

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into [Mental Health support in Higher Education](#)

MHHE 18

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol y Therapyddion Galwedigaethol
Response from: Royal College of Occupational Therapists

About us

We're RCOT, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. We've championed the profession and the people behind it for over 80 years; and today, we are thriving with over 35,000 members. Then and now, we're here to help achieve life-changing breakthroughs for our members, for the people they support and for society as a whole. Occupational therapists in Wales and work in the NHS, Local Authority social care services, housing, schools, prisons, care homes, voluntary and independent sectors, and vocational and employment rehabilitation services.

Occupational therapy helps you live your best life at home, at work – and everywhere else. It's about being able to do the things you want and have to do. That could mean helping you overcome challenges learning at school, going to work, playing sport, or simply doing the dishes. Everything is focused on increasing independence and wellbeing.

It's science-based, health and social care profession that's regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council.

An occupational therapist helps people of all ages overcome challenges completing everyday tasks or activities – what we call 'occupations'. Occupational therapists see beyond diagnoses and limitations to hopes and aspirations. They look at relationships between the activities you do every day – your occupations – alongside the challenges you face and your environment.

Then, they create a plan of goals and adjustments targeted at achieving a specific set of activities. The plan is practical, realistic, and personal to you as an individual, to help you achieve the breakthroughs you need to elevate your everyday life.

This support can give people a renewed sense of purpose. It can also open up new opportunities and change the way people feel about the future.

Our response

Extent of need

Our members report a higher percentage of people going through some form of mental health difficulties during their time in higher education. This includes both students who are referred to occupational therapy services, and occupational therapy students on placement. Many students are finding everyday activities challenging which is increasing anxiety and general stress at this important life stage – the transition to adulthood. The aftermath of Covid 19 continues to be problematic. The transition into higher education was an already difficult process for some but current students have had significant time away from school and missed Important key milestones in their development and pastoral support.

Identification and provision

Our members report that in lots of areas in Wales by the time students get to see an occupational therapist their functioning has dropped to such a level it requires more intense work. Our members feel that mental health support in higher education prioritises talking therapies. Talking therapies are important but there should also be focused, practical interventions to get people back into study. Occupational therapists have the skills and expertise to look at the persons functional abilities, supporting them to manage self-care and study activities that are important to them.

Recommendations for change

- Universal interventions – provision of training, information, and support by occupational therapists to help young people and the student workforce embed opportunities to promote physical and mental health into students' daily routines and activities, optimising their development, health and wellbeing.
- Targeted interventions – delivered by occupational therapists in partnership with young people, educators and third sector organisations and working across traditional service boundaries to provide early intervention for students whose development, health and wellbeing is at risk.
- Specialist interventions – direct intervention with individuals with the most complex needs/circumstances, using a strengths-based approach that fosters self-management and independence.