

# Becoming an Occupational Therapist: FAQ Guide



This guide contains answers to most of the questions you may have about becoming an occupational therapist. The questions and their answers are arranged by category:

**A: Becoming an occupational therapist: Six key questions answered**

**B: More information about qualifying to become an occupational therapist**

**C: Further information for those wondering how personal circumstances may affect their studies**

**D: Information for international students and occupational therapists who qualified overseas**

**E: Information about studying or practising abroad**

**F: Miscellaneous questions and further reading**

<b>A</b>	<b>Becoming an Occupational Therapist: Six Key Questions Answered</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Q. How can I become an occupational therapist?</b>
	<p>Occupational therapy is a degree-level profession, so you would need to complete a programme of study at one of the accredited <a href="#">higher education institutions</a> which offer occupational therapy courses in the UK. At the end of the study programme you are required to register with our regulator the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to be able to practice as an occupational therapist.</p> <p>The following training routes are available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• full time BSc (Hons)</li><li>• part-time / in service BSc (Hons)</li><li>• full time/ part-time postgraduate e.g. MSc/ PG Dip</li></ul> <p>The <i>Occupational Therapy Career Handbook</i> <a href="https://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing_materials/public/Career-Handbook2015-16v2.pdf">https://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing_materials/public/Career-Handbook2015-16v2.pdf</a> also includes a full list of universities in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales which offer the above training routes.</p>

### Entry requirements:

You would normally need to have at least five GCSE passes and at least two (usually three) A levels to be accepted onto an occupational therapy degree programme. A science subject at 'A' Level is sometimes required. Approved Access courses, Vocational Certificate Education (VCE) and Scottish qualifications are acceptable alternatives to 'A' levels. To be eligible to apply for a place on the 2 year accelerated entry programme, you would need to have a previous degree.

Each university has its own entry requirements and these vary between degree programmes. The [HEI listings](#) on our *OT as a Career* web page has links to each institution's relevant web page where you will find more information on individual courses and requirements. If you are unsure as to whether your qualifications will meet the entry criteria for a particular programme, please contact the appropriate admissions tutors, who are always happy to answer questions from prospective students.

## 2 Q. Please can you advise me about work experience?

We do recommend that potential occupational therapy students seek some work experience before enrolling on a programme of study and some programmes (not all) like to see evidence of time spent with an occupational therapist to be able to demonstrate insight into the work of the profession. While the College is unfortunately not in a position to locate these opportunities on behalf of potential occupational therapy students, we can offer the following suggestions:

- Make contact with your local hospital and the occupational therapy department. Occupational therapists work in a very wide range of settings so in addition to your local hospital you could also consider contacting:
  - local mental health settings
  - social services
  - learning disabilities services.
- You could also approach any independent practitioners in your area that may also be able to help. (Information on independent practitioners can be found through [www.cotss-ip.org.uk](http://www.cotss-ip.org.uk))
- The College of Occupational Therapists has a 'Fan Page' on Facebook so this is another potential avenue to make contact with occupational therapists and occupational therapy students throughout the UK.
- You could also join the student specific Facebook group *Occupational Therapy Students: Get Connected*.

Please remember that our website [www.cot.org.uk](http://www.cot.org.uk) is a valuable resource for finding out about occupational therapy as a profession. We encourage you to visit our website, and to watch the range of videos which offer an insight into the role(s) and specialisms of occupational therapists.

## 3 Q. Where can I find information on fees/bursaries/financial support?

Each of the four UK countries have devolved administration for health and education. For information on Scotland go to: [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk)  
For information on Wales go to: <http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/>  
For information on Northern Ireland go to:  
[http://www.studentfinanceni.co.uk/portal/page?\\_pageid=54,1265897&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://www.studentfinanceni.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=54,1265897&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

	<p>For England please note that in light of the current educational climate, financial support for students might be subject to change, therefore the links provided below should deliver the most up to date information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>GOV.UK: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance">www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance</a></b> For information on how to apply for student finance support in all four countries.</li> <li>• <b>Department of Health: <a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health</a></b> For the latest financial information for Allied Health Care students.</li> <li>• <b>The College of Occupational Therapists: <a href="http://www.cot.co.uk">www.cot.co.uk</a></b> For up-to-date information and advice on NHS bursaries in England, and financial support for occupational therapy students.</li> </ul> <p>It is always best to check with the individual university regarding funding and bursaries.</p> <p><b><i>NB: Please note there is no funding available via COT to support pre-registration course fees.</i></b></p>
4	<p><b>Q. Will I be able to work alongside studying?</b></p>
	<p>The course design is very intense and in the first year in particular, you may find you are expected to be on campus four days per week in addition to self-directed study. When you go on placement, these are full time, often 37 hours per week so, especially during the placements, we would encourage you not to take additional paid work if at all possible. If you are considering whether you wish to study for the BSc or the MSc courses, please be aware that the latter is fast-track because the amount of study is condensed from the three year course to a two year course (and upgraded to Masters level). Therefore, typically the MSc (pre-registration) courses have much less leave during the academic year and it is more akin to the amount of annual leave you will get upon graduating. Please ensure you consider your own financial position and the limited opportunity to generate income during term time when you are selecting your course options.</p>
5	<p><b>Q. I am over 21 and have not studied for a long time. Do you have any advice for me?</b></p>
	<p>All programmes welcome applications from adult learners. The individual universities will advise you on how to prepare for study. Some adult learners prefer or are required to do a foundation degree or access course in a related field, such as health and social care, to help prepare them for a return to academic study. Please visit the individual university's website for more information, or contact the relevant admissions tutors if you would like to discuss your circumstances in more detail.</p>
6	<p><b>Q. What about employment prospects for new occupational therapy graduates? How much do occupational therapists earn?</b></p>
	<p>Employment prospects for new occupational therapists are generally good, although competition for jobs can vary across the UK. Ensuring your application stands out from the crowd is increasingly important and this can be achieved simply by preparing a really thoughtful application and demonstrating a commitment to the profession.</p>

