

# Occupational therapy workforce strategy action plan

Cymru–Wales

2024–2027



# Workforce Strategy action plan

Cymru–Wales

**We will deliver our first-ever UK wide occupational therapy Workforce Strategy, using nation-specific action plans. This action plan for Wales details:**

- the position of the occupational therapy (OT) workforce
- actions to transform and modernise the OT workforce
- examples of workforce modelling that can help organise skills and make sure staffing levels are safe.

Delivering our Workforce Strategy will be a team effort. We'd like to thank the member volunteers in our Workforce Strategy advisory group in Wales who've helped to shape this action plan.

Along with this action plan, please refer to the Workforce Strategy on our website where you'll also find a bibliography, useful terminology and frequently asked questions: [rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy](https://rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy)

# The position of the occupational therapy workforce

To successfully implement our Workforce Strategy in Wales, we need to understand where we are now against the growing demands on our occupational therapy workforce in Wales.

**Policies in Wales** have advocated for services to evolve in line with current and future population need. The argument for safely adopting artificial intelligence and technology enabled care solutions has also been made across policy and practice frameworks in Wales.

**A Healthier Wales**, the Welsh Government's long term plan for health, social care and education (2018), called for more services to be delivered out of hospital, closer to where people normally live and by multi-professional teams.

To achieve this ambition, occupational therapy needs to be at the forefront of helping people live fully – providing the support they need to sustain their physical, mental and social wellbeing.

**The Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)** mandates statutory health, social care and education organisations in Wales to adopt a long-term view and consider how the decisions we make today affect the wellbeing of future generations.



## Welsh Government's National Workforce Implementation Plan (2023)

emphasises the argument for better integration of health, social care, education and welfare services.

It called for employers to evaluate their existing workforce models and consider repositioning our workforce and reconfiguring the multi-professional skills within teams.

It makes the case for the role of the occupational therapy workforce in facilitating integration across:

- physical and mental health services
- primary, community and secondary care services
- health, social care and education.

You'll find workforce data for Wales within our 'State of the occupational therapy workforce' report at [rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy](https://rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy)



## Working with the occupational therapy workforce in Wales

We have identified that there is a strategic misalignment between current health, social care and education policy and the reality of service delivery at the coalface.

This misalignment has challenged our growth and ability to develop services in line with demographic need and surfaced the following issues:

- funding for service innovation and improvement is often short-term and inconsistent. This contributes to variation in the quality of service provided to the populations of Wales. It also does not make the most of the skills, knowledge and creativity that is abundant within an occupational therapy workforce
- the occupational therapy workforce is not eligible to apply for some leadership and senior management roles. This hinders our potential and ability to support collaboration and system change
- patchy and inconsistent demographic data that weakens systems' efforts to undertake effective workforce planning
- a limited understanding of the value of occupational therapy and its unique contribution to systemwide challenges and opportunities. This perpetuates fragmented access and positioning of the occupational therapy workforce within systems.



# Transforming and modernising the occupational therapy workforce

## Our workforce vision

Our vision is for an expanded occupational therapy workforce – positioned to have maximum impact in improving people's health and quality of life.

By 2035 we will have an occupational therapy workforce that is:

- **confident and skilled in championing inclusion** and advocating for occupational justice, focusing on the right of every person to have the choice and opportunity to engage in a diverse range of activities and roles
- **based primarily within communities** working closely with local populations to meet their health and care needs and ensuring that services are accessible to everyone
- **positioned to focus on prevention and early interventions**, minimising the need for crisis interventions and dependency on care services
- **putting occupations at the forefront of their practice**, empowering people to do the occupations that they value, manage their health and care needs and contribute to society.

