Studying and training to be an allied health professional

This page provides an overview of what to consider if you're thinking about a career as an allied health professional (AHP), what you can expect during training and your next steps, once qualified.

The allied health professions [1] cover a range of roles:

- *art therapists (i.e. art therapists [2], dramatherapists [3] and music therapists [4])?
- dietitians [5]
- occupational therapists [6]
- operating department practitioners [7]
- orthoptists [8]
- paramedics [10]
- prosthetists and orthotists [11]
- physiotherapists [12]
- podiatrists [13]
- diagnostic [14] and therapeutic radiographers [15]
- speech and language therapists [16]

*Art therapists first take a degree or have appropriate professional experience in a relevant subject, such as music or art, followed by an HCPC-approved postgraduate qualification.

Applying to become an AHP

The first step to becoming an AHP is to take an approved degree or postgraduate course. Osteopaths need to successfully complete a course approved by the General Osteopathic Council [17] (GOsC). All other AHPs need to complete a course approved by the Health & Care Professions Council [18] (HCPC [19]). You can search for approved courses for the AHPs using our course finder [20].

Entry requirements for approved AHP degree courses vary because each university sets its own entry criteria.

Additionally, some professional bodies also have their own accreditation system for membership.

Applications for first degrees are made through UCAS [21].

You can also train for some AHP roles through a degree apprenticeship [22]. This involves working and
studying at degree level at the same time. Details of the entry and training routes available are listed on the role pages for each career (follow the links above).

**Entry requirements**

Entry requirements for approved AHP degree courses and degree apprenticeships vary because each university sets its own entry criteria, but you are likely to need at least two (usually three) A-levels or equivalent qualifications at level 3, plus supporting GCSEs. Contact universities and employers directly to find out whether qualifications equivalent to A-levels or GCSEs are acceptable.

Entry is competitive, so aim for as high grades as possible. Courses often specify preferred or essential subjects, such as at least one science subject, but this varies from one allied health profession to another and even between courses for the same subject. Universities and employers offering apprenticeships will usually expect you to attend an interview.

**Financial support while studying at university**

Find out about financial support while studying at university [23]?

If you secure an apprenticeship, you will be paid while you are working and training.

- Your application
  
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  When applying, you will also need to demonstrate that you have found out about the role of an AHP and understand what the work involves. Relevant experience [24] in any healthcare setting is useful but if you can gain it in an AHP setting, so much the better. Work experience placements can be difficult to find, so alternatives would be to shadow an AHP or talk to one about their role. Find out exactly what is required for your chosen courses or apprenticeships and organise this as soon as possible.

  The UCAS website [25] allows you to search for courses and view entry requirements. More detailed information about specific courses can be found in university prospectuses and on their websites.

  For some of the allied health professions, there are other routes to becoming qualified, such as apprenticeships or studying part time whilst working in an assistant role [26] or taking an approved postgraduate programme after graduating in another subject [27].

  Apprenticeships are advertised on the NHS Jobs [28] and Government apprenticeship website [29]

- Recruiting for values
  
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  If you're applying for an apprenticeship or a university programme leading to a role providing NHS healthcare, you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values would apply in your everyday work.
Find out more about NHS values [30].

- Your training as an AHP

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Approved AHP degree courses last for three or four years (4 or 5 years for osteopathy degrees) and postgraduate courses usually for two years. They combine university study with practical experience in community settings as well as hospitals. Degree apprenticeships typically last 4 years and also combine academic study with practical, paid employment.

Approved courses must meet the HCPC's [18] and GOsC [17]'s standards of education and training but programmes vary in their content, the way they are structured, and how they are taught and assessed. The facilities available and amount of support and supervision may also differ from course to course. Find out more by looking at university websites and prospectuses, attending university open days and contacting admissions staff.

See our information about the support available [31] while on your course.

- What happens after AHP training?

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After you have passed an HCPC [19] or GOsC approved course or degree apprenticeship, in order to practise (and call yourself by one of the AHP protected titles, eg podiatrist, osteopath or radiographer) you must register with the HCPC [32] or GOsC [17].

Job vacancies for qualified AHPs are advertised on the NHS Jobs website [33].

If you become a member of a professional body such as the Royal College of Occupational Therapists [34], Institute of Osteopathy [35] or Chartered Society of Physiotherapy [36], you can also find jobs advertised in their journals or on their websites.

General information on looking for work can be found in our Career planning section [37] and Looking for a job [38] sections.

There are opportunities to work in a range of settings as an AHP and you can progress from one grade or band to another. You'll need some experience in a more generalist role, but in most areas of work you can specialise in an area that interests you. For example, physiotherapists can specialise in sports injuries, and speech and language therapists can focus on people with specific learning difficulties. Moving into clinical specialisms can involve taking further qualifications.

To remain registered with the HCPC or GOC you have to maintain their standards for your profession. This includes taking part in continuing professional development [39] (CPD).

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Links