



## Podcast transcript:

### A conversation with Julia Scott

*James:*

Hello and welcome to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists podcast. I'm James and I work in the digital team here at the RCOT and we'll be hosting today's edition. I'm very pleased to say that today we're be joined by Julia Scott, the Chief Executive of the RCOT. Julia, thank you very much for joining us.

*Julia:*

Well, thank you James, it's a pleasure to be here with you.

*James:*

We've got a few questions that we wanted to put your way. In terms of some of the things that have been happening very recently, we know that you've been out meeting members in the four countries recently: could you tell us a little bit about that and how it went?

*Julia:*

Yes, absolutely, I have been out and about a great deal over the last nine months in order to hear from members what they want the professional body to focus on for the next five years, so this is about constructing our strategic intentions for 2018 – 2023. It all started last Christmas, when in Occupational Therapy News I tend to write a Christmas message to all of our colleagues and I asked people whether they would be interested in hosting a meeting. Thankfully, many people responded, we also put out the invitation to get involved via our branches forum which meets here at headquarters twice a year and you also kindly put out further reminders via the website. So, we managed to use a lot of our media platforms to engage with members and we had a very positive response. We had 13 different events over the last 19 months across all four countries, we had an event with our governing body, with Council, an event with staff here at the Royal College and a separate event with the management team here at the college and we also had numerous emails from people who couldn't get to sessions but wanted to contribute their thoughts. And I should say at this point how very grateful I am to all those who hosted sessions, and



participated in them because I know it used people's time and time is very limited at the moment.

In terms of who got involved, we had students, we had practitioners, we had researchers, educators, we had support staff and we had some non-members too, which I think was very useful because it's important to hear from them why they don't feel membership is valuable to them. Members, the conversation, I should say, was shaped around two key questions I was asking members and the questions were: what are the big issues that will impact on the profession over the next 5-10 years and what should the professional body focus on in the light of these big issues? And I did make it very clear to those involved in the process that the strategic intentions applied to the professional body, but obviously they have to help the professional body support the profession. So, although they are our strategic intentions, they do relate to the work our members do.

*James:*

Great, with that in mind, what did you find to be the key issues that occupational therapists are concerned with at the moment?

*Julia:*

Well, if I start with some of the concerns they raised, or some of my observations about being with many members. I felt in some places, morale was very, very low, people feel invisible and they feel therefore under-valued. That's very sad to see – that people are working their hardest and they feel that they are not respected for what they do. Some members had concerns, significant concerns, about the impact of the loss of bursaries, on occupational therapy education, they were concerned that would lead to less occupational therapists being educated and trained, and in some parts of the country there were further related concerns about small numbers of students [edit needed] impacting on the sustainability of small programmes, so they were worried in some part of the country that smaller programmes just wouldn't survive if the number of applicants went down. All of that led to concerns about the sustainability of the profession.

There was a sustained call, most of the sessions that had educators there that we must address the shortage of placements that was another key concern for educators that we have to encourage more people to take students on placement. And the final concern, overall, was about the loss of leadership posts, the loss of identified unique



occupational therapy leaders or principals or heads of service and people perceiving that as a loss of opportunity to influence within their service and to be heard within their service.

On the positive side, and there were many positives, the Improving Lives, Saving Money campaign was very well received by members, they enjoyed engaging in the process of collecting data and they also were very happy with the outputs and together those two things, getting involved in the campaign but also seeing what the campaign delivered seemed to empower them and give them confidence to advocate for occupational therapy services. They were also very pleased about the level of impact that the campaign was having, so they feel that this is enabling us to knock on doors and have the right conversations with the right people.

There were also many positive comments on the new website, James, which I know will be a delight to you.

They were keen to reshape their offer to meet future care models, so I think many occupational therapists recognise that the same old, same old will not do – we have to reshape and reconceive how we provide occupational therapy services going forward and examples given were things like working in Primary Care and they were also very cogniscent that a public health approach to care might mean that occupational therapists have to be sited in different locations and delivering different types of services, so they were very aware of those changes that are coming towards us fast.

And finally, they wanted very much to grow the evidence base for occupational therapy and they were keen to support more research in the field.

*James:*

There are definitely a lot of things there and going forward, with that in mind, what areas did members suggest that we should be focussing on for the next five years?

*Julia:*

Well they were very keen to have more Improving Lives, Saving Money products, I don't think we can sustain that for another five years, but certainly in the short-term there is more we are working on so they will be pleased to see that. They were positive about the activities that we have been carrying out under the strategic intentions we have currently, about being the voice of the profession. They felt that



we should continue our influencing activities and continue to build our media presence. Members were keen we empower them to act and advocate locally and encourage them to act as OT Ambassadors especially with local media. They were keen and willing to get involved in that sort of area of activity.

They wanted the Royal College to be a dynamic and enabling organisation, at a national and a local level; which I think we continue to do to work at delivering and they did want more strategic influencing whilst recognising that we have knocked on a lot of doors, they want us to continue to knocking on doors and going through those doors and talking to the right people.

Members wanted help to keep abreast of policy shifts, they recognise that there is a lot of change going on, and they want to develop the confidence to affect change at a local level and we can help them with that. And I think finally they wanted, they recognised that the world of occupational therapy practice is changing and they want support to work within new sectors and in new roles and they did recognise that some of those new roles will not be called necessarily occupational therapist but they agreed that it's very important we all affirm our offer as occupational therapists by demonstrating the impact and value of occupation on health and wellbeing, so whilst people may end up working within different services, delivered in different ways, possibly with different job titles, as occupational therapists it is absolutely vital that we continue to affirm the value of occupation in terms of its delivery for our populations' health and wellbeing.

*James:*

Fantastic. Julia Scott, thank you very much for joining us.

*Julia:*

Thank you – it's been a pleasure.

*James:*

To our listeners, hope you enjoyed the podcast. We're trialling this as a new way to communicate with members, and non-members, trying to see how the audience finds it, your thoughts and feedback are really appreciated so do please drop us a line on Twitter or Facebook, let us know what you think of the podcast, we're @theRCOT on Facebook and Twitter and thank you very much for listening.

