



## Inspiring Change: Expanding Occupational Therapy Practice to Support Public Health & Tackle Health Inequalities

### Embedding Physical Activity Within Pre-Registration Occupational Therapy Education

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# Sport for Confidence

- ∞ Embeds Occupational Therapists directly within community, leisure and sport settings to use physical activity as a therapeutic, preventative and person-centred, occupation-focused tool.
- ∞ Uses meaningful movement to build skills, routines and confidence for daily living, social participation, education, employment and independent community life.
- ∞ Operates as a whole-systems model connecting health, social care, leisure and community – tackling inactivity, reducing inequalities and preventing ill health.

**Where Occupational Therapy transforms physical activity into personalised therapy, prevention and possibility – without medicalising movement.**



# The Issue

## Inactivity, Inequality and the Systems That Shape Participation

- ∞ **Inactivity is a global health challenge.** Nearly 1.8 billion adults are at increased risk of preventable disease, poor mental health and reduced quality of life due to insufficient physical activity. *(WHO)*
- ∞ **Inactivity and inequality are linked.** People facing disadvantage, disability, long-term conditions or financial hardship are consistently the least active – and the least well. *(Sport England / Uniting the Movement)*
- ∞ **People who most need movement face multiple, overlapping barriers –** social, cultural, sensory, financial and emotional.
- ∞ **Traditional sport and leisure systems are not designed for belonging,** leaving many feeling unsafe, overwhelmed or unwelcome.
- ∞ **Health and social care often unintentionally deepen inequalities** through inaccurate signposting into pathways that cannot meet people's needs.
- ∞ **Leisure is still treated as a luxury add-on,** rather than a therapeutic, preventative community health environment.

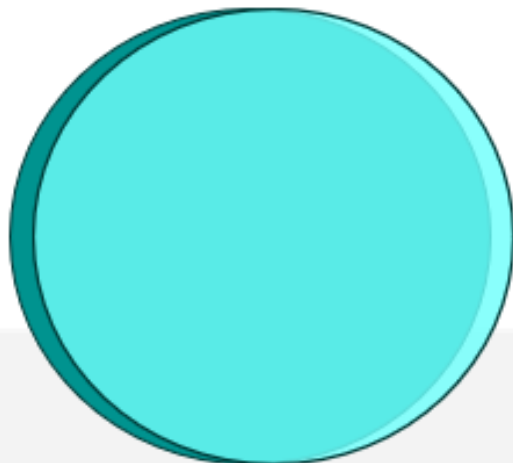
**Inequalities in movement create inequalities in health, confidence and independence.**



# Our Plan

- To influence education and practice of occupational therapists to include physical activity, as a Sport England System Partner, using a spiral curriculum approach (Howard 2007).
- For all occupational therapy students and practitioners to see physical activity, and reducing physical inactivity, as within our scope of practice.
- For occupational therapists to be seen as leaders and essential workers in creating health, addressing health inequalities.

