

Increasing retention of newly registered occupational therapists: the role of the UK professional body

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RCOT

- We are the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, the professional body for occupational therapy in the United Kingdom.
- We have 37,000 members across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.
- We offer members opportunities to learn, research, teach, practise and continuously improve their occupational therapy knowledge and skills. We're the powerful advocate and high-profile champion that the UK's occupational therapists deserve. We work with healthcare commissioners, political leaders and others to position occupational therapy as a solution at the heart of health and social care.

Context

Early career refers to occupational therapists in the first three years following registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC 2023).

These include:

- newly registered practitioners;
- those returning to practice and:
- those transitioning from international settings

Need: To meet current and future demand we must invest in a skilled, diverse and committed occupational therapy workforce, supported by strong professional identity and career development opportunities.

Our response

- It is vital that, as a profession, we provide every early career occupational therapist with a strong and supportive introduction to the profession.
- We all have a role in shaping the quality and sustainability of our profession and ultimately ensuring we enjoy being, and are proud to be, occupational therapists.
- Early career occupational therapists should feel recognised, nurtured and equipped to succeed.
- **Early career principles and standards for occupational therapists** – five Principles with underpinning Standards for employers to demonstrate.

Aim: To secure the future of the profession we will:

- smooth the transition into practice,
- foster excellence,
- nurture a strong sense of professional belonging and
- improve retention.

Principle 1

Early career occupational therapists experience a sense of belonging, connection and feel valued as they begin or return to their professional journey.

Principle 2

Early career occupational therapists have access to regular, structured supervision that supports their individual transition into autonomous, safe and confident practice.

Principle 3

Early career occupational therapists are supported to engage in professional development, establish individual career trajectories and contribute to the development of the profession

Principle 4

Employers proactively promote the wellbeing of early career occupational therapists through supportive working practices that enable sustainable, reflective and self-directed engagement in the profession.

Principle 5

Early career occupational therapists develop a strong professional identity and engage with the wider profession.

Principle 3

Early career occupational therapists are supported to engage in professional development, establish individual career trajectories and contribute to the development of the profession.

- 3.1 There is a process to ensure early career occupational therapists take an active role in identifying their individual learning needs, setting development goals and engaging with professional development opportunities across the four pillars of practice within the Career development framework (RCOT 2021a.)
- 3.2 A minimum of half a day protected time is allocated per month for continuing professional development in addition to structured supervision.
- 3.3 Employers actively seek to understand the knowledge, skills and values developed during pre-registration education and ensure this learning is built upon in the workplace.
- 3.4 Employers actively seek to engage with education providers to inform the development of a contemporary pre-registration programmes, supporting alignment between guiding policy, evolving service needs and graduate readiness.
- 3.5 Employers support early career occupational therapists to engage in practice that contributes to long term workforce sustainability, including opportunities for career development, progression and retention.

Principle 5

Early career occupational therapists develop a strong professional identity and engage with the wider profession.

- 5.1 There are processes to support early career occupational therapists to explore and articulate the unique value of occupational therapy in multiprofessional settings.
- 5.2 There are processes to support early career occupational therapists to engage in peer learning and leadership opportunities.
- 5.3 Early career occupational therapists are provided with information about Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) membership, including its purpose and the benefits of being an active member of the professional body
- 5.4 Early career occupational therapists are expected to engage with the wider profession. This may include accessing RCOT communities, World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and other occupational therapy forums.

Next steps

Embed **Early career principles** across the profession by:

- promoting through professional networks, events and resources.
- supporting employers to implement.
- raising awareness among early career OTs.
- launching an employer recognition scheme to recognise and celebrate excellence.
- reviewing retention figures.

Early career principles and standards for occupational therapists

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Thank you for your time.