



Topic: Advancing Practice

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Context:

Given the ongoing challenges in the health and care system, it has become a strategic priority to create a sustainable, flexible, and adaptable workforce that can embrace new ways of working. This presents opportunities for roles and careers to be centred on the needs of the individuals, communities, and populations we serve, alongside developing new capabilities and professional development pathways for occupational therapists at every career level. These opportunities extend across all four Pillars of Practice, namely Professional Practice, Facilitation of Learning, Leadership and Evidence, Research and Development (RCOT 2021, p9).

People working at advanced and consultant levels of practice are educated to master's level, doctoral level or equivalent, respectively. They have the experience, skills and knowledge that enable them to undertake expanded roles and scope of practice, within the requirements set by their regulatory bodies, to maximise the capacity and capability of teams and services.

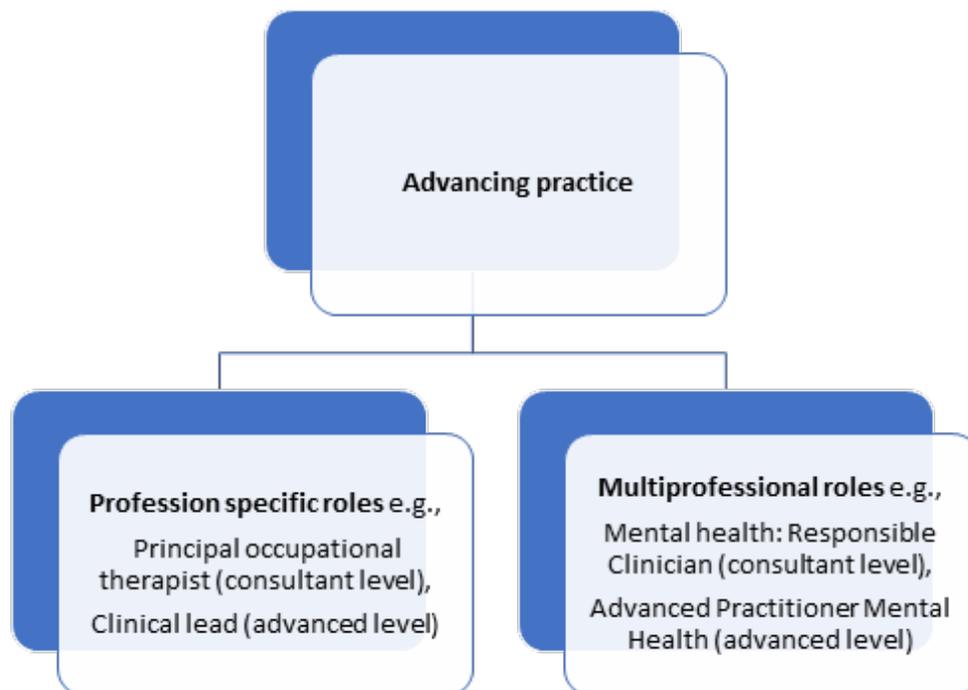
It is important to make the distinction between advanced and consultant levels of practice, as it is with all career levels, to support safe and effective practice for people who access services. Furthermore, the distinction helps to articulate career development pathways, in part to retain and develop talent within the many settings and sectors where occupational therapists work.

This Informed View focuses on the advancement of occupational therapy roles in all settings and within all sectors. It identifies the knowledge and skills that occupational therapists bring, or could bring, to a number of different roles at advanced and consultant levels of practice. It was written with RCOT members working at advanced or consultant levels of practice, across sectors including but not limited to health, social care, and academia.

RCOT View:

Advanced and Consultant roles exist within and beyond the occupational therapy profession (see figure 1 for an example) and both are legitimate career pathways for occupational therapists. Where occupational therapists move into multiprofessional roles, they are still using their knowledge, experience, and ways of thinking derived from their origin profession. Their professional reasoning and decision making will primarily be undertaken through the lens of occupation, while the work will involve some hybridisation with other professions.

Figure 1: examples of profession specific and multiprofessional roles at consultant or advanced levels of practice



The term 'advancing practice' refers to advanced and consultant levels of practice. In contrast, the word 'specialist' is not a level of practice, rather it is a scope of practice aligned to specialisms (RCOT 2021, p4). For example, an occupational therapist may choose to specialise early on in their career but that does not mean they are working at an advanced level. Conversely, an experienced occupational therapist may work at a consultant level without specialising in a sphere of practice and do so as an expert generalist. Occupational therapists may also work at advanced or consultant levels within specialisms / specialist settings.

Various job roles can be enacted at advanced and consultant levels of practice, including new and emerging roles. Occupational therapists working at these levels will have many different job titles, and within the NHS may have different Agenda for Change bandings, determined by their employer or their own employed status.

Occupational therapists working at either advanced or consultant levels of practice have an advanced and critical understanding of the complex interplay between the person, their occupations, and the environment, including:

- The importance of enabling people to do the things they want, need, or are expected to do (occupational balance), to support them being well in life, within their own context and cultural backgrounds.
- The impact on a person's ability to do the things they want, need, or are expected to do (occupational performance) caused by physical and mental health conditions, presentations from medicines or the influence of body functions and structures.



- The wider determinants of health, including education and skills, food, work, housing, money and resources, friends, family and communities, transport and the impact of these on a person's ability to do the things they want, need or are expected to do.
- The principles of sustainability (Jameton and McGuire 2002), including the unique contribution of occupational therapy, alongside the knowledge and skills shared within the interprofessional team (e.g., population health, reablement, home modifications and rehabilitation).
- Different theory bases, evidence, and approaches across all four Pillars of Practice, to lead and coproduce work in practice, leadership, learning/education, and research.

Occupational therapists at either advanced or consultant levels of practice are able to work across all four Pillars of Practice, including at strategic levels. Using masters or doctoral level thinking, alongside significant experience, occupational therapists at either advanced or consultant levels of practice have practice-based, technical, and research-related skills to:

- Make decisions within complex contexts where protocols and pathways may not exist, to support people to do the things they want, need, or are expected to do.
- Manage complexity, embrace risk and support others to do so (e.g., by providing consultation to other professions).
- Address medicines related issues and support people with the supply, administration, and management of medicines, within their existing scope of practice. In addition, RCOT believes that the profession has the capacity to be non-medical prescribers in certain circumstances (RCOT 2020).
- Influence the cultural, social, political, and economic environments which impact on service delivery, including at a strategic level.
- Use data sources and evidence to inform service delivery, development, and system wide change, to identify and evaluate the impact and outcomes that focus on the needs of people, communities, and populations.
- Contribute to and / or lead research and education processes to influence knowledge at a national and international level.
- Use their roles and influence to support workforce development and inspire others.

Detailed principles to further articulate the contributions that occupational therapists bring to advanced and consultant levels of practice can be found in the RCOT Career Development Framework (RCOT 2021), at Career Levels 7 and 8 respectively, across all four pillars of practice.

References:

Jameton A, McGuire C (2002) Towards sustainable health-care services: principles, challenges, and a process. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 3(2), 113-117



Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2021) Career Development Framework: guiding principles for occupational therapy (2nd edition). Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/publications/career-development-framework> (accessed 10th June 2021)

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2020) RCOT Informed View: Medicines Mechanisms. Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/rcot-informed-views> (accessed 10th June 2021)

Other resources:

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2021) Professional standards for occupational therapy practice, conduct and ethics. <https://www.rcot.co.uk/publications/professional-standards-occupational-therapy-practice-conduct-and-ethics> (accessed 23rd June 2021)

Access information across the UK about advancing practice at RCOT webpage: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/advancing-practice> (accessed 10th June 2021)