Unlike graduates with qualifications that are not specifically career-orientated, new occupational therapy graduates generally have the advantage of a structured career path with good long-term prospects.

The average starting salary for a registered occupational therapist working in the UK is in excess of £21,000. A more experienced occupational therapist can earn around £40,000, and a consultant occupational therapist can earn between £66,000 and £82,000.

## **B I want more information about qualifying as an Occupational Therapist**

<b>Q:</b>	<b>Can I practice as an occupational therapist without a degree?</b>
<b>A:</b>	No, all new occupational therapists in the UK are required to register with the Health and Care Professions Council ( <a href="http://www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/">www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/</a> ) in order to practice, and graduation from a validated degree course is a pre-requisite for registration.
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Can the College recommend a particular degree programme?</b>
<b>A:</b>	No, there is no league table for occupational therapy degree programmes in the UK. All occupational therapy programmes have to be approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), the independent regulatory body. All programmes are currently also accredited by the College of Occupational Therapists (COT) and the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) which ensures that graduates are fit for practice and have the skills to take the profession forward. When drawing up a short-list for which universities to apply to, it may be helpful to consider the teaching style that is used at the university. Some opt for a lecture-based teaching style whereas others favour group work and problem-solving seminars. Consider your own learning style and select accordingly.
<b>Q:</b>	<b>What is the difference between in-service programmes and part-time programmes?</b>
<b>A:</b>	Some programmes are designed to provide access to professional qualifications for support workers or technical instructors working in health and social care, and these are termed 'in-service'. Other programmes enable students to study part-time irrespective of their employment status. Both programmes of study include daily or weekly attendance, and all include periods of practice placements equivalent to a minimum of 1.000 hours.
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I already know I want to work with a specific group of service users. Do I still have to complete practice placements in other practice settings?</b>
<b>A:</b>	Yes. You will need to complete a range of practice placements that provide you with experience in a variety of different settings. So although you may develop a preference to a particular area of occupational therapy practice during your time as a student you will be expected to complete placements in a range of different environments.

<b>C</b>	<b>I want to know how my personal circumstances could affect my studies</b>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I already have a degree, is there a fast track route to becoming an occupational therapist?</b>
<b>A:</b>	A pre-registration Postgraduate Diploma or Masters degree (MSc pre-registration) is aimed at allowing people who already have a Bachelors degree to study to become occupational therapists. Some universities will ask that you have a bachelor's degree in a specific subject relating to occupational therapy and that your degree has a certain classification. You still may be required to have certain grades for specific GCSE subjects. Check the university's website for information on this or contact the university directly. Postgraduate programmes are delivered over two years, however you will still be required to complete a minimum of 1,000 hours of practice placement and you may find that these are scheduled to occur over the traditional summer break. Most universities will expect you to show evidence of an academic achievement within, on average, the last five years, though some may allow for a longer period. It is best to check with each university directly. Masters courses are very popular and there is generally a high level of competition. In preparation for an interview, make sure that you have thoroughly researched the role of the occupational therapist and of occupational therapy. You should also research the current issues in health and social care.
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I am a student with disabilities. How will I be supported on a degree programme?</b>
<b>A:</b>	All universities have special provision for students with disabilities (including unseen disabilities such as dyslexia or diabetes). For further information contact the university directly.  Students with disabilities may be eligible for a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). Contact your Local Education Authority, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (tel: 020 7215 5555); or visit the Directgov website: <a href="http://www.direct.gov.uk">www.direct.gov.uk</a> for further information or for a copy of <i>Bridging the gap: a guide to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs in Higher Education)</i> .  The Health and Care Professional Council has produced some guidance for students with a disability. You can access this via their website; <a href="http://www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/">http://www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/</a> .
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Will I need to have a health check before starting the degree programme?</b>
<b>A:</b>	All students will be required to undertake a health check, and you may have to pay for certain inoculations before going on a placement. The university will provide further details.
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Do the universities check for criminal records?</b>
<b>A:</b>	Disclosure and Barring Checks (DBS, previously CRB) will be requested by the university after you have been provisionally accepted, and before your first practice placement.

