



THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD) STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN FOR WALES

Response from the College of Occupational Therapists

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) is pleased to provide a response to this document, which has been assisted by members throughout Wales.
- 1.2. The COT represents over 28,000 occupational therapists who are either working or studying across the United Kingdom, of which over 1,500 are either working or studying in Wales. Occupational therapists (OTs) work in the NHS, Local Authority Social Services and Housing Departments, schools, primary care settings, and a wide range of vocational and employment rehabilitation services.
- 1.3. 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 wellbeing. Practice is based on holistic, person centred care.

2. Consultation Questions

2.1. Question 1

Yes, the areas covered are comprehensive and pertinent. Links with the CAMHS strategy and Children and young persons NSF are identified, but need to be strengthened. Key actions for improving access to adult services are needed. The transition from child to adult services needs to be improved. Specifically Wales needs to commission occupational therapy paediatric, transition and adult services to ensure people are enabled to develop their maximum potential. This includes the critical issue of meaningful activities, which is not dealt with in sufficient detail. See general comment below.

2.2. Question 2

The section dealing with meaningful activities needs amending to ensure all occupational deprivation is included and people are enabled to engage in a range of meaningful activities, not just education. See general comment below.

The strategy correctly identifies occupational therapists' key role across the whole spectrum of needs for people with ASD. Access to OT is critical and the strategy needs to identify it as essential, alongside other team members and therapies such as speech and language therapy. Annex 1 identifies it as enhanced; annex 3 identifies it only as 'desirable'. We believe this will prevent necessary commissioning of OT, with a resultant detrimental effect on quality of life for people, of all ages with ASD.



Occupational therapists work in all the statutory agencies and are able to provide intervention across organisational boundaries. It is the only profession to do this. Assessment and management advice provided by an occupational therapist is essential in formulating a successful intervention plan for those with complex challenging behaviours and for those with sensory processing difficulties.

In particular the reference to an LEA OT (Annex 3, p51) is unclear. We do not understand what the Welsh Assembly is referring to here. Does this mean a (new) specific role in the Local Education Authority or is this a misspelling of Local Authority OT. What is this intended to refer to? See general comment below.

2.3. Question 3

The evidence presented in the action plan and the emphasis on access to appropriate services is accurate and appropriate. It would therefore be useful in the key actions to require commissioners to commission adequate multi professional services, with adequately skilled practitioners. The actions need timescales and measurable action if they are to translate into effective outcomes. The actions need to be implemented and agencies required to deliver them.

3. **General Comments**

3.1. The College is pleased to see the expectation that services could be regionally commissioned throughout the document. The expectation that co-operative commissioning be pursued is welcomed. The College believes that far greater use of pooled budgets would enhance services for people with ASD. In the annual reporting processes from Local Service Boards, and on Health Social Care and Wellbeing Plans, there could usefully be a requirement for these bodies to justify to the Assembly Government and the people of Wales why these opportunities have not been taken. Further, the profession is very pleased to hear that the Assembly Government is considering opportunities to improve the funding barriers between agencies. (No 20, p28)

3.2. One critical area not covered adequately is that of enabling people to maximise their potential to engage in meaningful activities throughout their life (p35, No45). There is a clear intention that the strategy should result in this, and the educational opportunities are well included. Once reaching adulthood however, equal importance needs to be placed on maintaining independence: for example through tenancy and home making activities or engaging in leisure or volunteering activities as well as work. There are clear policy requirements to enable support to be provided to facilitate learning. Similar levels need to be specified for other activities. For example, access to occupational therapy services would enable people to develop and maintain life skills such as budgeting, good tenancy skills, time management, stress and anxiety management, work skills, use of community facilities, social networks and other skills needed to undertake meaningful activities. Hence, access to OT in work and employment schemes such as vocational rehabilitation, pathways to work and in leisure activities is critical and a clear requirement to commission such services is needed in the key actions.



