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Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales Guidance on ‘Making the Most of the First Year in Practice’

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 Welsh Assembly Government document which has been assisted by members throughout Wales.
- 1.2. The COT represents over 29,000 occupational therapists who are either working or studying across the United Kingdom, of which around 1,500 are either working or studying in Wales. The College also supports a number of support workers who are known as associate members. Occupational therapists (OTs) work in Local Authority Social Services and Housing Departments, the NHS, 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 well-being. Practice is based on holistic, person centred care.

2. General Comments

- 2.1. We welcome this guidance identifying the need to support newly qualified social workers in their transition from student to new professional. The first year of practice is always difficult as one seeks to put theory into practice and grasp the realities of work and the new employer. This is particularly true of the complex work involved in social care.
- 2.2. Approximately 25% of all occupational therapists in the Welsh statutory health and social care sector are employed in Social Services Departments. Many begin their careers in social services and thus make the transition from student to practitioner in this complex field of work.
- 2.3. It is therefore of great disappointment that the newly qualified occupational therapists entering local authorities or other social care employers direct from graduation have not been included in this work. The important reasons given for this guidance (from Social Work in Wales: A Profession to Value) are also true of occupational therapy staff. As evidenced in “Enabling Everyday Lives” (COT 2006), available from: <http://www.cot.org.uk/public/publications2/showpublication.php?c=4&pubid=47>).

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- 2.4. The profession believes the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) will miss an important opportunity to ensure that all newly qualified social care staff are given the same level of support, supervision and development unless this guidance is amended to embrace occupational therapy as well as social work graduates in their first year. The majority of this document is equally applicable to occupational therapists employed in social care. The CSSIW should expect to see similar processes in place for occupational therapy graduates as part of their inspection processes.
- 2.5. A good staff development strategy should look at all staff and their mix of skills and roles within the team. 'Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities' identified that social services should support a highly skilled and qualified workforce. Social services departments need to develop a learning culture for the whole workforce. As stated on P8 of this guidance, this model "needs to be part of an organisation wide approach to learning". This clearly indicates why this guidance should not solely be focused on social work practice, but needs to include all newly qualified professional staff entering social care. The student profile 'Elgan' suggests he is going back into a mixed team - just how remarkably different should the strategy and arrangements be for other team members making a similar transition?
- 2.6. In order to retain their professional registration with the Health Professions Council, occupational therapists employed in Social Services Departments, or other social care agencies, need to engage in the supervision, continuing professional development and other structured activities to improve practice. Best practice requires that occupational therapy personnel also have the protected caseload and mentoring/ supervision systems identified in this model. Section 5 reflects much of the College's advice and guidance to occupational therapists already in use.
- 2.7. Although occupational therapists do not yet have the same prescribed post qualifying framework, the College's own post qualifying framework could be used as a guide for consolidation in the first year. We believe it would be valuable to have a discussion between Care Council for Wales, CSSIW and the College in respect of the possible benefits of a PQ framework for occupational therapists in social care. The College is aware of informal developments of this nature in some local authorities already.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. In conclusion, the College is disappointed that CSSIW may miss a key opportunity to produce guidance for supporting all new entrants to social work and occupational therapy and urges that consideration is given to amending this guidance now to ensure it includes occupational therapists as well as social workers in their first year of practice. This model could easily be applied to new occupational therapists employed in social care as well as social workers.
- 3.2. The College suggests that discussions between CSSIW, CCW and the College could result in a useful progress on support and development for occupational therapy as well as social work graduates.

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**College of
Occupational Therapists**

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3.3. The College is willing to provide any further information which would help CSSIW.
Please do not hesitate to contact the Policy Officer for Wales at the address below.

3.4. The College is content for this response to be published.

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Policy Officer Wales

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Chair of Welsh Board

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