



The Northern Ireland Housing Executive Housing and Health Review

'Housing Matters'

Response from the College of Occupational Therapists

1. Introduction

The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) is pleased to provide a response to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's *Review of Housing and Health- Housing Matters*. The response to this consultation has been completed with the assistance of the College of Occupational Therapists Specialist Section - Housing (COTSS-H).

The COT represents over 29,000 Occupational therapists, students, and support workers across the United Kingdom, of which over 900 are either working or studying in Northern Ireland. Occupational therapists (OTs) work in the NHS, Local Authority Social Services & Housing Departments, schools, primary care settings, and a wide range of vocational and employment rehabilitation services.

Occupational therapists are regulated by the Health Professions Council and work with individuals of all ages with a wide range of occupational problems resulting from physical, mental, social or developmental difficulties. The philosophy of occupational therapy is founded on the concept of occupation as a crucial element of health and well-being. Practice is based on holistic, client centred care.

2. General Comments

The College welcomes this review of the Housing Executive's Housing and Health policy. Whilst we endorse much of what is written we would like to see more emphasis on the unique role that occupational therapists have to offer in this area and ways in which this can be developed. Occupational therapists are keen to be involved in the design, commissioning and delivery of services in this area.

Although occupational therapy is referred to in the main body of the document, occupational therapists in Northern Ireland feel that further development of the links between occupational therapy specifically and the Housing Executive needs to be included as a recommendation.

3. Specific Comments

Consultation Questions: Objective 1		
1.	Do you agree with the recommendations relating to achieving the Decent Homes Standard?	Yes✓ No
2.	Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes✓ No



3.	<p>Further comments</p> <p>The College endorses the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s ongoing research programme, which is reviewing the various standards for disabled people in consultation with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and service users.</p> <p>Please ensure that the accessibility of fixtures and fittings being considered under the Decent Homes Standard will meet the needs of disabled and older people.</p> <p>Occupational therapists are uniquely placed to advise on accessible housing. Ideally occupational therapists should be included in the initial planning stages of any building works, whether it is for the public or private sector, as well as being involved when refurbishments are being planned in existing homes or public buildings.</p>
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Consultation Questions: Objective 2			
1.	Do you agree with the recommendations relating to Promoting Independent Living?	Yes✓	No
2.	Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes	No✓
3.	<p>Further comments</p> <p>Occupational therapists in Northern Ireland do not feel these recommendations go far enough particularly regarding links with occupational therapy.</p> <p>We know, through our working relationships with those individuals with a disability and their carers, that appropriate housing is pivotal to maintaining independence in the community.</p>		



The primary objective of our profession is to 'promote independent living' and we play a key role in ensuring that our client's environment allows them to function independently.

The College would recommend that the Executive explore the possibility of employing occupational therapists in housing, pursuing similar models that provide an effective service in England, Scotland and Wales. Occupational therapists in these countries are employed within their housing departments to evaluate void properties for accessibility, setting up housing registers, plus advising on choice lettings.

Occupational therapists are uniquely positioned, because of their health and social care function, to identify an individual's housing needs and ensure the appropriate allocation of suitable properties to those in most need.

Occupational therapists are also actively involved in assistive technology services, which are an identified recommendation.

We would like to suggest the recommendation is changed to: 'Develop assistive technology services in conjunction with occupational therapy'.

We need to ensure that there is occupational therapy representation in the proposed (DHSSPS) Disability Taskforce. We would like to have more information regarding this Taskforce and relevant contact details.

Further development of the links between occupational therapy specifically and the Housing Executive needs to be included as a recommendation.

Occupational therapists in Northern Ireland would like to see the creation of a database of disabled housing for the region. This would clarify for the Housing Executive the level of need for adapted / wheelchair housing. Housing providers need to have improved information technology systems to be able to identify the level of need and availability of accessible stock. Occupational therapists are well placed to identify that need due to their knowledge of the needs of disabled people and the impact of the environment on occupational performance.

The College is pleased to note that to facilitate joint working within the review the Housing Executive and DHSSPS jointly fund a Housing Adaptations Liaison Manager.



The College is pleased to note that significant improvements have been made in regards to waiting times for occupational therapy throughout Northern Ireland and will continue to be made due to the new performance targets set down by the (DHSSPS).

We have concerns that waiting lists are developing at other points within the system of delivery and delays are occurring post-occupational therapy assessment and involvement. The 'option appraisal' process seems to go on indefinitely for a substantive number of people who are undergoing this process. We feel there should be a time frame for 'option appraisal' and decisions made as to the most effective action that needs to be taken should be carried out in a timely fashion.

Occupational therapists in Northern Ireland would like to see closer inter-agency case management of complex case work, e.g., increased working between the occupational therapist and the welfare officer/complex needs officer at an early stage in the adaptations process.

We are pleased to note that in a recent 'Consumer Satisfaction Survey' (2006), clients reported an improvement in the information they had received from occupational therapists during the adaptations process. Occupational therapists in Northern Ireland would like to see further support services for clients undergoing adaptations to be developed.

New research in *Better outcomes, lower costs, Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence* by Frances Heywood and Lynn Turner, published by the Office for Disability Issues, summarises existing evidence relating to savings to health and social care budgets as a result of investment in housing adaptations and housing improvements. We are pleased that new research evidence outlined in this publication underpins the value of inter-agency working. We would also like to see further inter-agency research into the health and social care outcomes following housing interventions.



Consultation Questions: Objective 3		
1. Do you agree with the recommendations relating to Foster Urban and Rural Regeneration?	Yes✓	No
2. Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes✓	No
3. Further comments		

Consultation Questions: Objective 4		
1. Do you agree with the recommendations relating to Promoting affordable housing?	Yes✓	No
2. Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes✓	No
3. Further comments		

Consultation Questions: Objective 5		
1. Do you agree with the recommendations relating to Building a stronger community?	Yes✓	No
2. Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes✓	No
3. Further comments		

Consultation Questions: Objective 6		
1. Do you agree with the recommendations relating to delivering better public services?	Yes✓	No
2. Do you believe these recommendations go far enough?	Yes✓	No
3. Further comments		



4. Conclusion

The College would like to commend the inter-agency working that is presently taking place through the Joint Housing Adaptations Steering Group (JHASG).

In partnership with the Housing Corporation and with the backing of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department of Health, the College of Occupational Therapists produced the publication, *Minor Adaptations without Delay (Jan. 2006)*, a practical guide and technical specification for housing associations in England. This is an example of good collaborative working in England between housing/ health and social care. The guide was produced to set out joint policy guidance from COT and the Housing Corporation, to illustrate best practice and to provide technical information. It forms a useful policy document, which would assist with policy development. This can be found on the College's website http://www.cot.org.uk/newpublic/about/minor_works.php as a free download.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require clarification or further information.

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References:

1) Frances Heywood and Lynn Turner, *Better outcomes, lower costs, implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence, May 2007*, Office for Disability Issues
<http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk/publications/>

2) *Minor adaptations without delay – a practical guide and technical specifications for housing associations, January 2006*, College of Occupational Therapists, 106 – 114 Borough High Street, Southwark, London, SE1 1LB.
www.cot.org.uk
http://www.cot.org.uk/newpublic/about/minor_works.php