS, Tel: 01242 544881   www.ucas.com

Applications to two-year accelerated programmes and four-year part-time/in-service routes should be made direct to the university. Check your chosen university websites for deadlines.

REGISTERING WITH THE HEALTH AND CARE PROFESSIONS COUNCIL (HCPC)
The HCPC is the regulatory body for the allied health professions (AHPs) in the UK. It has been established to protect the public.

Occupational therapy is a protected regulated profession. To be an occupational therapist, you need to register with the HCPC. All pre-registration occupational therapy degree programmes must be approved by the HCPC to indicate they meet their standards of education, training and proficiency.

WHERE CAN I STUDY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?
There are 38 universities across the UK that deliver pre-registration occupational therapy programmes accredited by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists.

Please see the tables on the following pages which lists the programmes currently accredited by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists as of 1st September 2018.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University/Location</th>
<th>University/University Name</th>
<th>3 year full-time BSc (Hons)</th>
<th>4/5 year part-time/in-service BSc (Hons)</th>
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*Programmes offered by these universities are available at more than one location  **Pending accreditation
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*Programmes offered by these universities are available at more than one location  **Pending accreditation

**RECOGNISED SUPPORT WORKER PROGRAMMES WALES**

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**FOR INFORMATION ON INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES, VISIT THE RELEVANT UNIVERSITY WEBSITES**
WHO ARE THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS?
The Royal College is the professional body and sets the practice and educational standards for occupational therapy and represents the interests of the profession across the UK and internationally.

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS’ ROLE IN PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) has a rigorous and supportive role in the quality assurance and enhancement of pre-registration education, especially in the accreditation, or reaccreditation, of programmes.

RCOT accreditation and re-accreditation is the process of reviewing, evaluating and quality assuring pre-registration occupational therapy programmes. This service is offered to any education provider considering developing or delivering pre-registration occupational therapy education.

An occupational therapy programme which holds successful RCOT accreditation will ensure that pre-registration students are educated in a manner that is consistent with the values, beliefs and philosophy of the profession and that newly qualified practitioners will recognise the scope and breadth of the profession and have the capability to meet the Royal College’s standards for professional practice, which are and remain, above the threshold required for registration with the Health and Care Profession (HCPC).

Whilst it is recognised that HCPC approval is a mandatory requirement for any Allied Health Profession programme, gaining RCOT accreditation not only offers added value specifically to the occupational therapy profession, it also provides a recognised badge of national and international quality via the delegated authority of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists’ (WFOT) to bestow approval on these programmes.

“Going through the accreditation process, ensures that you strive for excellence in a broad range of performance indicators which are often more relevant and more aspirational than the university quality indicators.”
OT Programme Director

It remains in everyone’s interest to participate in the opportunities which the RCOT accreditation process offers. Through this process programme teams, alongside students, graduates and practice partners, work hard to uphold the quality of professional education, enabling the employability of current and future UK occupational therapists that are recognised across the UK and globally.

Recognition by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists means your qualification will be accepted in over 60 countries!
WHY STUDY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

WHAT MAKES THE PROFESSION SO SPECIAL AND APPEALING?

- Occupational therapists can work in diverse settings, and with lots of different people.
- Occupational therapists support people to engage in their most meaningful occupations.
- Occupational therapy is the only profession that uses occupation as a therapeutic tool.
- Occupational therapists develop a complex understanding of the value of occupations on people’s health, wellbeing and quality of life.

WHAT DO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS SAY ABOUT BEING A STUDENT MEMBER OF RCOT?

“Being a student member has broadened my knowledge and creativity in occupational therapy (OT). OT news has linked the concepts discussed in University with the innovative and meaningful practice carried out by OT colleagues around the United Kingdom. I also had the opportunity to present my undergraduate research at RCOT 2018 Conference, building my experience as an OT researcher. At the conference, I networked and learnt from OTs, coming from various fields. These experiences have enriched my studies, and I look forward to sharing the best practices gleaned from my RCOT membership in my own practice back home in Singapore.”

KELLIE TEDJO

“I knew early on that I wanted to work with children in my future career as an occupational therapist and joining the specialist section Children, Young People and Families has been immensely beneficial. It has given me access to valuable study events, up to date practice through newsletters and journals and networking with those working in my area of interest. I would highly recommend every occupational therapy student (and therapist) not only join RCOT, but get involved, be that through a specialist section or regional group. Now being on the committee for this specialist section has opened so many doors for me and allowed me to help and support the profession whilst also gaining and learning from it.”

