

POSITION STATEMENT

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ENTRY-LEVEL QUALIFICATIONS

Introductory statement of the purpose of the paper

This position paper addresses occupational therapy entry-level qualifications, which means the qualification that enables a person to practise as an occupational therapist. The entry-level programmes around the world currently include diplomas, baccalaureate degrees, and master's degrees. A doctoral level qualification has also been proposed in the United States. In the European Union, diplomas/baccalaureate, masters and doctoral level qualifications are referred to as three cycles of education.

Statement of the position being taken

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists recognises and supports that there are various educational levels for entry to the profession, depending on regional regulations and standards. WFOT further recognizes that therapists, with different entry-level qualifications, will bring different strengths to their professional practice, all of which are valuable to the profession, the clients and societies they serve. However occupational therapists with entry-level qualifications ranging from diploma baccalaureate, masters or doctoral, will all have the knowledge and skills to engage individuals in therapeutic processes. Those with higher post graduate qualifications will have advanced skill in evidence-based practice and producing new knowledge to inform the profession.

The varying qualifications cited above align with the local educational preparation of entering students, the educational credentials of similar professions, expectations for health professionals and salary levels available for qualified health professionals in the specific context and region.

WFOT recognises that in some countries, a single entry-level qualification will be the mandate. In other countries, programmes offering entry-level qualifications at different levels will co-exist. It is recognised that progression towards higher entry-level qualifications is an ongoing and dynamic process that should occur at an appropriate pace within the local context.

Challenges and Strategies

Three considerations are identified when a higher entry-level qualification is proposed.

1. thought must be given to whether the higher entry-level would be a barrier to graduates from other member countries gaining registration to practice;
2. because enrolment in a higher qualification requires higher entry credentials and completing the requirements delays entry to the workforce, the possible impact on indigenous nations or other educationally disadvantaged people's entry to the profession needs to be taken into account; and
3. when higher entry-level qualifications are offered, consideration must be given to mechanisms for previously qualified therapists to attain the higher qualification. This concern aligns with WFOT's expectation that, whatever the entry-level qualification(s) available in a country or region, post-qualifying educational opportunities will be available to therapists.

Statement of the significance of position or issue to occupational therapy

The profession has historically enjoyed the ability of occupational therapists to move between countries. WFOT accepts that the flow of therapists between countries is complicated by differing entry-level qualifications. It recognises the need for mechanisms to enable international mobility of therapists and welcomes initiatives that help to maintain this movement. WFOT advises educational programmes to include clear statements of competencies or learning outcomes of graduating students, to enable other countries to evaluate a therapist's entry-level qualification, thus facilitating movement to other countries.

Statement of the significance of the position to society where appropriate

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists plays a key role in assuring that occupational therapy education programmes, around the world, prepare graduates who are knowledgeable and skilled in "promoting health and well being through occupation" by working collaboratively with individuals or groups and "changing aspects of the environment to enhance participation" (WFOT, 2004). This consistency of focus on occupation and environments that support occupation is embedded in the Federation's *Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists*.

Consistent with calls for the reform of the health professions, the Minimum Standards also emphasise the need for educational programmes to be relevant to the social and community concerns, as well as the prevailing health needs and priorities in the local context (UNESCO, 1996, 1998; WHO, 1993). While the Minimum Standards also focus on the transferability of graduates' skills and maintaining strong links with the international occupational therapy community (Hocking & Ness, 2002), they endorse differences in content and educational process to best serve the local health needs.

This position paper should be read in conjunction with the WFOT Entry Level Competencies document, the WFOT *Position Paper on Human Rights and Diversity Matters: Guiding Principles on Diversity and Culture*.

Conclusion

This position paper states the current situation with regard to entry-level qualification to the profession. The World Federation endorses multi-level entry, but supports the move towards higher level-entry as circumstances may permit.

REFERENCES

- Hocking, C., & Ness, N.-E. (2002). *WFOT Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists*. Perth: World Federation of Occupational Therapists.
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