Occupational therapist

Occupational therapy is an exciting and varied career. It offers you the chance to make a difference, a high degree of flexibility and excellent employment prospects. You’ll work with patients every day to help improve their care and their lives.

Working life

You’ll work with people who have difficulties carrying out these activities because of disability, illness, trauma, ageing, and a range of long term conditions.

"Occupational therapy allows you to make a difference to people’s lives across the community which is something that really appeals to me about the career." Rachel Rule, occupational therapy student.

Read Rachel's story in full [1]

What you’ll do as an occupational therapist

You’ll see a huge variety of patients and help them with many different issues as an occupational therapist. Some examples of things you might work on include:

- helping someone adapt to life after major surgery
- helping people suffering from mental illness get back into everyday activities such as work or volunteering
- helping elderly people stay in their own homes by providing adaptations such as level access showers or stair lifts

Variety is one of the most exciting things about being an occupational therapist. As well as seeing different patients and conditions you’ll also have the opportunity to work in a multi-disciplinary team in a range of settings from hospitals and clinics to charities, prisons and social services departments
You’ll find solutions to everyday problems, for example:

- advising on how to approach a task differently
- using equipment or assistive technology
- adapting the living or working environment
- finding strategies to meet an individual’s goals

Illness, injury, disability or ageing can make ordinary tasks such daily care (washing, dressing, eating), work or education and leisure harder to do. You’ll help people find ways to continue with activities that are important to them. This might involve learning new ways to do things, or making changes to their environment to make things easier.

As well as working with individual patients and their families, occupational therapists work with groups. They work in teams with other health professionals. They may also supervise the work of occupational therapy support workers.

**How to become an occupational therapist**

To become an occupational therapist you’ll need to train and study at undergraduate degree level (through a full-time course or degree apprenticeship) or if you already have a relevant degree, at Masters level through a 2-year accelerated programme. Entry requirements vary depending on where you’d like to study. You can search for occupational therapy courses using our [Course Finder tool](#).

Find out more about entry requirements and training to become an occupational therapist [3]

"Helping to find solutions and deliver therapy that improves children’s health and quality of life is really satisfying." Anne Gordon, paediatric occupational therapist

[Read Anne’s story in full](#)

**Want to learn more?**

- [Find out about the entry requirements for being an occupational therapist.](#)
- [Find out about working as an occupational therapy support worker.](#)
- [Pay and conditions](#)
As an occupational therapist working in the NHS, you would start on band 5 of the NHS Agenda for Change pay system [6]. With experience, further qualifications and training, you could apply for more specialist and senior posts at bands 6 and 7, such as a primary mental health worker in a child and adolescent mental health service. Occupational therapists working at consultant level will typically be on band 8A or 8B.

Occupational therapists in the NHS work around 37.5 hours a week and may be expected to work flexibly over a 7 day period. In private practice hours of work may include evenings and weekends.

- Where the role can lead

Once qualified, you're encouraged to join the British Association of Occupational Therapists [7]. Joining the professional body has many benefits including Professional Indemnity Insurance and trade union membership.

The Health and Care Professions Council Standards of Continuing Professional Development demand that all qualified health professionals must maintain a continuous accurate and up-to-date record of their continuing professional development (CPD) activities.

Further information on CPD opportunities and guidelines are available for members of the British Association of Occupational Therapists [8].

You'll work across a range of settings; elderly care, physical and mental health settings, paediatrics, brain injury and learning disability to name a few. Occupational therapists are found in the public, private and voluntary sectors and also in independent practice. There are also opportunities to become involved in research and education.

Occupational therapists can work within multidisciplinary teams such as child and adolescent mental health services, or as service managers in health or social care. There are also opportunities to work overseas.

- Job market and vacancies

In November 2018, there were 39,669 occupational therapists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [9]. Occupational therapists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [9].

The need for occupational therapists is growing, and this is being recognised nationally. Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [10]. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations NHS Choices [11].

If you're applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your
everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS. Find out more about NHS values. [12]

To increase your chances of employability, it helps if you have thought about the area of occupational therapy you are interested in and can demonstrate knowledge in this area. To find NHS vacancies visit NHS Jobs [10]. Or for jobs in social care look on local government websites or in sector publications. You may also want to register with a recruitment agency.

- Further information

Expand / collapse

- Royal College of Occupational Therapists [13]

Other roles that may interest you

- Art therapist/art psychotherapist [14]
- Music therapist [15]
- Mental health nurse [16]
- Social worker [17]

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Links
[2] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/course-finder?field_leading_to_a_career_in_tid=191&field_qualification_type_tid=All&field_study_mode_tid=All&field_region_tid=All&field_provider_name_tid=All
[12] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution
[13] https://www.rcot.co.uk/