



Entry level education in occupational therapy 2018

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT), through its Academic Credentialing Council (ACC), is the sole accrediting body for the accreditation of entry level education programs for occupational therapists. Since 2008, occupational therapy educational programs that lead to a professional Master's degree in occupational therapy are eligible for accreditation. This document provides information on frequently asked questions related to occupational therapy entry level education:

Frequently Asked Questions on Entry Level Education of Occupational Therapists in Canada

How are occupational therapists educated in Canada?

Occupational therapists are educated at one of fourteen occupational therapy education programs available in Canada. All Canadian occupational therapy education programs are accredited by CAOT. The CAOT accreditation process ensures that university programs meet expected standards and outcomes for the education of occupational therapists. Accreditation by CAOT means that programs meet or exceed the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) standards for the education of occupational therapists.

What was the rationale for the requirement for Master's level education for occupational therapists?

In 2008, the national educational standards were revised to require a master's degree in place of the previous bachelor's degree. The change in academic credential for Canadian occupational therapy education was precipitated by expectations of the practice environment regarding the knowledge, skills and abilities of occupational therapists, as outlined in the Profile of Practice of Occupational Therapists in Canada (CAOT, 2012). Occupational therapy in Canada is evolving as a result of a number of factors including: i) health and social system reform, ii) changing client profile and health status, iii) growing professional knowledge base, iv) the growth of private practice, and v) national and international mobility. The Master's entry level education model is responsive to the intensity and breadth of education required; complexity of current practice; and system need for accountability.

How does education from an entry level professional Master's degree program differ from other Master's degree programs?

An "entry level professional Master's degree" refers to professional education that meets the competencies to enter a profession, is accredited by the appropriate organization, and confers a Master's to graduates of the program. Graduates are eligible to apply to write the national examination and apply for registration to practice with provincial regulatory organizations. This makes it distinct from other types of graduate level studies such as course-based master's degrees that do not meet professional competencies to enter a profession and thesis-based master's degrees with a specific research focus.

Sometimes occupational therapists use the term “post-entry Master’s degree” to describe degrees that represent further studies at the graduate level in occupational therapy or another discipline for people who have already obtained their professional education at either the Bachelor’s or Master’s level. These graduates have acquired knowledge beyond the entry level requirement for the profession.

How does the practice of the occupational therapists with a Master’s or Bachelor’s degree differ?

Occupational therapists with a Master’s or Bachelor’s degree are expected to meet the same standards for practice. Both acquire the competencies for professional roles and functions as described in the Profile of Practice of Occupational Therapists in Canada (CAOT, 2012) and the Essential Competencies (Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations [ACOTRO] 2011), either through continuing professional development, in the case of experienced occupational therapists, or as recent graduates of the professional Master’s programs. Both are primary providers of occupational therapy services and provide direct services not only to individuals but also perform functions as manager, researcher, program developer, educator, or as part of other professional roles. All occupational therapists regardless of their educational credentials, are responsible for ongoing education to remain current with new developments in the profession. All are expected to pursue continuing professional education to maintain excellence in their practice and to ensure that their level of achievement is consistent with the Profile and the Essential Competencies.

As occupational therapy is a regulated health profession in all provinces in Canada, occupational therapists must meet minimum education requirements set out by provincial regulatory organizations. Internationally educated occupational therapists who want to work in Canada are required to meet regulatory entry-to-practice requirements that are equivalent to those set out for Canadian graduates.

Should an occupational therapist with a professional Master’s degree be paid more than one with a Bachelor’s degree?

CAOT does not support differences in salary for occupational therapists based on entry level credential. CAOT advocates that occupational therapists be fairly compensated based on the competencies they demonstrate to meet the demands of the practice environment, as outlined in the Profile (CAOT, 2012). Salary scales should match the position description and expectations.

Note to employers

When posting for required academic qualifications for occupational therapist positions, CAOT recommends the following wording: "successful completion of an accredited entry to practice occupational therapist program".

When posting for required credentials for occupational therapist positions, CAOT recommends the following wording: "registration with the appropriate occupational therapy regulatory organization".

References

Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations (2011). Essential Competencies (3rd Edition). Retrieved on December 18, 2017 from http://acotro-acore.org/sites/default/files/uploads/ACOTRO_EC_3rd_ed.pdf

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2012). Profile of Practice of Occupational Therapists in Canada, 2nd Edition. Ottawa, ON : CAOT Publications ACE. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2006) Position Statement on Continuing Professional Education. Retrieved on December 18, 2017 from <https://www.caot.ca/document/3653/2012otprofile.pdf>.