

Information for the National Sensory Impaired Partnership Working Group on current courses, qualifications and progression routes.

Training in sensory impairment for therapy professionals working with children

1. Acquisition of information

1.1 The following professional associations were asked if they would provide information and comment on the training in sensory impairment in children that is available to their members at

- a.) undergraduate pre registration level,
- b.) postgraduate post registration level/continuing professional development:

- The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (Jenny Carey, Education Adviser, CSP). CSP contacted the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP) for further information
- The College of Occupational Therapists (Anna Clampin, Education Development Manager, COT)
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (Sharon Woolf, Head of Professional Development, RCSLT).

1.2 Additional information was supplied by a number of individuals. They are acknowledged in Appendix 1.

2. Training available to physiotherapists

2.1 Undergraduate/pre registration level

Students are very unlikely to have specific training in areas of sensory impairment in children (in fact only a few universities offer opportunities to their undergraduates to look at physiotherapy in relation to children at all as it is more regarded as a Band6/7 area of specialisation) but they will be taught to apply their skills of clinical reasoning and decision making to a wide range of different contexts and cultures. (J Carey)

2.2 Postgraduate/post registration level

There is very little in the way of postgraduate training for sensory impairments. Training in Sensory Integration therapy is available (usually by OTs) but this is really a treatment modality.

Physiotherapists have to use advanced clinical reasoning and decision making to recognise the impact of sensory deficits and sensory integrative deficits, on motor performance and behaviours. (J Carey)

2.3 General comment by CSP/APCP

Members of the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists (APCP) felt that physiotherapists will access training from non-physio bodies if they feel it relevant e.g. from RNID or RNIB etc. They were not aware of any centre which offered courses with academic accreditation for members of the profession specifically in this area. It was acknowledged that close working by physiotherapists with specialist teachers will provide professional development in sensory impairments.

APCP described experience and reflective practice as important elements in training for physiotherapists. Many physiotherapists working with children who have complex needs in special schools settings routinely include and recommend sensory activities in treatment programmes.

APCP felt that there might be some interest in accessing training for children with these impairments. J Carey asked to be kept informed of any development in this area.

3. **Training available to occupational therapists**

3.1 Undergraduate/pre-registration level

COT was not aware of any institution of higher education that ran any specific module on sensory impairment. It was indicated that all courses are likely to cover elements of paediatric practice and to that sensory impairment will be considered in this context. (A Clampin)

3.2 Post registration level

COT's Education Development Manager ran a check on their 'interactive learning opportunities' database. This revealed 16 CPD

courses for OTs using sensory impairment as a key word. No further information was provided on the nature of these courses, but it seems likely that they were courses that included considerations of sensory impairment rather than having sensory impairment as a primary focus. (A Clampin)

3.3 General comment

Discussion with an OT who has a lead for children with sensory impairment in a school for children acquired brain injury confirmed the view that there are no courses focusing specifically on sensory impairment for OTs, but that continuing professional development in this area is acquired through

- working with others who have built up expertise in this area
- reflective practice
- attending relevant short courses
- self-study.

4. **Training available to speech and language therapists**

4.1 Undergraduate/pre registration

Little information was available from the RCSLT on modules on sensory impairment within pre registration courses for SLT students. A quick survey of course providers indicated that some (eg Universities of Reading, Ulster and City) cover topics pertaining to the ear, hearing, deafness, cochlear implants and impact of hearing loss on communication etc. in some depth. To some extent, this appears historical and reflects the interest and continuing clinical practice and interest of course tutors - e.g. a lecturer at University of Ulster is a lead clinician in hearing impairment for Belfast Trust for 50% week.

There appears to be very little focus on visual impairment in pre-registration courses.

4.2 Post registration level

Until recently, The City University (London) ran the only Advanced Clinical Diploma for S<s specialising in work with deaf clients for over twenty years. The Senior Lecturer with responsibility for this course reported that it had now folded 'due to lack of demand'.

4.3 General comment

Further developmental activities are accessed through

- working with others who have built up expertise in this area

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- reflective practice
- attending relevant short courses
- self-study.

In addition, the RCSLT supports regional communities of practice of S<s known as 'Special Interest Groups' (SIGs). SIGs exist in relation to hearing impairment and MSI- but not visual impairment. SIGs are recognised in the profession as having an important role in CPD.

5. Summary

5.1 Undergraduate/pre registration level

- Initial training courses cover all age ranges of client. In the case of physiotherapists there is an acknowledgement that there is little focus on children, let alone those with sensory impairment.
- Little available on sensory impairment for OTs and physiotherapists in initial training
- Some modules on ears, hearing, deafness and associated topics for S<s in training. Institutes of HE have variable focus on this. No such focus on VI.

5.2 Post registration level

- No sensory impairment advanced diploma level courses now available for any of the therapies
- Therapists are expected to further professional development via:
 - working with others who have built up expertise
 - reflective practice
 - attending relevant short courses
 - self-study
 - membership of relevant SIG (S<s).

5.3 Other

The Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists felt that there might be interest in accessing training in sensory impairment in children & asked to be kept informed. No such comment was received from any of the other professional associations.

Judy Bell

19/11/09

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Appendix 1

Organisations and individuals who responded to requests for information

Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
College of Occupational Therapists
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Dr Ros Herman, Senior Lecturer, Dept of Language & Communication Skills

Dr Jill Titterton, Speech & Language Therapy Department, University of Ulster

Jane Peters, Service Development Co-ordinator, Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service