

Occupational therapist

As an occupational therapist, you'll help people who have difficulties carrying out day-to-day activities because of a disability, illness, trauma, ageing, and a range of long-term conditions.

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Working life

Accidents, illness, disability, mental health issues and ageing affect millions of people, making it harder for them to do everyday things, along with activities they enjoy. As an occupational therapist, you'll help all kinds of people overcome all kinds of challenges, so they can live as fully and independently as possible. This might involve learning new ways to do things, or making changes to their environment to make things easier.

In the role, you could help:

- someone adapt to life after major surgery.
- people with mental illnesses or learning disabilities with everyday activities such as work or volunteering.
- elderly people stay in their own homes by providing adaptations such as level access showers or stair lifts.

You'll find solutions to everyday problems, such as:

- advising on how to approach a task differently.
- using equipment or assistive technology.
- adapting the living or working environment.
- finding strategies to meet your patient's goals.

As well as working with individual patients and their families, you could also work with groups, or as part of a multidisciplinary team in hospitals, clinics, charities, prisons and social services departments.

Real-life story - Rachel Rule

Lead occupational therapist

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.

[Read Rachel's story](#) ^[3]

Entry requirements

To become an occupational therapist, you'll need a degree in occupational therapy, which usually takes three years full time or up to six years part time. In postgraduate studies, it's possible to gain a Masters degree in one to two years. Once you've successfully completed your degree, you'll need to register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC ^[4]) before you can start practising. The other option is to apply for an apprenticeship degree.

Entry requirements for an undergraduate course are typically:

Apprenticeships logo

- two or three A levels
- five GCSEs (grades 9-4/A-C), including science.

Or equivalent qualifications:

- a BTEC, HND or HNC, including biological science
- a relevant T level
- a relevant NVQ
- a science-based access course
- equivalent Scottish or Irish qualifications.

When applying for a occupational therapy degree, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work.

Annual payments

If you're eligible, you'll receive at least £5,000 a year to help fund your studies while at university. Your personal circumstances may mean you could receive more. And the good news? You'll never have to pay it back. Find out more. ^[5]

Degree apprenticeship

There are a growing number of degree apprenticeships. Apprenticeships give you the chance to earn a living while gaining your qualification. Your employer and the government will pay the tuition fees, so apprenticeships aren't eligible for student grants.

Must-have skills

Don't forget – academic qualifications aren't everything. You'll need to be a natural 'people person' who is able to make anyone feel quickly at ease. Creativity and the ability to balance patience with enthusiasm is also needed. You'll need to enjoy teamwork and be able to think quickly on your feet too.

Training and career development

Once you've qualified, you'll have annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) check-ins, where we'll discuss your career aspirations and plan how we can help you to achieve them, so you're always moving forward. You'll be encouraged to join the [Royal College of Occupational Therapists](#) ^[6] where you'll gain professional indemnity coverage and a trade union membership.

You'll also be able to specialise in areas such as elderly care or paediatrics. You could move into research or education, and there are opportunities overseas. Or with experience, further qualifications and training, you could apply for more specialist and senior posts.

Pay and benefits

Your standard working week will be around 37.5 hours with the need to work flexibly over a seven day period. As an occupational therapist, you'll be paid on the [Agenda for Change \(AFC\) pay system](#) ^[7], typically starting on band 5.

You'll also have access to our generous pension scheme and health service discounts, as well as 27 days of annual leave plus bank holidays.

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Occupational therapy (pre-registration)

University of Essex

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- Qualification
 - MSc
- Study mode
 - Full-time
- Duration of the course
 - 2 years

- Leading to a career in
Occupational Therapy
- Contact details
 - pgadmit@essex.ac.uk ^[9]
 - +44 (0) 1206 873333
- Region
 - East of England
- Admissions address
 - University of Essex
 - Wivenhoe Park
 - Colchester CO4 3SQ

Occupational therapy (pre-registration)

Brunel University London

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- Qualification
 - MSc
- Study mode
 - Full-time
- Duration of the course
 - 2 years
- Leading to a career in
 - Occupational Therapy
- Contact details
 - admissions@brunel.ac.uk ^[11]
 - +44 (0)1895 274000
- Region
 - London
- Admissions address
 - Brunel University London
 - Kingston Lane
 - Uxbridge
 - Middlesex UB8 3PH

Occupational therapy (pre-registration)

Teesside University, Middlesbrough

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- Qualification
 - MSc
- Study mode
 - Full-time
- Duration of the course
 - 2 years
- Leading to a career in
 - Occupational Therapy

- Contact details
shlsadmissions@tees.ac.uk ^[13]
 01642 738801
- Region
 North East
 Admissions address
 Teesside University
 Middlesbrough
 Tees Valley
 TS1 3BX UK

Occupational therapy (pre-registration)

University of Cumbria

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- Qualification
 MSc
 Study mode
 Full-time
 Duration of the course
 2 years
 Leading to a career in
 Occupational Therapy
- Contact details
enquirycentre@cumbria.ac.uk ^[15]
 0333 363 6535
- Region
 North West
 Admissions address
 Fusehill Street
 Carlisle
 Cumbria
 CA1 2HH

Occupational therapy (pre-registration)

University of Salford

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- Qualification
 MSc
 Study mode
 Full-time
 Duration of the course
 2 years
 Leading to a career in
 Occupational Therapy
- Contact details

enquiries@salford.ac.uk ^[17]

0161 295 4545

- Region
 - North West
- Admissions address
 - Allerton Building
 - Frederick Road Campus
 - Salford
 - M6 6PU
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Register for your guide to becoming an occupational therapist

We'll email you a step-by-step guide to help you on your way to joining us

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- [Art therapist/art psychotherapist](#) ^[20]
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