RETURN TO PRACTICE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS RETURNING TO WORK

Q1. Who should read this information?

- Occupational Therapists (OTs) who are planning a return to practice after a career break and wish to be registered with the protected title ‘Occupational Therapist’.
- Occupational Therapy managers or practitioners who will be supervising the returner.
- Occupational Therapists contemplating or planning a career break.

Q2. What is the HPC?

The Health Professions Council is the regulatory body for Occupational Therapists and 12 other Allied Health Professions. It replaced the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM) in 2002. Their role is to protect the public by keeping a register of health professionals who meet their standards for training, professional skills, behaviour and health. Being on the HPC register means that you are entitled to use the protected title of Occupational Therapist.

Q3. What is meant by a protected title?

It is a criminal offence to use a protected title unless you are registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC).

Q4. Where can I find out more about the HPC and what they do?

Visit their website www.hpc-uk.org

Q5. I am thinking of taking a career break. What should I bear in mind when deciding on timing?

You need to be aware of the HPC’s rules about the length of time you can spend off the HPC register before you forfeit your protected title and the amount of supervised practice, formal learning and private study you need to do to be eligible for restoration.
the HPC register. To visit the returners to practice area of their website go to www.hpc-uk.org click on ‘registrants’ and then ‘returners to practice’.

Q6. I am thinking of taking a career break. How do I keep in touch with the profession?

The benefits of membership of BA/COT include the ability to continue to network with colleagues even when you are not practicing yourself. You might consider staying in touch with developments in the OT world by regularly reading BJOT (the British Journal of Occupational Therapy), OTN (Occupational Therapy News) and the electronic bulletins produced by the College. As a member, you also have access to iLOD (the interactive learning opportunities database). This is a resource on our website (www.cot.org.uk) which includes content that allows you to learn at your own pace, free of charge. It provides information about a range of learning opportunities and a chance to plan your career. You might also wish to join or remain a member of a Specialist Section relevant to your area of practice.

Q7. Does the College have any information to help me return to practice before I rejoin as a member?

We have information available on the public area of the website. Go to www.cot.org.uk, click on ‘professional practice’, click on ‘return to practice’. You will find a briefing entitled Return to practice in PDF which you can download and read or print off. There is some information about the Criminal Records Bureau checking process and you can also find profiles of OTs who have returned to practice after career breaks.

Q8. What more does the College do to help members to return to practice?

We can help put you in touch with local OT networks through our regional team. We can offer access to coaching or supervision for those who are working in non-traditional roles through our Consultancy Service (although there would be a charge for this). Membership means access to many free learning opportunities through our interactive learning opportunities database (iLOD). We can keep you in touch with new developments in OT through OT News and BJOT (the British Journal of Occupational Therapy) and various specific (e.g. research-oriented, Higher Education oriented) electronic alerts and bulletins that you can sign up for.
Q9. I feel concerned – my time away from OT has caused me to lose confidence and I am confused about what I need to do. Who can help me?

You can rejoin your former OT networks or establish new links via BA/COT or the appropriate Specialist Section. You should find that practicing OTs will welcome and support you.

Q10. Can I be a member of BA/COT if I am not on the HPC register?

Yes. To be a professional member or a self-employed member you must be eligible to be on the HPC register or undergoing the process of returning to the register.

Q11. Can I join BA/COT if I am not practising as an OT?

Yes (see Q10). You may not be using the title of Occupational Therapist but you may well be using the knowledge, philosophy and skills you gained when qualifying and/or practicing as an OT.

Q12. What is my insurance position while I am not on the HPC register?

Membership of BA/COT confers indemnity insurance on all members but there are caveats which apply to self-employed and overseas members. Members undertaking supervised return to occupational therapy practice and who are supervised by an occupational therapist will be covered by BAOT professional indemnity insurance. Contact our Membership Department for further information.

Q13. How do I contact the Membership Department?

Membership Administration Department
BAOT
106-114 Borough High Street
Southwark
London, SE1 1LB
020 7450 2348
membership@baot.co.uk
www.baot.org.uk
Q14. What if I qualified but have never practiced - do I have to retrain?

No, once you are qualified you do not have to retrain even if you do not practice. Depending on the length of time since you qualified, you may have to carry out a period of supervised practice in order to enter or return to the register.

Q15. I have been away from practice for less than two years and remained on the register – what do I have to do?

Nothing, since you already meet the HPC requirements for registration. You have to meet the HPC’s Standards of Proficiency in Occupational Therapy to be admitted to and to remain on the register. You must also comply with the Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. However, it is advisable to brief yourself about recent changes and developments in the area of practice you intend to work in before seeking employment.

Q16. I have been off the register for more than two years – what do I have to do to return to the register?

Look on the HPC website for all the relevant information, [www.hpc-uk.org](http://www.hpc-uk.org)

Q17. My access to the internet is limited – what should I do?

Most public libraries offer free internet access. It is now vital to be computer literate in almost any work situation. Getting up to speed with recent advances in the ways people communicate may be the first thing to do to prepare yourself for your return to practice.

Q18. How do I plan for a return to practice?

Carry out a self-evaluation of the gaps in your knowledge and devise a learning plan to meet your needs. When approaching a potential supervisor for your return to practice, be clear about your needs, present your supervisor with a clear plan and make it evident what you will offer a potential employer.

Q19. How can I find someone to supervise my return to practice?

Think about the OT services you want to work in and approach potential employers. If you are a member of BA/COT you can tap in locally to our national networks in order to contact a supervisor and arrange a placement.
Q20. Can I get paid when I am carrying out my supervised practice?
You cannot be employed using the title of Occupational Therapist until you are back on the HPC register, but there may be opportunities to be employed as an OT Assistant for this period, depending on your local situation. To work as a volunteer, you need to contact the employer’s Voluntary Services Coordinator or equivalent.

