Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland

Minimum Standards for Practice Education in Ireland

Submitted to: Council of the AOTI

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Date: October 2007
Revised: March 2008

March 2008
Introduction

In 2006, the Council of AOTI established the Working Group for the Review of Practice Education Hours, to review the AOTI Contextual Requirements for Practice Education in Ireland. The report of the Working Group was ratified by AOTI in late 2006 and was implemented in January 2007.

All key stakeholders reviewed the document in September 2007 and the following information now sets out the Minimum Standards for Practice Education in Ireland.

Minimum Standards for Practice Education

According to the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT):

“the purpose of fieldwork (practice education) is for students to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes to the level of competent practice required of qualifying occupational therapists”


The following is a summary of the WFOT description of fieldwork and requirements to meet the Revised Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists:

“Students experience a range of different fieldwork placements that require them to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice with a range of different people who have different needs, and in different circumstances. The range of student experiences always includes:

- People of different age groups
- People who have recently acquired and long-standing health needs
- Interventions that focus on the person, the occupation, and the environment.

Student experiences will normally also encompass at least three of the following parameters:
• A range of personal factors such as gender, ethnicity, etc that is reflective of the population that will be recipients of occupational therapy
• Individual, community/group and population approaches
• Health conditions that affect different aspects of the body structure and function and that cause different kinds of activity limitations
• Different delivery systems such as hospital and community, public and private, health and educational, urban and rural, local and international
• Existing and emerging services, such as services being developed for and with people who are under-employed, disempowered, dispossessed or socially challenging; organisations and industries that may benefit from occupational therapy expertise; arts and cultural services

Each student will complete sufficient hours of fieldwork to ensure integration of theory to practice. A minimum of 1,000 is normally expected. The 1,000 hours fieldwork hours refers to time each student spends implementing an occupational therapy process, or an aspect of an occupational therapy process, with or for a real live person:

• Interpreting the person-occupation-environment relationship and how that relationship influences the person’s health and well-being
• Establishing and evaluating therapeutic and professional relationships
• Planning and preparing for an occupational therapy assessment or intervention
• Implementing an occupational therapy process (or an aspect of it)
• Demonstrating professional reasoning and behaviours
• Generating or using knowledge of the contexts of professional practice

Hocking & Ness also outline that:

“Fieldwork placements are of sufficient duration to allow integration of theory to practice. It is expected that at least some placements will be up to 2 months in duration. Fieldwork is distributed throughout every year of the curriculum”.


To ensure a depth of learning, fieldwork is guided by a learning contract and supervised and assessed by an occupational therapist with at least one year’s experience or an occupational therapy educator. There is no requirement that the supervisor is on site” (Hocking & Ness, 2002, pg. 25).

**Contextual Requirements**

The Revised Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists allow WFOT member Associations to establish additional ‘contextual’ requirements over and above those set out in the Minimum Standards document. In this regard, the Review Group for the Review of Practice Education Hours recommends to the Council of AOTI
to retain its contextual requirements for practice education as adopted in 2006 with the following amendments.

These following requirements from the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland are for the purpose of WFOT accreditation of Occupational Therapy programmes in the Republic of Ireland and for the Validation of Foreign Qualifications.

A. **Hours Requirements:**

- A minimum of 1,000 hours of practice education (fieldwork) is required as described in the WFOT *Revised Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists* (Hocking & Ness, 2002).

- The context of practice education (setting) has been deemed relevant because it is linked to graduates’ knowledge, skills and attitudes for competent practice. It is also linked with recruitment and retention. Therefore, a minimum of 250 psychosocial hours and 250 physical and sensory disabilities hours is required as a component of the total 1000 hours (see description below).

- Central to the psychosocial hours requirement is the opportunity for students to consolidate their knowledge, skills and attitudes with regard to therapeutic relationships and therapeutic use of self.

- Central to the physical and sensory disability hours requirement is the opportunity for students to consolidate their knowledge, skills and attitudes with regard to the therapeutic use of and/or adaptation of the environment and the use of compensatory strategies to promote the occupational performance of clients with physical and sensory disabilities.

- Ideally, a minimum of two eight-week blocks of practice education in different settings is required as a component of the total 1000 hours.

- In keeping with general work practice, students will normally do a 35-hour week during block placements. The normal number of hours calculated per day on placement will be 7 hours with students generally completing a 35 hour week.