- 3.3. In relation to transition services, one of the key reasons that transition is so difficult for many families is the lack of services to transfer into. Thus there is a need to identify the demand for adult specialist services. There needs to be clarity about whether mental health or learning disability services are the most appropriate for a given individual, and a decision either way must not preclude access to other services when / if necessary.
- 3.4. In Annex 3 there is reference to an 'LEA OT'. We are not clear what is meant here. Occupational therapists are currently employed by a range of statutory and voluntary agencies. Those employed by local authorities are primarily employed in social services or housing departments. OTs working in schools or residential services may be employed in any of the above. There are many advantages in OTs being employed across the sector, the only health professional to be so; however, the profession has recognised that there are also potential disadvantages in complexity and duplication of involvement of occupational therapists with any one individual or family. To try to reduce unnecessary duplication, and complexity for people and their families the College published "From Interface to Integration" (COT 2002). This strategy promotes greater integration of occupational therapy services, ensuring that the service users needs are placed above the organisational or employment issues. Thus there should be no need to identify the OT from an employer perspective in the care pathway. It should be sufficient to identify that OT is essential to the pathway. Good integrated practice will then ensure that the right OT is referred to when needs are identified.

4. Good practice examples:

Please find attached a resume of the occupational therapist of the year 2005, who was nominated as a result of her work with a young adult with autism.

2005 Occupational Therapist of the Year: Jo Tinkler



An occupational therapist who works in Portsmouth, Jo Tinkler, has won the College of Occupational Therapists' / Stannah Stairlifts' Occupational Therapist of the Year Award for 2005.

Jo was chosen out of hundreds of occupational therapists nominated for the award by a panel of judges led by consumer investigator and children's rights campaigner, Esther Rantzen, and Jon Stannah, Managing Director of Stannah Stairlifts.

[25th May 2007]

Occupational Therapists

Coleg Therapyddion
Galwedigaethol



Despite having only been an occupational therapist for four years, Jo - who graduated from Southampton University in June 2001 - has contributed an enormous amount to the profession itself and to her individual patients. She was nominated for the award twice: firstly by Sandie Davies, the mother of a young man with learning difficulties Jo helped extensively, and secondly by her colleagues on the Fareham and Gosport Learning Disability Community Team, who have continually been impressed by Jo's work and attitude.

Sandie Davies said that Jo's work with her son, Michael, has helped to enhance his life:



"Michael, who is 20 years old, has profound learning disabilities and autism. He had been resorting to self-harm and was gradually losing weight and losing interest in the world around him. We felt that he wouldn't survive. Jo has spent many hours with Michael over the last eighteen months, and her work has made a real difference and stopped Michael's life from spiralling downwards. Now, he is making choices, moving around the house, and doing so much more - all thanks to the work Jo has done with him."

Jo says she developed sensory integration and intensive interaction programmes to give Michael more control over his life:

"Intensive interaction is a way of communicating with someone who doesn't speak - mimicking and responding to the noises and actions they make. We also developed calming strategies to help Michael to cope when things become too hectic or busy for him."

In her role, Jo works in community learning disability teams in Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth, Havant and Petersfield - mostly visiting people at their homes, in residential settings, day-services and respite units. She says she is "deeply touched" to have won the award:

"I genuinely love my job, and I would recommend occupational therapy for anyone seeking a career which is fulfilling, varied and interesting. It's so rewarding getting to know your patients - finding out what's meaningful to them and working around that."



Esther Rantzen said: "The role of an occupational therapist is often underestimated and misunderstood, which is why awards like these are so important. It was wonderful to meet Jo Tinkler - a real unsung hero - and I hope that these awards will help to raise the profile of the profession as a whole."

[25th May 2007]

Occupational Therapists

Coleg Therapyddion
Galwedigaethol



4. Conclusion

- 4.1. The profession welcomes the publication of this strategy and is pleased to participate in the consultation. The College is happy to offer any further information. Please do not hesitate to contact the Policy Officer at the Cardiff address below
- 4.2. The Strategy needs to more strongly identify the need to commission therapies services for adults and children with ASD. The role of therapists is critical to ensuring that people with ASD are able to maximise their potential and take as much control of their own lives as possible. Commissioning therapies needs to be a clearly stated key action.
- 4.3. The strategy has identified many critical issues in improving services for people with ASD. These need to all be captured as actions, timescales and outcomes need to be attached, thus allowing the Assembly government to assess the implementation of the strategy.

Ruth Crowder
Policy Officer Wales

Victoria Deakins
Chair of Welsh Board

College of Occupational Therapists
P.O. Box 4156
Cardiff
CF14 0ZA