Q21. As a returner undertaking supervised practice - what is my status in the workplace? What uniform should I wear?
Some people have been disappointed that their managers/colleagues do not quite know where to place them. People on both sides of the process (supervisors and returners) need to be willing to work through the period of transition whilst doing their supervised practice or supervising that practice. The situation can call for diplomacy on both sides. Whether a uniform is required and what kind will depend upon the established practice in the particular workplace.

Q22. How do I work out what I have to offer a future employer?
If you review what you have learnt whilst on your career break, you will probably find that you have gained useful transferable skills. For example, many returners have gained valuable insight into the service user perspective in their time away from practice. This is useful because the HPC's new Standards for continuous professional development focus on how improvements made in your practice as a result of your CPD can benefit the service user.

Q23. What is the difference between supervised return to practice and induction?
The supervised return to practice is concerned with establishing your fitness to practice as an Occupational Therapist. The supervised return to practice can be part of the process of meeting the requirements of the HPC and demonstrating fitness to return to their register.

The induction process involves familiarization both with your work role and the organisation. Induction for a specific role may be for a more extended period and in greater depth than the supervised return to practice. Induction should enable an OT to function well and perform capably in their designated role within an organisation to meet the requirements of the job description.
FOR RETURN TO PRACTICE SUPERVISORS

This guidance is to help clarify the role of return to practice supervisors of occupational therapy returners seeking to meet the Health Professions Council (HPC) return to practice requirements.

Q1. What are the HPC’s return to practice requirements?

The HPC’s return to practice requirements apply to those who have not practised for more than two years. If an occupational therapist who has not practised for more than two years wants to apply for readmission to the register, the following must be taken into account:
- 0-2 years out of practice – no requirements
- 2-5 years out of practice – 30 days updating
- 5 years or more out of practice – 60 days updating

Q2. What does updating consist of?

The period of updating knowledge and skills can be any combination of:
- supervised practice
- formal study
- private study

Note: private study can only take up to a maximum of half the total period of updating.

Q3. What is ‘supervised practice’?

In occupational therapy, this means working under the guidance (supervision) of an occupational therapist.

Q4. Who can be a return to practice supervisor for occupational therapists?

An occupational therapist who:
- is registered as an an occupational therapist with the HPC
- have at least 3 years experience
- has not been cautioned or subject to ‘conditions of practice’ orders from the HPC

Q5. Why should occupational therapists take on the role of return to practice supervisors?

The experience of supervising a successful return to occupational therapy practice is a valuable learning experience, which will enhance an occupational therapist’s CPD portfolio and benefit the workplace and service. A sensitive and helpful supervisor who facilitates colleagues’ return to occupational therapy is an asset to the profession.
Q6. **What skills and knowledge does the return to practice supervisor need to have?**

The return to practice supervisor should only provide supervision in the activities that are within his or her own scope of practice. This means that the supervisor has to be knowledgeable and experienced in the area of work for which he or she is providing the supervision. This ensures that the supervised practice will be carried out safely and effectively.

Q7. **What happens when an occupational therapist first agrees to be the supervisor of a returner?**

It is the returner’s responsibility to provide the supervisor with an identified learning plan that will meet with the specific HPC standards of proficiency in occupational therapy.

The return to practice supervisor will discuss this learning plan with the returner and agree how it can be best met through the practice placement. The service priorities and available resources will be taken into account. This may result in agreed modifications to the learning plan.

Q8. **What is the level of supervision required?**

This is negotiated and agreed between the returner and supervisor. It is dependent on the extent of the identified learning needs as well as the competence of the returner.

Q9. **How is the role of the return to practice supervisor different from other supervisors?**

The return to practice supervisor provides guidance to the returner during his or her period of updating to acquire the skills necessary to meet the HPC’s Standards of Proficiency – Occupational Therapy and therefore be eligible for registration with the HPC and eventual employment as an occupational therapist.

This is different from the role of supervisor of occupational therapists already registered with the HPC and employed in the work place and that of the practice placement educator or supervisor of occupational therapy students.

Q10. **The supervisor is required to sign off the returner’s HPC forms for the updating period and the period of supervised practice. Does this mean that the supervisor is signing to confirm that the returner is fit to practice?**

No.
Q11. What is the supervisor signing for?

As a countersignatory, the supervisor is signing to confirm that, as far as the supervisor is aware (‘as far as I know’), the information provided by the returner in the relevant form is correct and that the returner has completed the period of supervised practice as stated on the form.

Q12. How can the supervisor be certain that the returner is competent to practise?

It is not the supervisor’s responsibility to judge whether the returner is competent to practice. This is the HPC’s decision and they will measure this against its Standards of Proficiency – Occupational Therapy and its Standards of Performance Conduct and Ethics.

If, however, the supervisor has concerns about the returner’s conduct or competence e.g. convicted of a criminal offence or had been suspended because of the returner’s lack of competence, then the HPC advises that this be reported to them.

Q13. Who is responsible for the successful compliance with the return to practice requirements of the HPC?

The return to practice process places the onus on the returner to establish to the satisfaction of the HPC that they have completed a period of updating which equips them to return to the profession and to the register.

Q14. What if the supervisor is concerned about the returner's conduct and competence and its potential risk to the public?

You are advised to report this to the HPC.

Q14. Will the supervisor ever be contacted by the HPC?

The HPC will be processing the information sent to them by the returner. They may contact the returner or supervisor if more information is required or if they wish to further verify that the supervisor is indeed a registered health professional.

If you would like to talk to someone about your return to work or your question has not been answered within this document please contact the Professional Practice Enquiries Service on 0207 450 2330 or email professional.enquiries@cot.co.uk