

# Shaping the future of AHP personnel

Sharon Campana talks about RCOT joining forces with HEE on workforce reform.

The RCOT Data and Innovation strategy was launched in December 2021, alongside a data literacy survey. The strategy's vision is that: 'Every occupational therapist is confident in engaging in a range of activities where data is used, collected and shared for the purpose of improving health outcomes at the individual, service, and population level.'

The survey identified that occupational therapists commonly receive system specific training and support in their workplaces and feel confident using different systems.

However, there are several challenges and areas for development when it comes to specifying what systems need to do to improve efficiency and productivity as well as collect data to measure impact.

RCOT and Health Education England (HEE) have joined forces to create an Allied Health Professionals (AHP) Workforce Reform. It is a 12-month project to shape the future of the AHP personnel, of which a key focus is to highlight how occupational therapists are using digital tools and data to transform health and care provision and how we can continue to progress in this area.

### The wider context

Much has been published over the past five years on digital, data and innovation. It is a core priority of the *NHS Long Term plan* (2019), the *AHPs Deliver* strategy (2022) and more specifically our own *Data and Innovation Strategy* (RCOT 2021).

Given that local strategies also exist, combined with individual continuing professional development plans, it's not a surprise that this can all feel somewhat overwhelming and far removed from our day-to-day work.

Here lies the challenge, given that we need this to become a foundation of our everyday practice. Engaging with digital technology, data

and innovation will allow us to do the most effective work we can, with the best tools, at the right time and place for the people who access our services.

We will be able to demonstrate the impact we are having and where things are not working as well as they could be and need to be changed. Data gives us the power to identify these things so cannot be an aside to clinical practice or education.

Growth in this area is going to be vital for all those working within occupational therapy, given the ever-evolving digital landscape in which we work, but also to facilitate innovation that allows us to continue providing high quality occupational therapy in a time of finite resources and economic challenge.

### HEE AHP Digital Competency Framework (2020)

As part of a Topol Digital Health Fellowship project (2019-20), a framework of 124 competencies across 10 domains (diagram one) was formulated.

The framework is designed to support those within AHP professions to meet their full potential within digital practice. A self-assessment can be completed to determine current skill and knowledge level, which can then guide plans for learning and development.

A UK-wide survey of AHP confidence, motivation and competence with data and digital technology was completed utilising the domains of this framework (Tack et al 2022), and in which 19.2% of respondents stated their profession as occupational therapist.

Christopher Tack, Topol Digital Fellow, describes the current picture for occupational therapy, based on the survey findings: 'As a professional group that spans the gamut of health and care services, from acute through community to social services, the range of



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Domain	Topic
Domain 1	General
Domain 2	Data management and clinical informatics
Domain 3	Records, assessments, and plans
Domain 4	Transfer of care
Domain 5	Medicines management and optimisation
Domain 6	Orders and results management
Domain 7	Assets and resource optimisation: Business related
Domain 7b	Assets and resource optimisation: Personal
Domain 8	Decision support
Domain 9	Digital therapeutics
Domain 10	Meta-competencies

**Above:** Diagram one: HEE AHP Digital Competency Framework (2020)

digital skills and knowledge required in practice is vast.

‘That means that most, if not all, of the HEE AHP Digital Competency Framework is applicable to occupational therapists from the newly graduated to those in positions of leadership or advanced practice.

‘Despite this varied scope, the priorities for professional development remain reflective of those of the wider UK AHP population. These priorities should focus on the progression of digital and informatics leadership skills, and the advancement of knowledge related to the development and use of the electronic health record as a mechanism to enhance quality of care.’

### Bringing the frameworks together

Helpfully, the HEE competencies have been documented specifically for application by occupational therapists in a Profession Specific Framework (accessible via the main framework document).

Mapping of this specific framework to the RCOT Career Development Framework has revealed some helpful correlation, particularly when they are reviewed in the context of the RCOT Data and Innovation Strategy.

To date, this mapping has reinforced the need to really evaluate what is needed by individuals and teams at that point in time, be it in its entirety or in order of relevance for each separate domain. ➔

### My digital journey as an occupational therapist

As an occupational therapist, I have continuously been drawn to innovation, not always with a digital component, but always with the view to delivering better care and to improving job satisfaction.

As I’m sure is true for many, digital technology has played a constant role throughout my career to varying degrees, be it in the form of Electronic Patient Records (EPR) or patient administration systems, emails, or databases.

