

CHOOSING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AS A CAREER

A list of courses is overleaf, followed by a detail of what qualifications are required, a description of what OH is, and career vignettes.

Occupational Health (OH) professionals make a real difference to the health of workers. It is a rewarding and interesting career, which allows a good work/life balance. The OH world is friendly, willing to help and support you. Whatever your background, there is a career that's perfect for you! Take a look at the free OH mentoring service [here](#), visit the website [here](#) with a video [here](#). Sign up to [OH Nurse Connect bulletin](#) or [OH GP Connect bulletin](#) if you wish to stay connected.

Take a look at SOM's 2023 Careers Event recording for doctors [here](#) and for nurses [here](#). There was a [Free webinar on Careers in OH](#) and a webinar on [Support for OH Nursing Students \(Recording\)](#). Download the presentation slides below:

- [Starting a career in Occupational Health Nursing](#)
- [How to become an occupational health physician?](#)
- [Careers in Occupational Health](#)
- [What are recruiters looking for?](#)
- [Why occupational medicine?](#)
- [Occupational Health Nurses Careers Morning](#)
- [National School of Occupational Health website](#)
- [About the CESR/Portfolio route](#)

Funding

NHS employers may be able to offer funding and some OH providers pay for training. Do look at www.gov.uk/apply-for-student-finance, to apply for student financial support. There are also scholarships available from the SOM at <https://www.som.org.uk/som-occupational-health-and-medicine-scholarships> and the Florence Nightingale Scholarship <http://www.florence-nightingale-foundation.org.uk/content/page/33/>. The NSOH has facilitated funding for those wishing to enter OH, which may be repeated.

Join the SOM

SOM supports your entry into OH and career development e.g. support for placements and mentoring, workplace visits, and support groups. There are jobs advertised at <https://www.som.org.uk/current-vacancies>

Join at <https://www.som.org.uk/membership> or [contact us](#).

1 List of Courses (correct at September 2024) – check courses for more detail

Return to study? Programmes welcome applications from career changers. Visit university websites for more information.

Course	Duration	Qualification
Multidisciplinary		
Middlesex University Occupational Health and Safety https://tinyurl.com/y8833ecj - Accredited by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, which means you can become a graduate member of the institution when you complete the course and can then gain chartered membership after two years' professional development.	1 year FT or 2 years PT	MSc
University of Nottingham Workplace Health and Wellbeing https://tinyurl.com/y8nf63tf - Professional experience in a relevant field is required. This may include, among others, occupational health, wellbeing, safety, nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, human resources, etc.	1 year/ 1.5 years/ 2 years/ DocWHW 4-6 years	PG Cert/ PG Dip / MSc/ DocWHW
Cardiff Metropolitan Occupational Safety, Health & Wellbeing https://tinyurl.com/yd63k2sr	1 year FT or up to 3 years PT	PG Cert PG Dip MSc
Doctors		
Training – http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/speciality-training/prospective-trainees		
Portfolio – see http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/cesr		
Manchester University https://tinyurl.com/yaqyqt9u CPD Diploma in Occupational Medicine offers part-time distance learning over six months for	6 months/ 1 year PT/ FT/ 3 years PT	CPD Diploma/ PG Cert/ PG Dip/ MSc

those preparing for the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed) examination. Although the CPD Diploma does not result in an academic qualification from the University, students who have completed the course are eligible for 10 CPD points towards their re-validation. In addition, you have the option to transfer your credits and continue to our postgraduate courses for a postgraduate certificate (PGCert), Advanced Diploma (Adv Dip) or Master of Science (MSc) award in Occupational Health		
Diploma in Occupational Medicine http://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/doccmcd	2 weeks	FOM DOccMed
Nurses		
Diploma in Occupational Health Practice at https://www.fom.ac.uk/education/examinations/diplomas/dipohprac	2 weeks	FOM DOHPrac
University of Chester Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) University of Chester	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc Hons/ MSc / (SCPHN)
Derby University – SCPHN - OH https://www.derby.ac.uk/postgraduate/nursing-health-care-practice-courses/specialist-community-public-health-nursing-msc/	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc Hons (SCPHN) / MSc
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen – multidisciplinary course Occupational Health Course with BSc Degree RGU University – Aberdeen, Scotland, UK RGU	2 years PT Distance learning	BSc Non NMC
Brunel University, London https://www.brunel.ac.uk/study/courses/specialist-community-public-health-nursing-pgdip-and-msc	1 year FT or 2 years PT	BSc (SCPHN)/ PgDip / MSc