## Preparing our workforce for change

We recognise that there's much to do to prepare the occupational therapy workforce in Wales for modernisation and transformation. Guided by demographic need, policy and practice direction, this three-year action plan will focus on key ambitions for the occupational therapy workforce in Wales. **The Primary Care Model for Wales (PCMW, 2014)** highlighted the need for whole system approaches to providing local, sustainable and easily accessible healthcare services. By focusing on place-based care, delivered to people in their usual places of residence, and multi-professional working, the occupational therapy workforce in Wales have been pioneers in developing services to meet this requirement. We need more teams to adopt this model to enhance its scope and scale in provision.

Data has suggested that over two-thirds of health and social care in Wales is delivered in inpatient (secondary care) services, while a third is delivered in the community (**NHS Wales, 2021**). Furthermore, while 90% of NHS activity occurs within primary and community care, primary and community care services only receive 6% of the NHS budget (**NHS Wales Planning Framework 2022 – 2025**)



**Our action plan promotes the adoption of the universal, targeted and specialist framework of service provision.**

By improving the proportion of services across these levels, we will enable people to access the right help at the right time, in the right place and delivered by the right multiprofessional workforce.

# The workforce modelling that we need

Working with the occupational therapy workforce and leaders in Wales, we have identified several principles of workforce modelling and service delivery that will help us achieve our goals:

- having access to data and intelligence that reflects the reality of services. This will facilitate effective workforce planning and workforce transformation initiatives.
- equitable access to jobs at all career levels of the pillars of practice.
- occupational therapy practitioners with a strong professional identity and clear sense of their unique value and contribution to health, social care and education systems.
- a robust base of real-world and research evidence for the role of occupational therapy within multiprofessional teams.
- an occupational therapy workforce that embraces technology within their work and are digitally ready today and tomorrow.

We address the misalignment in policy and practice, propelling the healthcare reform and workforce transformation needed in Wales. The question we've sought to answer through the development of this action plan is – What will an excellent, inclusive occupational therapy service look like in 2035 and how do we get there?

**The tables on pages 9–13 present our action plan for delivering our Workforce Strategy in Wales.**

Each workforce priority has actions with measures and timings.

## Workforce priority one: Optimising occupational therapy



- We will support occupational therapy practitioners to be changemakers, using their skills and knowledge to lead and co-design innovative products, interventions and services that improve people’s lives and wellbeing.
- We will champion innovative service delivery models that improve access to occupational therapy and achieve health equity for all.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will support the embedding of the new <b>Welsh Professional Framework for Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Clinical Practice - HEIW (nhs.wales)</b>. This framework aims to increase the number of occupational therapy practitioners working in enhanced, advanced and extended roles within primary, rehabilitation and care settings for children, young people and families.</p> <p>We will work with members to develop a communication strategy for the OT workforce across Wales to share key information about development opportunities available.</p> <p>We will work with employers to develop job descriptions that meet enhanced, advanced and clinical practice framework.</p>	<p>Having a baseline understanding of the size and nature of OT practitioners working at enhanced, advanced and consultant levels of practice. This will allow us to monitor growth against.</p> <p>Number of users downloading and interacting with the co-developed communications on our webpages. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of users downloading and interacting with job descriptions made available on our digital channels. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will work with the Welsh AHP network to share information and promote different models of practice, challenging practitioners to think and work differently.</p> <p>We will work with our members to use the Innovation hub as a digital platform to build knowledge and confidence to drive innovation and demonstrate the impact of occupational therapy.</p> <p>We will work with <b>ORIENT</b> to support our members to grow the real-world and research evidence for their practice.</p>	<p>Number of case studies, improvement journeys and impact stories collected from our members, stakeholders and partners.</p> <p>Quarterly summaries of evidence trends and gaps from improvement journeys.</p> <p>Number of improvement journeys from the Innovation hub shared with key stakeholders including Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), NHS Wales, Social Care Wales, Public Health Wales and Council of Occupational Therapy Education Directors.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will work with Welsh education and informatics providers to develop education and training modules that empower the occupational therapy workforce to use data for effective workforce planning, service improvement and workforce transformation.</p>	<p>Number of users downloading and accessing resources on our digital platforms designed for the evaluation of the economic, social and experiential impact of occupational therapy. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p>	2024 to 2027

