

# Regulated professions qualification pathways

## Careers in occupational therapy



### General entry requirement

All routes into occupational therapy typically require the below. Universities/higher education providers may accept a range of other qualifications and consider different entry levels.\*



**GCSEs** including English and Maths at Grade C/4 or **accepted UK GCSE equivalencies**.



Evidence of successful study at **Level 3 or above** (for example **A levels, Level 3 apprenticeships recognised by Skills England, Access to Higher Education Diplomas**), often in relevant subjects e.g. Human biology, psychology, social sciences, or other health and science-related subjects.

### Where you might begin



Relevant experience in health and social care sector or community settings typically via:

Volunteering  
Paid or unpaid work experience



Adult social care care or support worker (Level 2–3)

Community support worker (older people, learning disability, mental health) (Level 2–3)

Assistant practitioner in occupational therapy (Level 5) or other health and social care discipline/practice (Level 4–5)

NHS healthcare assistant/support worker/senior support worker (Level 2–3)



Undergraduate degree programme in a health and science-related subject

### How you could qualify

	<b>Undergraduate Occupational Therapy degree</b> (Level 6)	<b>Occupational Therapy degree apprenticeship</b> (Level 6)	<b>Postgraduate Occupational Therapy qualification</b> (Level 7)
Description	A full-time university degree in occupational therapy leading to eligibility to apply for Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) registration as an occupational therapist.	A work-based apprenticeship combining employment, on-the-job training, and academic study leading to an HCPC-approved degree.	A postgraduate conversion/pre-registration degree for those who already hold a degree in a relevant subject. Qualifying award leads to HCPC registration as an occupational therapist.
Time commitment	<b>3 years full time</b> (part-time options exist).	<b>3-4 years</b> (typically around 36 months of work/study).	Up to <b>2 years full-time</b> (apprenticeship and part-time options exist)
Desirable	Relevant volunteer/work experience encouraged but not universally required.	Prior sector experience encouraged and many apprentices enter from social care, healthcare or community care roles.	Some courses require relevant health and social care experience as part of entry requirement

### Newly qualified occupational therapist

#### What are some of the early career opportunities in adult social care once qualified?

Newly qualified occupational therapists who choose to work in **adult social care** often start in roles that support people with physical and mental health challenges to maintain their independence in daily life. They may do this by assessing individual needs, offering practical advice, and recommending specialist equipment and environmental adaptations.

### Opportunities in adult social care settings

Local authority neighborhood and older people services.

Integrated care services multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs).

Specialist community teams e.g. neuro rehabilitation services.

Local authority or community mental health services.

\*We recommend checking with relevant higher education institutes and individual providers for detailed and up-to-date entry requirements, as well as information on specific programmes.

# Careers in occupational therapy

## Andrew's story – from Community Support Worker to Occupational Therapist

### Andrew's journey into occupational therapy didn't start in a hospital or a clinic – it started in a theatre group.

While involved in a learning disability theatre company, Andrew discovered how powerful it can be to help people express themselves and take part in activities that matter to them. Although he had once considered a career in the arts, he found that supporting people with learning disabilities to build confidence and participate fully incredibly rewarding.

That experience led him into adult social care. He began working as a care worker and later moved into a community support worker role within a local authority learning disability service. In this role, he supported people in their own homes and communities – helping with daily routines, developing independence skills, and finding ways to overcome barriers to everyday activities.

It was here that Andrew began working closely with occupational therapists. He was drawn to their practical, solution-focused approach. He liked how occupational therapy looked at the whole picture - not just someone's diagnosis, but their environment, routines, goals, and the things that gave their life meaning. The focus on enabling people to do what matters most to them felt like a natural fit for Andrew's career aspirations.

Andrew knew he wanted to take the next step to become an occupational therapist, but with a young family, leaving work to join a qualifying degree programme full time wasn't a viable option for him. When he saw an advert for an Occupational Therapy degree apprenticeship sponsored by his local council, it felt like the opportunity he had been waiting for. The apprenticeship offered Andrew a route to qualification while remaining in paid employment and building on the experience he already had.

His background in adult social care meant he understood safeguarding, person-centred support, and multidisciplinary working which helped him to secure a place on the apprenticeship.

Over three years, Andrew combined academic study with work-based learning. He received regular supervision and support from both his employer and the university. As part of the programme, he also completed external placements in health and specialist services through local NHS trusts. These placements broadened his understanding of occupational therapy across different settings - but they also confirmed that adult social care was where he felt most at home.

After completing the apprenticeship, Andrew gained registration with the Health and Care Professional Council as an occupational therapist and took up a role within the local authority. Today, he still draws on his frontline experience to develop practical, meaningful solutions with the people he supports. His background in adult social care helps him understand the real-life challenges people face and work alongside them to build independence in ways that feel achievable and personalised.

### Could this be you?

If you enjoy working closely with people, solving practical problems and helping others build independence, occupational therapy could be a natural next step. Degree apprenticeships make it possible to train while staying in work, using the skills and experience you already have as a foundation. Andrew's journey shows that a career in occupational therapy can grow directly from frontline adult social care experience – and that progression doesn't mean starting from scratch.

## An employer story

### A local authority developing occupational therapists from within adult social care services

Recruiting occupational therapists had become an ongoing challenge for a local authority. Its proximity to London and opportunities offered by nearby NHS trusts meant qualified practitioners were frequently attracted to what the capital has to offer, leaving hard-to-fill vacancies and increased pressure on existing teams in adult social care.

Rather than competing in an increasingly difficult recruitment market, the authority made a strategic decision to invest and grow its existing occupational therapy workforce.

Leaders recognised that many community care officers and adult social care support workers were already demonstrating skills closely aligned with occupational therapy. Staff were supporting people to adapt routines, use equipment, maximise independence, and overcome environmental barriers every day. They understood local communities and many had the capabilities to take on more responsibilities. What they needed was a structured and accessible route into professional qualification.

In response, the council introduced an occupational therapy degree apprenticeship pathway for internal staff. Dedicated apprentice roles were created and centrally funded, enabling staff to train while remaining in paid employment. Apprentices were seconded into occupational therapy teams, provided with protected study time, and supported by qualified mentors and supervisors.

The programme was intentionally designed to build breadth and confidence. Apprentices rotated through different occupational therapy services across adult social care, including learning disability, older people's services, and enablement teams. The partner university delivered the academic curriculum and arranged external placements, including within NHS settings, ensuring apprentices developed a full understanding of occupational therapy across health and care systems.

Close collaboration between the council and university ensured expectations were clear and learning remained closely aligned to frontline practice. Apprentices were able to apply theory directly to live cases, strengthening professional competence while continuing to contribute to service delivery during the programme.

The results have been significant. Newly qualified occupational therapists already understand local systems, policies, and community contexts, enabling them to transition seamlessly into permanent roles following qualification. Teams benefited from continuity of care, improved morale, and visible progression pathways. Over time, reliance on external recruitment has reduced and workforce stability has improved.

By developing occupational therapists from within adult social care, the local authority has strengthened its service resilience while recognising and investing in the potential of its existing workforce.