Occupation

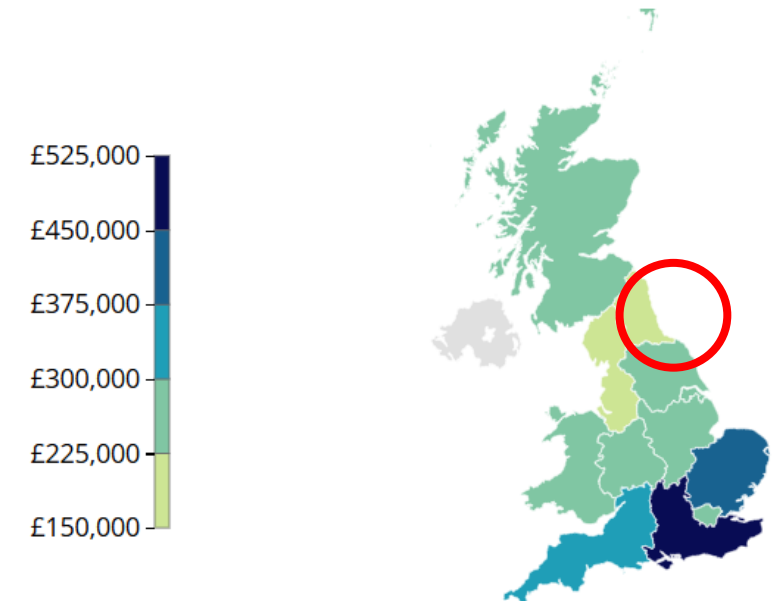


Physical Activity

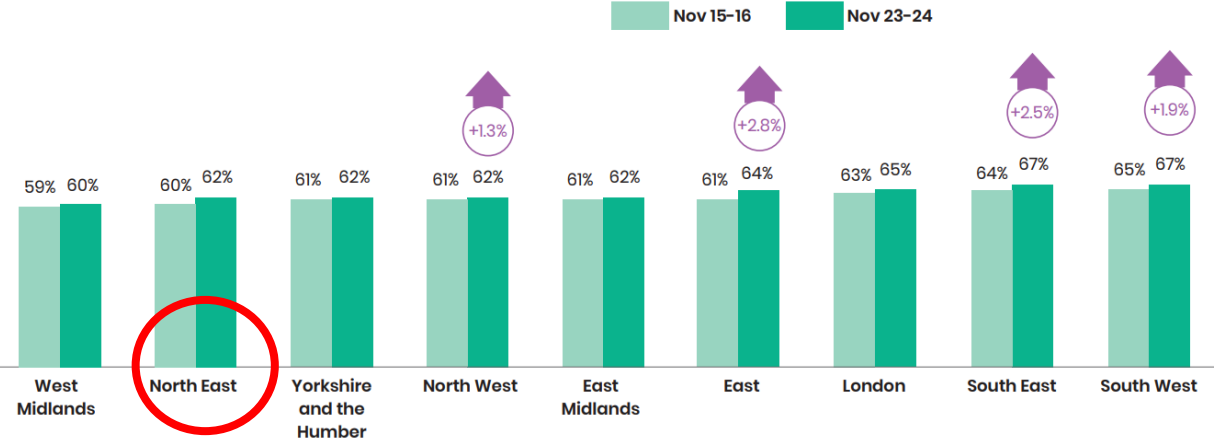


**Figure 5: Median household wealth in the South East (£489,800) was more than twice as high as in the North East (£179,900)**

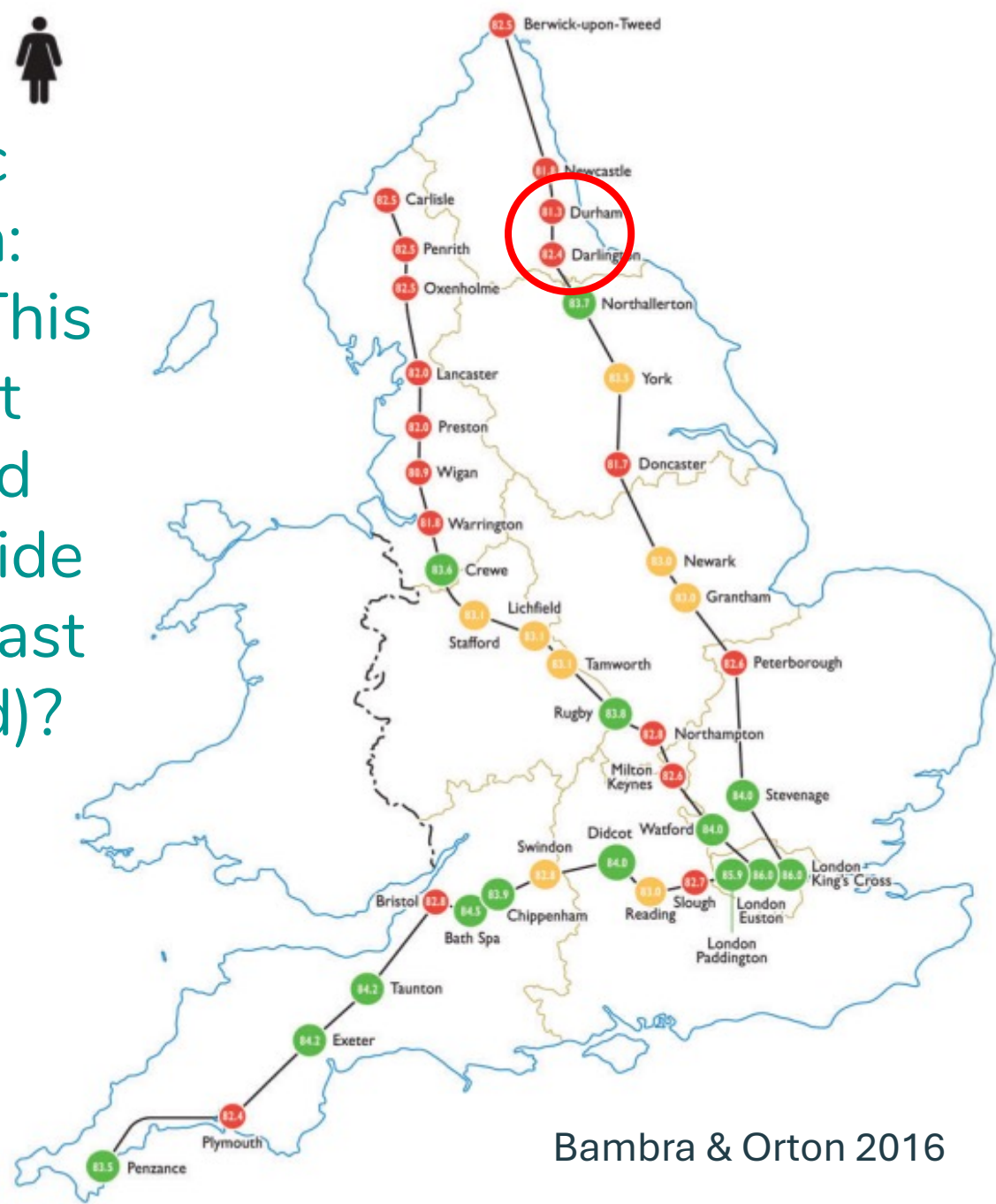
Median household wealth by region, Great Britain, April 2020 to March 2022