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<p>University of Cumbria- multidisciplinary courses</p> <p>Graduate Diploma Occupational Health: Practice Development - University of Cumbria</p> <p>BSc (Hons) Occupational Health: Practice Development (Top-up) - University of Cumbria</p> <p>University Advanced Diploma Occupational Health: Practice Development - University of Cumbria</p>	<p>GDOH:PD 2 years PT</p> <p>OH:PD (top -up) 2 years PT</p> <p>UADip – 1 yr PT</p> <p>Distance learning</p>	<p>BSc (Hons) (Top out)</p> <p>University Advanced Diploma Practice Development Non NMC</p>
<p>University of Chester – SCPHN - OH</p> <p>https://www.chester.ac.uk/study/course-search/specialist-community-public-health-nursing---occupational-health-nursing-msc/</p>	<p>1 year FT</p>	<p>BSc or Graduate Diploma</p>
<p>University of West of England SCPHN – OH</p> <p>https://tinyurl.com/ya7qwj6v</p>	<p>1 year FT or 2 years PT</p>	<p>BSc (Hons) (SCPHN)</p>
<p>OH Physiotherapists</p>		
<p>Varied providers e.g. https://acpohe.csp.org.uk/content/acpohe-courses</p>	<p>Varied</p>	<p>Short course</p>
<p>OH Psychologists</p>		
<p>Find an accredited course at https://tinyurl.com/ycnm5tnh. Examples of courses include Kings College London https://tinyurl.com/ybuka46z and University of Nottingham at https://tinyurl.com/y8xynexl; Occupational Psychology MSc Postgraduate taught; Professional Course Nottingham Trent University</p>		<p>MSc</p>
<p>OH Technicians</p>		
<p>The Open Awards Level 3 Certificate for Occupational Health Technicians developed by SOM/partners is delivered by https://compass-ms.co.uk/l3-oht-certificate/ and EOPH (tbc) https://eoph.co.uk/</p>		

2 Qualifications needed to become an OH professional

Doctors – might wish to complete a Diploma in Occupational Medicine, designed for those who are working part-time in, or have an interest in, occupational medicine. To qualify as a specialist in occupational medicine, doctors need to register with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM) and undertake a speciality training programme approved by the General Medical Council (GMC). Once successfully completed, this makes doctors eligible both for Membership in the Faculty (MFOM) and for entry to the GMC Specialist Register. An alternative route to becoming a specialist is through a Portfolio application to the GMC Specialist Register. SOM has a support group for these candidates. The mean average salary for OH doctors is over £120,000.

OH Nurses. Progression is more likely with a qualification, and it is possible to undertake training whilst employed. There is a foundation course available through the FOM Diploma in Occupational Health practice. More formal qualifications with a greater possibility of progression are through the NMC Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) route or through alternate, non-NMC OH degrees such as a BSc, PGDip, or MSc. These courses may take 1 year full-time, or 2 years part-time. The SCPHN qualification requires a practice placement. Some OH employers provide “on-the-job” training and foundation courses. Educational requirements and the OH nurse career paths are currently under review by the National School of OH and the Faculty of OH Nursing. Average salaries for OH nurses are in the region of £38,000 with managerial roles earning on average £48,000.

OH Physiotherapist provide treatment and rehabilitation of work-relevant injuries (on-site or off-site), plan return to work, educate about injury prevention in the workplace, conduct health promotion, job task analysis, and advise on modifications to the role or working environment. They often have specialist knowledge of manual handling and physical ergonomics in the workplace. Average salaries are around £38,000.

Occupational Health Psychologist use psychological theories and approaches to enhance the effectiveness of organisations and developing the performance, motivation, and wellbeing of people in the workplace. They develop, apply, and evaluate a range of tools and interventions across many different areas of the workplace, including psychological assessment, training and development, wellbeing, work design, organisational change and development and leadership, motivation, and engagement. Average salaries for experienced practitioners are around £40k.

OH Technicians work as part of a team. They undertake health surveillance clinics including spirometry, audiology and vision screening supervised by an OH nurse or Physician, who remains accountable for interpreting these results and determining fitness to work. The role may expand to involve blood pressure monitoring, phlebotomy, cholesterol, and urine testing. This role involves working on their own initiative and may include site visits. The technician must provide accurate written, electronic, and verbal reports always observing confidentiality. See self-assessment against competencies and escalation criteria for OH technicians at [OH Technician Skills Self-Assessment | The Society of Occupational Medicine \(som.org.uk\)](https://www.som.org.uk) Average salaries for OH technicians are around £25,000.