<b>Q:</b>	<b>Can I study occupational therapy through distance learning?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>No, to train as an occupational therapist you need to attend university. The only distance learning programmes available are aimed at support workers (e.g. HNC offered at Glasgow Clyde College).</p> <p>While some universities offer a post-graduate MSc in Occupational Therapy by distance learning, these programmes are for those already qualified. All pre-registration programmes that lead to registration eligibility (thus enabling you to practice as an occupational therapist) require regular attendance at university and the completion of a minimum of 1000 hours of practice placement.</p>

<b>D</b>	<b>I am an international student or an occupational therapist with a qualification from overseas</b>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I qualified as an occupational therapist overseas; can I work in the UK?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>To practice in the UK, occupational therapists must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (<a href="http://www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/">www.hcpc-uk.org.uk/</a>). Prospective employers of overseas occupational therapists could also check whether the awarding body/university is recognised by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (<a href="http://www.wfot.org/education/entryleveleducationalprogrammeswfotapproved.aspx">http://www.wfot.org/education/entryleveleducationalprogrammeswfotapproved.aspx</a>).</p> <p>The equivalency of the qualification awarded can be determined by the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC, <a href="https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/">https://www.naric.org.uk/naric/</a>)</p>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I am an international student and I would like to do a practice placement in the UK.</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>Make direct contact with occupational therapy departments in hospitals to find out if they are able to supervise an overseas student. Priority will always be given to UK students, but some services may have the capacity to take additional students. Legal agreements need to be set up with the department/service and the student's university. Practice placement tutors at the UK universities may also be able to offer advice on finding a placement in the UK.</p>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>I am an international student – can I still study occupational therapy in the UK?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>The Council for International Education (UKCISA) produces guidance notes for international students wishing to study in the UK. Visit: <a href="http://www.ukcisa.org.uk">www.ukcisa.org.uk</a> or write to UKCISA, 9-17 St Albans Place, London N1 0NX, or call +44 (0)20 7107 9922.</p> <p>The British Council provides information for international students wishing to study in the UK. Visit <a href="http://www.britishcouncil.org">www.britishcouncil.org</a></p> <p>International Education Financial Aid (IEFA) provides information on financial aid, scholarships and grant information for international students wishing to study abroad. Visit <a href="http://www.iefaf.org">www.iefaf.org</a></p> <p>A list of resources that you might find useful are available on our international student page <a href="https://www.cot.co.uk/become-ot/international-students">https://www.cot.co.uk/become-ot/international-students</a></p>

E I am considering studying or practising abroad	
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Can I work overseas after completing my occupational therapy training?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>Yes. All COT accredited occupational therapy training programmes are currently recognised by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists <a href="http://www.wfot.org">www.wfot.org</a>. Information on working in all countries affiliated to WFOT can be found on their website, under the individual country entries. Another helpful document can be downloaded from the resource centre 'Working as an Occupational Therapist in Another Country revised 2015'.</p> <p>N.B. If you are considering working in the USA go to: <a href="http://www.nbcot.org">www.nbcot.org</a></p> <p><b>There is a specific information page on our website for new graduates considering working overseas:</b> <a href="http://www.cot.co.uk/new-graduates/new-graduates-working-overseas">http://www.cot.co.uk/new-graduates/new-graduates-working-overseas</a></p>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Are there opportunities to study abroad whilst completing a UK based degree programme?</b>
<b>A:</b>	Some universities have international links, giving students the opportunity to study abroad as part of their degree programme. Please contact the university directly for further information.

F I have a question about something else	
<b>Q:</b>	<b>How can I become an occupational therapy support worker?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>There are no specific requirements to becoming a support worker as this is not a regulated profession. However, some employers may ask for experience in a health setting. The National Health Service (NHS) Jobs website <a href="https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/">https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/</a> will provide useful information on the experience employers are looking for. There is also a specific information page on the COT website for people interested in becoming a support worker: <a href="http://www.cot.co.uk/support-workers/become-ot-support-worker">http://www.cot.co.uk/support-workers/become-ot-support-worker</a></p>
<b>Q:</b>	<b>Are there any other resources you can recommend to help me find out more about occupational therapy?</b>
<b>A:</b>	<p>The <i>Occupational Therapy Career Handbook</i> is full of information and resources. It can be downloaded here: <a href="https://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing_materials/public/Career-Handbook2015-16v2.pdf">https://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/marketing_materials/public/Career-Handbook2015-16v2.pdf</a></p> <p>You may also find these two books useful:</p> <p>Atchison, B. Dirette, D.K. (2011) <i>Conditions in Occupational Therapy: Effect on Occupational Performance</i>. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Baltimore: Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins.</p> <p>McKenna, C. Wright, C. (2012) <i>Becoming an Occupational Therapist</i>. London: BPP Learning Media.</p>