

You can be a changemaker

As a member of the occupational therapy community, you can champion the profession's vital role in health and social care, locally, nationally and globally. Here's how.

Earlier this year, we published our first ever Workforce Strategy. Our vision is that by 2035, the occupational therapy profession will be based primarily within communities, working closely with local populations to meet their health and care needs, and ensuring that services are accessible to everyone.

It will also be a profession that is positioned to focus on prevention and early interventions, minimising the need for crisis interventions and dependency on social care services.

During 2024's Occupational Therapy Week, we reached an important milestone by releasing our England action plan, detailing the steps we'll take over the next three years to achieve this vision. This follows the launch of our Wales action plan over the summer, with action plans for Northern Ireland and Scotland anticipated early next year.

Our action plan is broken into four priority areas:

- Optimising occupational therapy.
- Retention and career development.
- Demonstrating value and impact.
- Effective workforce planning.

You can read in detail about what actions we're taking to deliver each of these in the action plan. Here, we focus on 'Optimising occupational therapy', which involves equipping practitioners to become changemakers. By nurturing leadership and advocacy skills, we aim to inspire new approaches and solutions across the profession.

The power of occupational therapy

Our 'Power of occupational therapy – transforming health and social care' campaign launched on 4 November, marking the start of OT Week 2024 (OTnews, November issue, page 11).

One of the ways we'll deliver this year-long campaign is by enabling the OT community to champion occupational therapy's vital role in health and social care, locally, nationally and globally.

10-Year Health Plan

With a new government in place in the UK, now is a pivotal time to advocate for occupational therapy's critical role in addressing the nation's health and social care challenges.

The government's forthcoming 10-Year Health Plan for England – now open for public consultation – is set to transform healthcare delivery by focusing on three strategic shifts: moving care from hospitals to communities; advancing digital health solutions; and prioritising prevention over treatment.

We encourage all members of the public, NHS staff and healthcare professionals to participate in this consultation, sharing insights on what's working and what needs improvement in the NHS.

Contributions can be made via the NHS's Change platform, which will remain open until next Spring, at <https://change.nhs.uk>.

RCOT will respond to help ensure that occupational therapists' perspectives are integral to the policy's development.

Through this campaign, we'll help you tell the story of occupational therapy and become advocates and changemakers on social media, in communities and beyond.

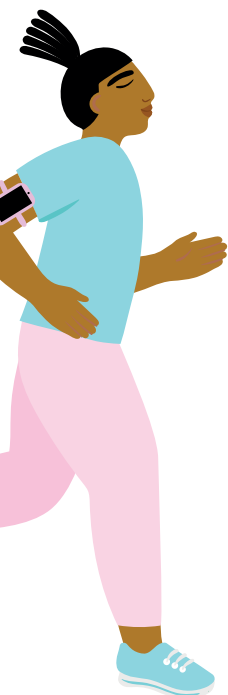
You'll find a narrative and resources in the campaign pack. We've also created a comprehensive Profile Raising Toolkit, offering actionable steps and resources to raise awareness and influence change. You can also come to one of our Profile Raising Cafés.

OT service hosts government Minister at local leisure centre

A powerful example of occupational therapy in action is Sport for Confidence. This innovative programme uses the expertise of occupational therapists and coaches based in leisure centres to support individuals who have become isolated or disconnected from their communities.

Lyndsey Barrett, Founder and Lead Occupational Therapist at Sport for Confidence, invited the Minister for Sport, Media, Civil Society and Youth, Stephanie Peacock, to witness firsthand the transformative role of occupational therapy.

During her visit to Basildon Leisure Centre, she spoke directly with occupational therapists and programme participants, gaining insight into the unique value that occupational therapy brings to public health and community care.





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Lyndsey shared her motivation for the Minister's visit, explaining: 'Bringing the Minister to Sports for Confidence was about showcasing what's possible when occupational therapy is embedded in community spaces. When politicians see the real, positive impact on individuals, they gain a deeper understanding of why occupational therapy is essential to health and social care, and the role it can play in the public health agenda.'

Speaking about her feelings before the visit, Lyndsey said: 'I was eager, but also mindful, of the importance of this opportunity. Speaking with politicians is a little out of my comfort zone, but I wanted the Minister to truly see the heart of what we do, the people we support and the role occupational therapy plays in fostering inclusion and wellbeing. Afterwards, I felt immensely proud of our team and participants.'

Lyndsey added: 'Seeing the Minister engage with our team and programme participants was inspiring. It reinforced how occupational therapy can transform lives on a personal level, while addressing broader issues. Her genuine interest gave me hope that our message about occupational therapy's value is being heard.'

Lyndsey would like to see more practitioners be involved in influencing, saying: 'Engaging with policymakers might seem daunting, but it's essential if we want to amplify our voice and influence change. I encourage every occupational therapist to share their work and impact, because each story helps to build a fuller picture of our profession's value.'

Help raise the profile of OT

If you'd like to invite your local MP to attend your service you'll find a step-by-step guide to help you in our Profile Raising Toolkit. There are other ways to get involved as well:

- Use the Power of OT campaign materials and the Profile Raising Toolkit.

How you can raise the profile of OT

We've produced a toolkit that will help you promote occupational therapy to colleagues, influential decision-makers and others. Where possible, work with other occupational therapy colleagues so you can spread the workload.

There are some things you can do that don't take too much time, and others that will take some planning. You can: prepare and share your story; act local; be a media spokesperson; influence decision makers; and get social.

To find everything you need visit www.rcot.co.uk/profile. And finally, find everything you need to know about our Workforce Strategy and action plans at www.rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy.

- Join us. Come to one of our Profile Raising Cafés, where you can exchange ideas and strategies with others.
- Promote our Workforce Strategy action plans. The plans set out how we can all start working towards our vision for 2035 over the next three years. Please share these with leaders, colleagues and decision-makers to start making real change.
- Complete our Workforce Survey. See page 8.
- If you're in England, participate in the 10-Year Health Plan consultation to ensure occupational therapy's contributions are represented. See box out on page 16.

Each action we take brings us closer to a future where occupational therapy is recognised as an essential force in promoting health, wellbeing, and independence across the UK. Together, let's champion our profession and make a lasting difference. ●

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