ROBERT MOLLOY
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT ABOUT FINANCIAL SUPPORT?
In light of the current educational climate, financial support for students might be subject to change, therefore the links provided below should deliver the most up to date information:

- **GOV.UK**: [www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance)
  For information on how to apply for student finance support in all four countries.

  For the latest financial information for Allied Health Care students.

- **The Royal College of Occupational Therapists**: [www.rcot.co.uk](http://www.rcot.co.uk)
  For up-to-date information about the changes in education for the healthcare professions and how this might impact on occupational therapy education.

HOW MUCH DO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS EARN?

- A newly qualified occupational therapist can earn in the region of £24,000.
- A more experienced occupational therapist can earn over £40,000.
- A consultant occupational therapist can earn between £66,500 and £82,000.
  *(High cost area supplements are also available for those working in the London area)*

WHAT ARE THE WORKING HOURS?
Increasingly, services will offer a 7 day week occupational therapy provision, which offers flexibility in working hours.

I HAVE NOT STUDIED FOR A WHILE. CAN I APPLY?
All programmes welcome applications from career changers. The individual universities will advise on how to prepare for study. Visit the university websites for more information.

CAN I STUDY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING?
During this period of a global pandemic many courses have made some interim changes to ensure the continuation of the progression of the courses and this may include partial Online and virtual learning. However, it is not possible to study to become an occupational therapist via distance learning as you are required to spend a number of hours on practice placements. Therefore, there are no courses available at evenings, weekends or online, due to the skills and competency based nature of the courses. To train as an occupational therapist, you need to attend university and complete a minimum of 1,000 hours of practice placements successfully.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CAN THE COLLEGE RECOMMEND A PARTICULAR PROGRAMME?
All university occupational therapy programmes in the UK have to be approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the independent regulatory body. This is the minimum requirement for practising as an occupational therapist. All programmes are currently accredited by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists, ensuring that graduates are fit for purpose and fit to practise.

HOW DO I ARRANGE WORK EXPERIENCE?
- Use your network – do you know someone who knows an occupational therapist?
- Contact your local hospital or social services for information on visiting institutions where occupational therapists work.
- Residential nursing homes, homeless shelters or charities may also employ occupational therapists who could spend time discussing their role with you.
- Visit the Royal College of Occupational Therapists website for more information and advice. www.rcot.co.uk

DO THE UNIVERSITIES CHECK FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS?
Yes, enhanced disclosure and barring checks will be required before taking up a place on a university programme. This procedure is initiated by the university.

WILL I NEED TO HAVE A HEALTH CHECK BEFORE STARTING THE PROGRAMME?
All students will be required to undertake a health check, and you may have to pay for some vaccinations before going on a placement. The university will provide further details.

I ALREADY KNOW I WANT TO WORK WITH A SPECIFIC GROUP OF SERVICE USERS. DO I STILL HAVE TO COMPLETE A PRACTICE PLACEMENT IN ANOTHER PRACTICE SETTING?
Yes, it is the university’s responsibility to provide you with a range of practice placement experiences. Although you may develop a preference for a particular area of occupational therapy practice during your time as a student, you will be expected to complete placements in a range of different settings.
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

I AM AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT. CAN I STILL STUDY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN THE UK?

International students can find information on the entry requirements for each university in the course listings at www.rcot.co.uk. For more information, please contact the university directly.

WHERE ELSE CAN I GO TO GET MORE INFORMATION?

The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) produces guidance notes for international students wishing to study in the UK. Visit www.ukcisa.org.uk or call +44 (0)20 7288 4330.

THE BRITISH COUNCIL

The British Council provides information for international students wishing to study in the UK. Visit www.britishcouncil.org

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FINANCIAL AID (IEFA)

IEFA provides information on financial aid, scholarships and grant information for international students wishing to study abroad. Visit www.iefa.org

While all UK pre-registration occupational therapy courses are accredited by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), if you are an international student, this does not automatically mean you will be able to register and work in your home country. You may need to apply, submit documentation, complete extra study and sit exams, as each country sets its requirements differently.

As the professional body, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists does not deliver any programmes, so does not participate in the Erasmus programme or organise internships. You would need to contact the universities directly.