3 Some initial advice...

“Get as much practical experience as possible and find a good mentor. Also, be prepared to do lots of research and reading!” Suzanne Douglas - Senior Staff Health Advisor (Oxfam)

“Read around the speciality first, get a good contemporary OH book and join relevant groups/forums. If possible, shadow another OH practitioner and read the RCN OH nurses’ competencies for reference”. Jane Williams - Occupational Health Advisor (NHS)

“Be open-minded and to let opportunities develop your interests” Dr Paul Davies - Occupational Health Physician

“Understand the dynamics of the organisation they are working for, as well as the conflicting pressures and demands on the staff. This helps maintain a balanced perspective.” Martin Jelfs - OH Psychotherapist (Independent)

4 What OH professionals do

- Advise on the effects of work on health and health on work
- Contribute to workplace policy development
- Visit workplaces to advise on health
- Assess the fitness of employees to undertake specific tasks and recommend relevant adjustments that may be required in the workplace to support people with disabilities to undertake their job role
- Monitor the health of employees by undertaking ongoing health surveillance and health monitoring, particularly for employees who work with certain chemicals, and materials and could be exposed to noise or vibration because of work processes
- Assess individual cases of injuries and illnesses and develop return-to-work strategies
- Provide training to organisations and their managers on how to make the best of OH Services
- Engage with organisations to assess the effectiveness of delivery of OH Services and look for ways to bridge gaps between business needs and OH provision
- Collaborate with managers and human resource personnel to help to keep people well at work – physically and mentally. If there are problems, either with the workplace or with an employee’s fitness, the OH professional’s role is to advise on adjustments to the workplace, and/or to give appropriate advice and support to the employee. OH professionals assess employees who are injured or become ill at work by:
 - Providing advice on health education, health and safety and sickness absence
 - Conducting risk assessments in conjunction with the health and safety team
 - Managing employee health records and statistics.

They may work alone or as part of a team of health experts. They may work in a large organisation (like a hospital, local authority, or the military), or for a private OH firm used by smaller employers. They may also set up their own OH business or become self-employed. With experience, there are opportunities to progress to a management position, leading a team of OH staff, running an OH Centre or sitting on a board advising on the integration of employee wellbeing into the overall business strategy.

5 Career Vignettes

Clare Hadow – Occupational Health Advisor

Having newly qualified as a nurse I worked as a school nurse at Dulwich College, it was the first time I thought about people at work and their jobs. This was the catalyst for me to decide to study for my Occupational Health Nursing Certificate at Manchester Polytechnic. My husband decided to do an MBA at the London Business School, so adapted my OH skills

to work as a housemistress for a Kent Boarding school while giving us a roof over our heads, as my husband studied. The Headmaster recognised my OH qualifications and paid for me to study at Christchurch in Canterbury and I completed a Certificate in Health Education, so I could develop their Personal and Social Education program for 11-18-year-old girls. I continued working in OH setting up a new OH service for BBC North. My husband's job moved us from Ilkley to Bristol, and I worked for Wincanton Distribution (part-time) covering the southwest. I then worked part-time for BUPA Hospital in Bristol developing their OH service. I now work full-time for my own company with a great team of Associates. There are so many possibilities in OH and never a dull moment. OH is a profession that allows you to adapt to life's needs and develop to where you want to go within the profession.

Christine Poulter – Occupational Health Advisor

Through serendipity and due to transferable skills, I was offered a role as an OH Nurse in an NHS foundation trust. The NHS sponsored my initial training, and I consolidated my learning within the NHS. As I considered it might be difficult to gain a senior managerial role without diverse experience, I left the security of my NHS role to work in manufacturing within the private sector and higher education. I then completed further studies for an MSc in Occupational Health and Management. More recently, I am combining setting up my own practice with contract work. OH is not necessarily the easy option as viewed by many of my colleagues. Even my health professional colleagues confuse the difference between Occupational Therapy and OH; such remains the lack of awareness. No two days are ever the same. The role is most rewarding. There is no shortage of work in this growing industry.

Lorna Owens – Occupational Health Physiotherapist

I started working in the field of Occupational Health in 2017, after working in the NHS in Knowsley, Merseyside for 5 years. The varied workload and new environments I work in have provided me with some great new challenges. It has been great to adapt my skills to managing an occupational caseload, getting out into the workplace, and making my assessments and rehabilitation more functional and work focus. I have also found it beneficial to be able to link regularly with the managers at the different companies and other members of the OH team. Having this open dialogue really helps support people at work, it is a rewarding part of my role, and I see this reflected in the employee outcomes. Within a short period of time, I quickly saw the benefit of OH physiotherapy for people at work. This is effectively about preventing problems in the first place, something we all know that physios are very well placed to do.

Sally Beardsmore - Occupational Health Technician, HomeServe

I started working part-time as an administrator after studying midwifery at university. After 18 months in the role, I moved to work full-time for the Group Safety Director as a health & safety support officer. After two years in the role, I moved to work as a health trainer and offered mini 'know your numbers' health checks to all our UK staff. The role expanded and I began to offer more than just health checks as I trained with the NHS as a stop-smoking advisor. HomeServe brought occupational health in-house and I moved to work as an OH Technician. I have recently passed the audiometry and spirometry exams and will be studying for the NEBOSH later this year.