Active: 150+ minutes a week



Public Health:  
Why Is This Project Needed In Teesside (North East England)?



Bambra & Orton 2016

# Our Plan

- **Started out focused on influencing Teesside University's academic curriculum.**
- **Sport for Confidence uses a systems thinking approach to ensure health inequalities are reduced through use of physical activity.**
- **Opportunities to link with partners across the system amplified the impact of this work – both in valuing physical activity, and in valuing the role of occupational therapists.**

## Academic:

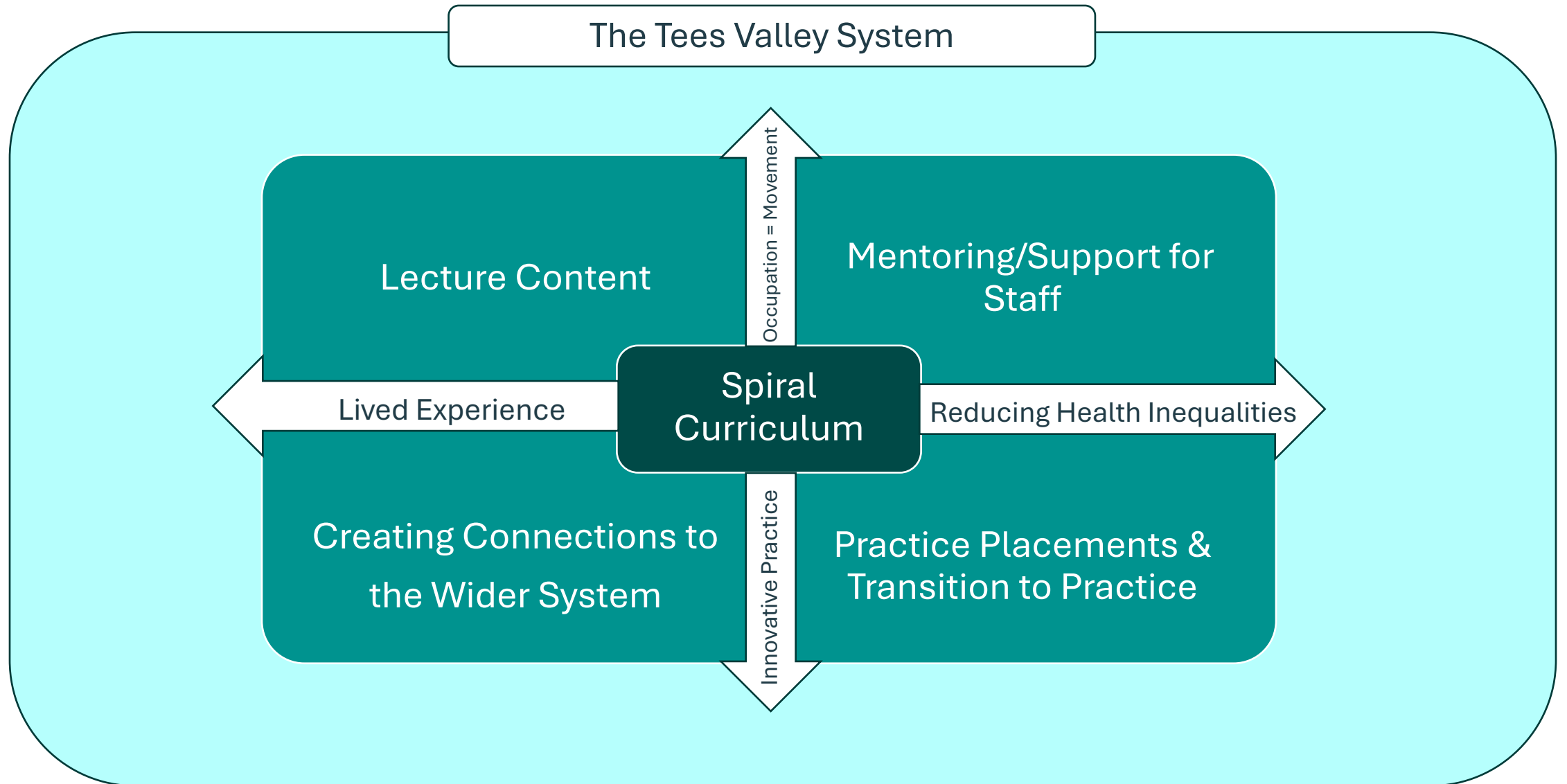
Embedding Physical Activity within the Occupational Therapy Curriculum

## Practice:

Partners Across the System Valuing Physical Activity, & the Role Occupational Therapists Can Play



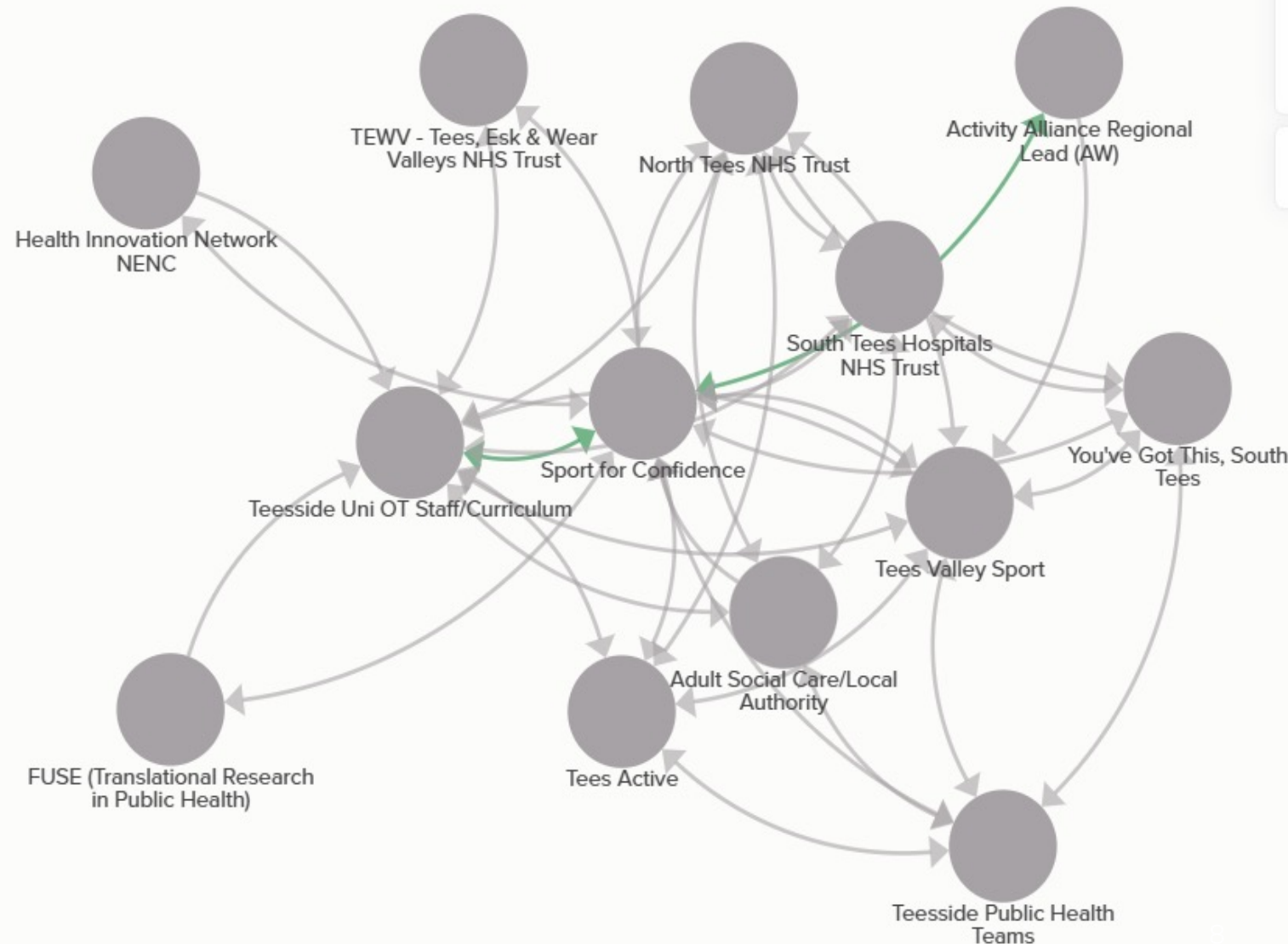
# Linking the Academic & Practice Worlds