<p>We will gather and share provider-level case studies that illustrate the value of occupational therapy within needs-led pathways rather than condition-specific pathways. For example, the value of occupational therapy in a person's journey from acute care to community support, including interventions by local authorities and housing teams.</p>	<p>Number of improvement journeys shared with professional and practice networks including the Allied Health Professions network, Occupational Therapy Advisory Forum and leadership forums in Wales.</p> <p>Number of improvement journeys at national events including the Welsh allied health professions and RCOT's Annual Conference.</p> <p>Number of case studies, improvement journeys and impact stories cited in publications by stakeholders and partners in Wales.</p>	
<p>We will influence Welsh employers to adopt a framework of universal, targeted and specialist service provision, with proportionate distribution across these levels to enable people to access the right help at the right time, in the right place and delivered by the right workforce.</p> <p>We will work with strategic AHP leaders in Wales to identify and amplify exemplary workforce and service transformation initiatives.</p>	<p>Number of meetings with health boards, local councils and regional partnership boards.</p> <p>Number of improvement journey submissions from employers that have adopted the universal, targeted and specialist framework.</p> <p>Number of submissions to HEIW's leadership portal, <b>Gwella</b>.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will support the occupational therapy workforce to harness the assistive technologies and digital healthcare assets available locally, to help people manage their own health and social care needs.</p> <p>We will work with the occupational therapy workforce in Wales to identify and explore opportunities for AI and digital technologies in the delivery of rehabilitation, primary care and children, young people and family services. This includes identifying outcome measures for our role in this space.</p> <p>We will work with housing providers to design and deliver affordable housing for the populations of Wales in line with the seven goals of the <b>Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFGA, 2015)</b>.</p> <p>We will collect and share examples of occupational therapy practitioners involved in the design of new and repurposed housing stock.</p>	<p>Number of users accessing our briefings on assistive technologies, digital healthcare and artificial intelligence. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of occupational therapy practitioners employed in rehabilitation, primary care and children, young people and family services and who use AI and digital healthcare solutions in their practice. We measure this via our tri-annual workforce survey and scoping review of AI.</p> <p>Having an outcome measure that is being used to communicate the value of occupational therapy in the AI and digital healthcare space.</p> <p>Number of examples of how occupational therapy was involved in the design of new and repurposed housing stock.</p>	2024 to 2027

## Workforce priority two: Demonstrating value and impact



- We will build our real-world and research evidence for occupational therapy to justify investment in the occupational therapy workforce by quantifying the impact.
- We will work with our leaders to put the case for how and where to deploy our expertise to add the most value for people and their families, the wider health and social care system and to avoid critical shortages within the occupational therapy workforce.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will support the occupational therapy workforce in Wales to modernise its practice in line with policy drivers and priorities.</p> <p>We will empower the occupational therapy workforce in Wales to develop arguments for investment in the services they are employed by.</p> <p>We will work with employers to spread the adoption of our quality audit tool for children's services in Wales.</p>	<p>Numbers of users engaging with resources by members, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number of services reporting misalignment between policy direction and realities of delivery. We will track this via our tri-annual workforce survey.</p> <p>Number of members in Wales using templates and resources from our digital Innovation hub designed to build cases for change. We will track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number and themes of cases for change in development on the digital Innovation hub.</p> <p>Number of cases presented in our idea clinics and the adoption of them by systems.</p> <p>Number of examples included in national and regional reports by our members, partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number of adopted recommendations from improvement journeys by our partners and stakeholders.</p> <p>Number of stakeholders and partners who adopt and spread examples and recommendations from improvement journey submissions to our Innovation hub.</p> <p>Number of improvement journey recommendations that have led to financial investment as reported by our members.</p> <p>Number of employers using the quality audit tool for children, young people and family services in Wales.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>