- Students must take a minimum of half an hour lunch break each day on placement.

- A maximum of 300 hours can be calculated from role-emerging placements. Role-emerging placements can only be completed once the student has had prior practice education experience. Therefore, hours in this area can be calculated only from placements in the third or fourth year of four year programmes, in the third year of a three year programme and only in the final year of a two year graduate entry masters programme.
Practice education hours can only be calculated from time spent in the practice education setting (or related settings). Hours cannot be counted from placement-related work done by students at home.

Hours credit will not be given for Public Holidays or Privilege days.

Hours must be logged formally and signed off by the practice educator(s). A log of the practice education hours is maintained by the colleges and each student. Students are encouraged to maintain evidence of their fieldwork hours in their professional development portfolio.

B. Psychosocial Hours Requirement:

A minimum of 250 hours normally in one block on a psychosocial placement. This cannot be in a role-emerging setting.

The focus and outcome of intervention in a psychosocial placement will primarily be centred on psychosocial functioning and how this impact on the person’s occupational performance, taking into account the person, their environment and their occupation. In addition to the normal range of learning experiences in any practice education setting, psychosocial placements offer an enhanced opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes for therapeutic use of self and therapeutic relationships.

Psychosocial hours can only be calculated from a placement which had a focus on psychosocial functioning.

Psychosocial hours can be calculated from practice education placements in any of the following services / settings (across the lifespan) as long as the primary focus was on psychosocial functioning:

- Mental Health services
- Psychiatry of Old Age services
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health services
- Intellectual Disability services with a psychosocial focus
- Primary Care services with a psychosocial focus
- Head Injury services with a psychosocial focus
- Homelessness services with a psychosocial focus
- Forensic services
- Palliative Care services with a psychosocial focus
- Addiction services
- Social Inclusion services
- Self-advocacy services
- Vocational Rehabilitation services with a psychosocial focus
- Psychosocial Rehabilitation services
- Health Promotion services
- Services for individuals with behavioural problems.
C. Physical and Sensory Disabilities Hours Requirement:

- A minimum of 250 hours normally in one block on a physical and sensory disability placement. This cannot be in a role-emerging setting.

- The focus and outcome of intervention will primarily be centred on physical and/or sensory functioning and how this impact on the person’s occupational performance, taking into account the person, their environment and their occupation. In addition to the normal range of learning experiences in any practice education setting, physical and sensory disabilities placements offer an enhanced opportunity for students to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes for therapeutic use of and/or adaptation of the environment and the use of compensatory strategies.

- Physical and Sensory Disabilities Hours can only be calculated from a placement which had a focus on physical and sensory functioning.

- Physical and sensory disabilities hours can be calculated from practice education placements in any of the following settings (across the lifespan) as long as the primary focus was on physical and sensory functioning:
  - Acute hospital services
  - Day hospital services
  - Residential Care services
  - Primary Care services
  - Intellectual Disabilities
  - Community Care services
  - Primary Care services
  - Palliative Care services
  - Psychiatry of Old Age with a physical and sensory focus (e.g. seating)
  - Physical and/or Sensory rehabilitation services
  - Care of the Elderly services
  - Physical and Sensory Disability services
  - Paediatric services
  - Vocational Rehabilitation services
  - Health Promotion services.

References

The AOTI Working Group (2006), Review of Practice Education Hours.
Appendix 1

ASSOCIATION OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS OF IRELAND

Review Group Committee Members
- Odhrán Allen, Former Chair of Practise Hours Review Committee
- Leonie Boland, Education Committee of AOTI
- Sherrie Buckley, Practice Educator Co-ordinator, University of Limerick
- Dr. Gill Chard, PhD, Professor & Head of Department of Occupational Therapy, University College Cork
- Aine Clyne, Former Committee Member of Practise Hours Review Committee
- Helen Cornelissen, Chair of the International Committee of AOTI, Chair of the validation Committee of AOTI & WFOT Delegate for Ireland and Former Committee Member of Practise Hours Review Committee
- Alison Enright, Former Committee Member of Practise Hours Review Committee
- Heather Frizzell, COTEC Delegate of AOTI
- Carol Hills, Chair of Education Committee of AOTI
- Dr. Elizabeth McKay, Head of Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Limerick
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March 2008