# Who Did We Work With?

- Teesside University
- NHS Trusts
- Local Authority (Adult Social Care, Public Health)
- Sport England-funded bodies
  - Tees Valley Sport (AP)
  - You've Got This (LDP)
- Leisure Provider (Tees Active)
- VCSE Organisations
- Organisations supporting research & innovation

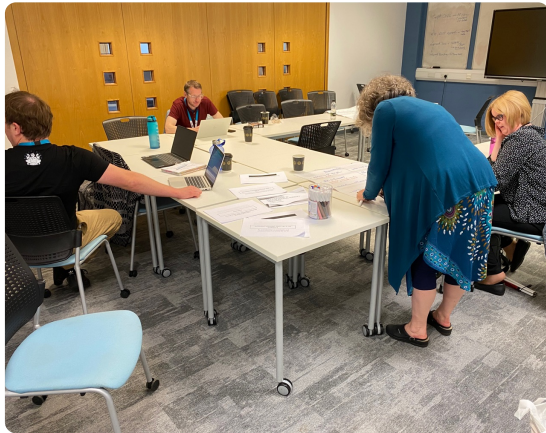
This diagram shows when we connect systems, remove labels, and embed person-centred, occupation-focused approaches into physical activity, we can close the gaps in health, social connection and daily participation – and create communities where everyone belongs.



# What Did We Do?

## CURRICULUM CONTENT

- Mapping the curriculum, and where physical activity could fit.
- Mentoring lecturing staff on perceptions of physical activity.
- Creating new curriculum content (entrepreneurship, lived experience, health inequalities – in addition to physical activity).
- Offered placements related to physical activity (e.g. leisure centres).



## PARTNER CONNECTIONS

- Established a steering group to ensure buy in & alignment with system partners.
- Visited partners to understand their work & offers related to physical activity.
- Offered learning opportunities to share Sport for Confidence's work.
- Found ways to work together, e.g. through student placements, community open days.

