



Get into  
occupational  
therapy

# What is occupational therapy?

Occupational therapy is a health and social care profession, regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Occupational therapy takes a whole-person approach to mental and physical health and wellbeing and enables individuals to achieve their full potential (Royal College of Occupational Therapists, [rcot.co.uk](http://rcot.co.uk)).

## WHAT DO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS DO?

The word **occupation** refers to practical and purposeful activities that allow people to live independently and have a sense of identity. This could be essential day-to-day tasks such as washing, dressing, cooking, driving, work or leisure.

Occupational therapists provide practical support to empower people to facilitate recovery and overcome barriers preventing them from doing the activities (or occupations) that matter to them. This support increases people's independence and satisfaction in all aspects of life.

As an occupational therapist, you work with a range of children and adults with a great variety of mental, physical or social impairments. You create individual treatment programmes and suggest changes to a person's environment to help them live with increasing confidence and independence.

You may work with individuals with neurological and neuromuscular injuries, people recovering from illness or surgery, or those with conditions such as autism, stroke, multiple sclerosis or brain injury. You may also work with individuals recovering from substance abuse, mental health issues or other mental or physical trauma.



I'm prepared to work flexibly – sometimes at weekends

I can show empathy

I'm a good team worker

I'm patient and good at listening

I'm compassionate and non-judgemental

I can perform under pressure

I want to help people help themselves

I'm prepared to study hard

I'm creative, practical and good at problem solving

I have good observation skills

I'm an effective communicator

I'm resilient

Explaining, encouraging and building the confidence of others is important to me

## Am I the right kind of person to become an occupational therapist?

You'll need to be a compassionate and empathetic individual to become a successful and effective occupational therapist. Occupational therapists work with people who have difficulties and you'll need to be understanding and considerate to treat and help them accordingly.

Occupational therapists come from all backgrounds. If you have the right skills, characteristics and drive you're the right person for the job.



# Occupational therapy is a varied and rewarding career

We asked some of Teesside University's occupational therapy practitioners and students to share some highlights from their practice...

- ☞ Enabling a new mum to change her baby's nappy three weeks after having a stroke
- ☞ Supporting a man with AIDS to return home to die in the care of his family
- ☞ Assisting a woman experiencing lupus to manage her household tasks with adjustments to her home
- ☞ Helping a young man decorate his bedroom in his own purpose-built accommodation
- ☞ Working with a lady recovering from a hip replacement operation
- ☞ Helping a family overcome the difficulties of panic attacks in a child with autism
- ☞ Seeing a child with learning disabilities gradually relax after creating a glitter bottle for her to play with
- ☞ Teaching mindfulness workshops to teenagers with a range of mental health issues



## What do I need to become an occupational therapist?

As well as having the right characteristics you need to complete a Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)-approved occupational therapy programme at either undergraduate or postgraduate level.

- > a full-time BSc honours degree in occupational therapy takes three years
- > if you already have a relevant degree and some relevant experience you may be eligible for a two-year accelerated postgraduate degree – this would give you a pre-registration MSc in occupational therapy
- > once you have your qualification you can apply for registration with the HCPC as an occupational therapist.

# BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy – what's the course like at Teesside University?

UCAS CODE: B920 BSc/OT

## Year 1

- > you are introduced to the underpinning core beliefs and values of OT
- > you gain a broad range of practical skills
- > you develop your communication skills and learn how to work out the best practice methods
- > you learn the basic foundation sciences including anatomy, psychology or sociology
- > you explore the role of research in occupational therapy

## Year 2

- > you evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of occupational therapy assessments, treatments and occupations
- > you learn to evaluate occupational therapy data
- > you will complete a period of voluntary work

## Year 3

- > you prepare for professional life and develop a development plan for your future career
- > you further develop your clinical reasoning skills
- > you use research to support entrepreneurship and research opportunities

In addition, you will have the opportunity to complete five full time practice placements.



## Sara Sumners

BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy

I'm originally from Florida but moved to the UK in 2010 to get married.

I'd worked as a healthcare assistant in forensic mental health for seven years and already had a two-year health degree from America. Although I had been out of education for some time I was keen to develop my healthcare career and get back to my studies.

After observing occupational therapists where I worked, I decided that it was something I also wanted to do. I love the versatility of the role and the prospect of being able to work in a range of healthcare settings.