<p>We will support national campaigns aimed at the public on the <b>Primary Care Model for Wales</b>. This will increase awareness and understanding of the multi-professional workforce working within and across primary care and community settings.</p>	<p>Number of national campaigns supported to raise awareness and understanding of the Primary Care Model for Wales.</p> <p>Number of influential meetings attended to influence direction and impact of national campaigns.</p> <p>Number of stories of our members promoting the value of occupational therapy with the general public. These will be collected via bespoke digital channels created including those for annual OT Week.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will work with stakeholders and leaders to develop a standardised approach to demonstrating the value and impact of occupational therapy. This will help us argue for investment that will enable us to grow within primary care, community rehabilitation and children, young people and family settings.</p> <p>We will scope and understand the role of occupational therapy practitioners using the fit note in Wales.</p> <p>We will amplify the impact of occupational therapy in helping people attain or regain good work when OTs are employed in occupational health, vocational rehabilitation and primary care services.</p> <p>We will highlight how we reduce people's experience of health inequalities by keeping them in productive life roles.</p>	<p>Number of workshops with stakeholders and leaders to explore opportunities for a standardised approach to demonstrating our value and communicating our impact.</p> <p>The contexts we will prioritise are primary care, community rehabilitation and children, young people and family settings.</p> <p>Number of users accessing baseline data and insights on the role of OT in relation to fit notes in Wales.</p> <p>Number of improvement journeys from occupational therapists working in occupational health, vocational rehabilitation and primary care settings submitted to our Innovation hub.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will host sessions through our events and networks, on the theme of occupational therapy workforce to share learning, celebrate successes and stimulate provocative debate around opportunities and challenges.</p>	<p>Number of annual events held on the theme of occupational therapy workforce. This includes our workforce reform workshops which build on our 2021/22 workforce summits.</p> <p>Number of occupational therapy poster and presenter submissions to the national AHP conference in Wales.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>

## Workforce priority three: Retention and career development



- We will support and promote the development of all occupational therapy practitioners, especially those from historically marginalised and under-represented communities, to be where they want to be at each stage in their career.
- We will build our profession’s capacity, confidence and capability to incorporate leadership, learning, research and innovation into practice.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will work with employers and education providers to increase the range of practice-based learning opportunities provided to grow a modern occupational therapy workforce.</p> <p>We will work with employers to encourage the embedding of practice-based learning facilitation within performance appraisal and development review processes and procedures.</p> <p>We will support and participate in national evaluations of practice-based learning provision.</p>	<p>Number of meetings with employers and education providers to discuss the range of practice-based learning opportunities offered.</p> <p>Number of meetings with employers to discuss the embedding of practice-based learning facilitation within performance appraisal and development review processes and procedures.</p> <p>Number of national evaluations of practice-based learning provision we engaged in.</p>	2024 to 2027
<p>We will collaborate with employers and stakeholders to develop national principles for preceptorships and continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities in Wales.</p> <p>We will support the implementation of the <b>2023 Continuous professional development (CPD) strategy for the NHS Wales healthcare Workforce.</b></p>	<p>Number of workshops held with employers and stakeholders to develop national principles for preceptorships and CPD opportunities in Wales.</p> <p>Number of occupational therapy submissions to consultations about CPD and preceptorships.</p> <p>Number of members in Wales engaging with the 2023 CPD strategy for the NHS Wales healthcare workforce.</p>	2024 to 2027