Data collection in the form of assessments or audits was always present too, but was never at the forefront of my mind. Without realising, I was acquiring a range of digital competencies alongside my occupational therapy skills.

On reflection, I would have described myself in the ‘All’ tier of engagement (image one) at this stage.

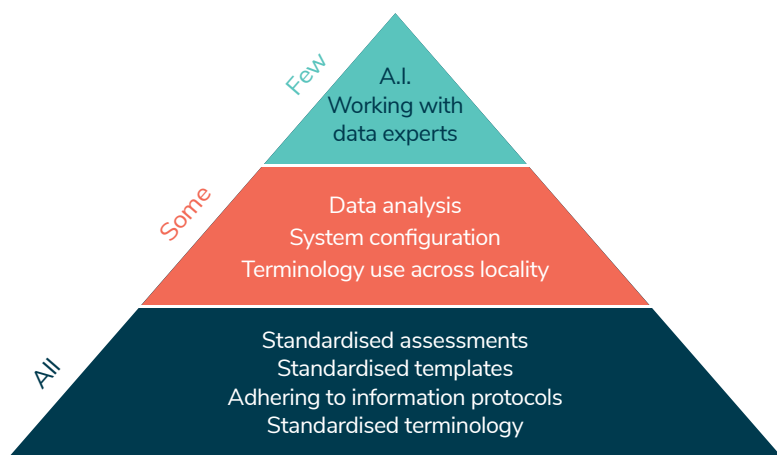
The biggest turning point in my career was becoming involved in the procurement of an EPR system. Taking me way outside of my comfort zone, it also allowed me to make good use of some of my core occupational therapy skills – problem solving, activity analysis and creativity.

It required rapid development of new digital and data skills to understand what was possible, with the view to a creating a rich source of data about both our population and our pathway, which in turn is key for shaping future improvements and innovations. This was the beginning of a transition into the ‘Some’ tier.

I moved into a full-time digital role in 2017, as a Senior Configurational Analyst within our EPR team. This was the beginning of my journey into data leadership (‘Few’ tier) and provided great challenge, both in terms of my digital skills, but also a breadth of skills for change and project management.

I learnt my biggest lesson here – the most important part of digital transformation is engagement of people.

I have been working as an Allied Health Information Officer since September 2019, with the aim of enhancing the links between our needs as professionals, the needs of our populations and the vast possibilities with digital and data.



**Above:** Image one: Tiered Approach to Engagement, RCOT Data and Innovation Strategy (2021)

Although the digital competencies are mapped by the NHS Agenda for Change (AfC) structure, they can also be reviewed in the context of level of career development and specifically to an individual's role and wider experience. Therefore, making them relevant across non-NHS settings too.

There is good correlation between these frameworks and the tiered approach to engagement (see image one) from the RCOT Data and Innovation Strategy, and this will be described in more detail in future resources.

It is hoped that this work will support individuals to reflect on the focus of their current work and their current skill and confidence levels and aid them in moving towards their ambitions for development and attainment in this arena, be that related to a specific project or general practice.

### Increasing engagement over time

Attainment of these competencies and progression with data and innovation has many benefits for people who access our services as well as for us in terms of work satisfaction, career progression and confidence.

To achieve this, it needs consideration alongside other CPD objectives as part of rounded career development.

It will take some time for these competencies and objectives to be fully integrated into education, development plans and for the terminology to become common place, but pockets of brilliant innovation and usage of data already exist.

The most powerful things we can do at this time to progress our confidence and competence in this area is to reflect on our individual learning needs, and to share, to listen and to ask. We are not in this alone and a supportive network exists already and by working together we can optimise our care of people who access services whilst enhancing the experience of our workforce.

It is important is that we collectively have the knowledge and skills to fully engage in our work, provide the best standard of service that we can and continue to consider what we can do differently to meet the ever-growing demands placed upon us. And that is the responsibility of all those working within occupational therapy to address. ●

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### Future work to look out for

In the spirit of sharing and learning from each other, we will be producing a series of leadership journeys to showcase the skills and successes of our peers, mapping this to the frameworks and the RCOT strategy.

We are also aiming to provide an outline of first steps for those wishing to replicate similar work in their context.

Further detail on the mapping between the strategy and the frameworks will be shared shortly. And keep an eye out for some exciting webinar events early in 2023.

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