Occupational therapy is a profession that allows me to use my creativity and problem-solving skills. It's about enabling individuals to live independent and fulfilled lives, which makes it a highly rewarding profession. I want to make a genuine difference to the lives of people I will work with.

My course is fantastic. I love the balance between practical and written work. The course structure allows me to learn about the underpinning theory and concepts of occupational therapy before going out on placement.

I really enjoy my placements because they allow me to gain real work experience and get a feel for which areas I may wish to work in when I graduate.





# A degree in occupational therapy – what can it lead to?

An occupational therapy role with international opportunities

A great CV, full of varied work experience and transferable skills

Registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)

The potential to run your own private practice

An opportunity for working in both traditional and emerging areas of practice

A role in the NHS, research, education or a charity

A career with lifelong learning opportunities, working with adults or children – you may specialise in a particular area

## Shaun Armstrong | BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy

After leaving the army, Shaun decided to build a new career in occupational therapy.



After leaving the army I felt quite lost – I didn't know what to do next. I found jobs easy to come by but I wanted a career. I realised I needed to get a degree to get into something worthwhile.

Whilst researching my options I spotted the occupational therapy degree on Teesside University's website. I was immediately interested as my dad is in a wheelchair and he'd had help from an occupational therapist in the past. I got in touch with the University and within four days I had visited the campus, met with one of the senior lecturers from the course and decided it was the degree for me.

I felt really comfortable at Teesside when I came for my interview. I liked the set up and appreciated how clean the campus was. When I started I thoroughly enjoy my course. The practical sessions really complement the academic side of things and allow me to put what I've learned into practice. My favourite modules have been the placements – I've been able to go out and work with occupational therapists in the field and learn on the job.

When I graduate my ideal job would be to work with spinal injuries in a rehabilitation setting, to work with soldiers returning from war, or to run a children's care home.



## Dr Claire Hart

principal lecturer (research & innovation)

I went into occupational therapy as I wanted a creative and varied career that involved working with people. I've enjoyed being an occupational therapist, working with a diverse range of clients, travelling and working in lots of different areas including clinical practice, education and research.

Working with people means my work involves a level of complexity and variety that I enjoy. The range of everyday occupational issues that arise means that occupational therapy always has the potential to make a difference.

I like the practical, creative problem solving involved in occupational therapy – seeing a challenge and finding multiple ways to help the individual move beyond it. I appreciate the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in people's lives, particularly those people who face complex or wide ranging issues.



## John Payne

lecturer in occupational therapy

Studying occupational therapy is a fabulous learning opportunity, I loved studying it myself. It's a vibrant hub of learning here at Teesside University. The academic facilities are outstanding for students and tutors. I fully appreciate the positive effect the University has had on me and can think of no better response to that experience than teaching others in a passionate, dynamic and dedicated manner.

My training gave me the self-confidence to be an occupational therapist. I have spent my practice career working with older people who have dementia. This has been incredibly rewarding. Five years after leaving the University I returned, gaining employment as a lecturer in occupational therapy.

## Hellen Wachepa

BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy

**I chose occupational therapy as I've always wanted to be part of a profession that is rewarding and fulfilling.**

Having worked as a healthcare assistant for nine years I came across occupational therapists in hospitals, nursing homes and in the community. Through this, I realised how diverse the career can be, and knew it was what I wanted to do.

The course structure meets everyone's preferred style of learning. It comprises lectures, seminars, practical sessions and practice placements. I enjoy practice placements and the opportunity to gain hands-on experience.

I enjoy all the modules because they are so varied and can all be applied differently. The best bit about the course is learning the theory, completing practical training and then being able to put it all into practice on placement.

My placements have all been different and so far have included in-patient psychosis and housing. I particularly enjoyed the housing placement and was lucky to be offered a summer job there as an occupational therapy assistant after my placement.

If you want to study at Teesside University, go for it and utilise the opportunities available. It is an amazing environment and you will definitely enjoy it.



# Further information

Teesside University [tees.ac.uk](https://www.tees.ac.uk)

Prospects [prospects.ac.uk](https://www.prospects.ac.uk)

Royal College of Occupational Therapists [rcot.co.uk](https://www.rcot.co.uk)

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