<p>We will work with education providers and HEIW to shape, modernise and enhance training standards including for the educator workforce in Wales.</p> <p>We will work with employers, education providers and HEIW to align occupational therapy education programmes with service needs to sustain a graduate workforce that is ready for employment today and tomorrow.</p> <p>We will work with education providers to understand the current position and needs of our academic educator workforce. This will help us build the case to expand the capacity and capability of educators in delivering pre-registration and post-registration occupational therapy education programmes.</p>	<p>Number of academic educators who respond to our scoping of their needs and the number and quality of themes from their responses.</p> <p>Number of workshops with employers, education providers and HEIW to modernise, shape, enhance and align education provision with service needs.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will update our supervision guidance with implementation tools to build the confidence and capability of the occupational therapy workforce to engage in and benefit from supervision.</p> <p>We will work with our multiprofessional colleagues in primary care settings to help them provide personalised, effective supervision to occupational therapy practitioners.</p>	<p>Number and demographics of users engaging with our updated supervision guidance on our digital channels. We track these using analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of meetings with employers in Wales to spread the adoption of our supervision guidance and implementation tools.</p> <p>Number of workshops with multiprofessional primary care colleagues to increase capacity and capability for supervision to occupational therapy practitioners. Number of multiprofessional colleagues attending these workshops.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
<p>We will support our members and employers to use the <b>Career Development Framework (CDF)</b> to nurture practice at all levels in Wales.</p> <p>We will work with employers to evaluate how the CDF is used to facilitate career mobility across statutory, private and independent, charity, voluntary and social enterprise sectors.</p>	<p>Number of workshops with members and employers to spread adoption of the CDF.</p> <p>Number of stories from members who have benefitted from applying the CDF in their career. We will also track the distribution of stories across career levels and employment sectors.</p>	



## Workforce priority four: Effective workforce planning

- We will empower the OT workforce to contribute to, access and use the workforce planning data and intelligence available to them.
- We will empower the occupational therapy workforce to use the data and intelligence to make informed decisions about their positioning within the health and social care system.

Action	Measure	When
<p>We will work with employers, NHS Wales and Social Care Wales to standardise how the occupational therapy workforce and their areas of practice are coded on workforce data dashboards.</p> <p>We will establish sharing arrangements with workforce data owners in Wales including private and independent providers.</p> <p>We will share workforce data, intelligence and tools with our members and stakeholders using our digital channels.</p> <p>We will produce a baseline understanding of the workforce data in Wales using freedom of information requests. We will publish this baseline to our leaders and members in Wales.</p> <p>We will collect and draw on data through our workforce survey, membership database and workforce maps to understand the size, distribution, career levels and skills mix of the occupational therapy workforce.</p> <p>We will work with employers and stakeholders to identify and promote effective workforce planning resources to our members.</p> <p>We will work with Welsh stakeholders to signpost our members and partners to resources that support access, use and application of workforce data</p>	<p>Number and quality of engagement with workforce data and planning resources on our digital channels. We will track these using the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of users downloading and accessing our webpage on workforce data, intelligence, resources and tools. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of users downloading and accessing our State of the OT Workforce in Wales webpage. We track this via the analytics of our digital channels.</p>	2024 to 2027

<p>We will gather and share examples on our digital channels of workforce models and skills configurations that have improved outcomes for people, teams and systems.</p> <p>We will work with employers to provide training on job planning, job evaluation and other relevant and current workforce productivity optimisation tools.</p>	<p>Number and quality of engagement with the examples shared on our digital channels of workforce models and skills configurations that have improved outcomes for people, teams and systems. We will track this using the analytics of our digital channels.</p> <p>Number of workshops with employers and stakeholders to agree a workforce planning methodology that can be adopted at all levels of our systems.</p> <p>Number of training workshops with employers and members on job planning, job evaluation and other relevant and current workforce productivity optimisation tools.</p>	<p>2024 to 2027</p>
--	---	---------------------

We're RCOT, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. We've championed the profession and the people behind it for over 90 years; and today, we are thriving with over 36,000 members.

Then and now, we're here to help achieve life-changing breakthroughs for our members, for the people they support and society as a whole.



[rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy](https://rcot.co.uk/workforce-strategy)

© 2024 Royal College of Occupational Therapists. A registered charity in England and Wales (No. 275119) and in Scotland (No. SCO39573) and a company registered in England (No. 1347374)