### Key Themes:

Communication

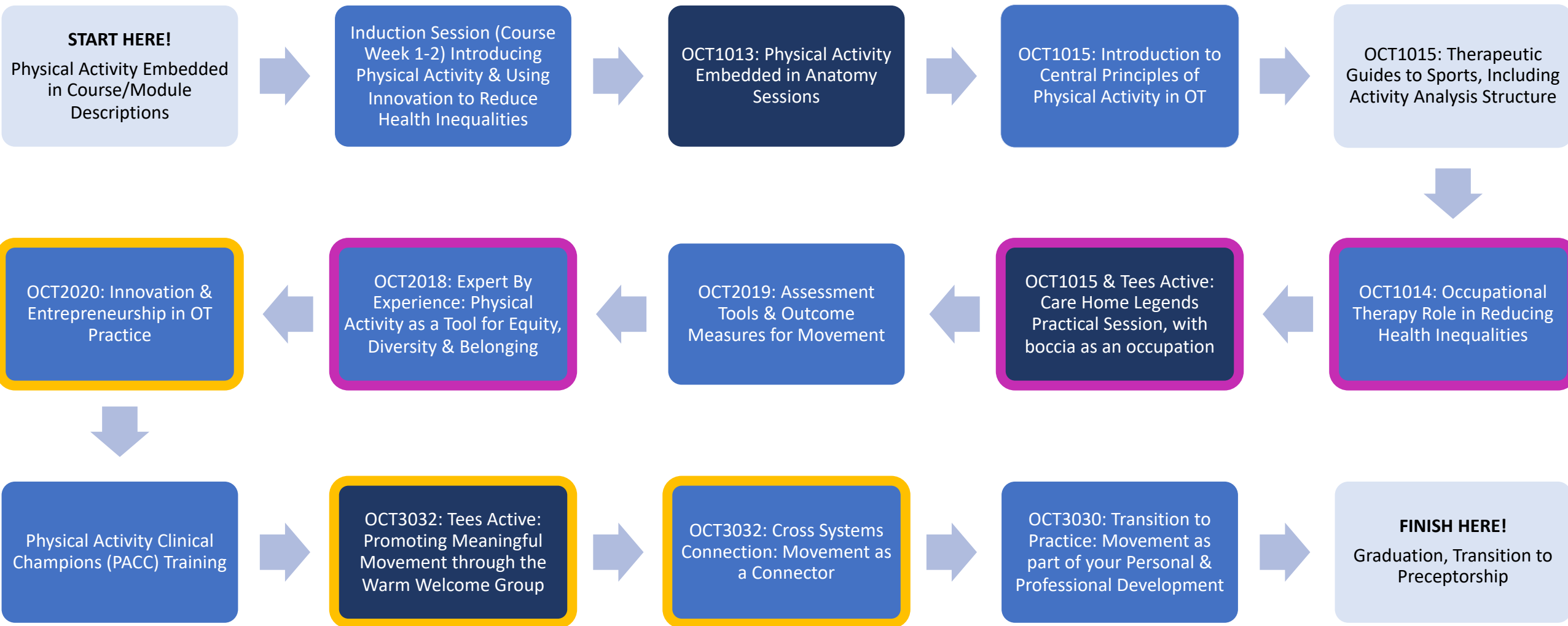
Involving Interest-Holders From The Start

Planning Around Community Needs

Gaining Feedback & Modifying Content Based on Feedback (PDSA)



# What We Produced: Spiral Curriculum Structure



**Delivery of Content:** Light Blue: Written Content; Mid Blue: Lecture/Presentation/Workshop; Dark Blue: Practical Session  
**Theme:** Purple Border = Lived Experience & Health Inequalities Focus; Orange Border = Innovation/Entrepreneurship Focus

# What's Next?

- **Funding from Elizabeth Casson Trust** to co-produce resources to support OT students & practitioners to see physical activity as part of their practice.
- **Connecting partners across the system** (Health, Social Care, Education, Leisure, Sport England Place Partnerships) to embed physical activity and an **occupational therapy perspective**.
- Documenting spiral curriculum development process into a **guidance document** to be shared with universities.
- Sport for Confidence **online student placement platform**: student placements in physical activity settings.
- Sharing learning offers with partners across the system, through the **Sport for Confidence Learning Arena**.



**AIM: Occupational Therapists are leaders in preventative public health work, reducing health inequalities, creating belonging within communities, and improving population health.**



**Get Involved!**

Join our MovingOTs Community of Practice  
for free Continuing Professional Development.

Get In Touch:

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A photograph of two women swimming in a pool. The woman on the left is smiling and looking towards the right. The woman on the right is looking forward with a neutral expression. They are both wearing swimsuits. The background shows blue and yellow lane markers in the water.

## References

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