

Education

Policy statement

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Education

Education is the process through which learning takes place and the learner is changed and/or changes practice as a result. The goal of physical therapist education is to facilitate the continuing intellectual, professional and personal development of students and qualified physical therapists. Physical therapists apply their learning continuously and use it to develop and improve their professional practice through a process of reflection, as they evolve from student to novice and to experienced/expert practitioner. Learning can be effectively facilitated in a number of ways, including formal teaching, self-directed learning, practice-based learning, technology-based, collaborative learning and learning from and through experience.

Physical therapist education is a continuum of learning which starts with the initial entry level physical therapist educational programme that allows entry into the profession, and continues throughout professional life. Continued learning is necessary for continued competence in a changing health and social care environment. Such lifelong learning is essential for achieving and promoting excellence in physical therapy service provision and for progression through a career. This may include advanced practice, an extension of professional scope, specialisation and the application of transferable professional meta-competencies - such as teaching, research, management, leadership and advocacy.

WCPT recognises, understands and values the fact that education of physical therapists takes place in diverse social, economic and political environments around the world. The practice of the physical therapy profession is complex and occurs in a constantly changing environment. The evidence base of the profession, which informs its practice, is also in a continual state of developmental change.¹ Therefore, the initial and continued education of physical therapists must equip them with the skills and attributes to perform in such an environment. This will enable them to practise within the full physical therapist scope of practice as defined by and/or legislated for in the country in which the education takes place. The education should therefore also respond to the demand for national and international mobility by introducing students and physical therapists to the challenge of meeting a diverse range of licence to practise requirements.

The pre-entry level student must successfully complete a university level education programme, which is recognised to be at an academic standard of at least Bachelor's level, with Physical Therapy/Physiotherapy in its title. This must include both theory and professional practice in a range of environments in which physical therapists work. This is the academic level, which is required to ensure development of the necessary intellectual skills of problem recognition, analysis, synthesis and evaluation and application of theory to practice which underpin the process of physical therapy. The curriculum should enable the graduate to practise as an autonomous professional physical therapy practitioner. It is expected that, on successful completion of the programme, the graduate will be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes to be a competent physical therapist who practises independently in a safe and ethical manner.^{2,3}

WCPT encourages and supports member organisations, with other stakeholders, to advocate for government recognition of the importance of, and sufficient support and funding for, entry level physical therapist education and to:

- Implement appropriate entry level educational standards which require delivery of a curriculum centred around the following principles. The curriculum:
 - is based on an analysis of health and social needs of the country in which it is delivered and reflects relevant World Health Organization guidance.
 - focuses on delivering learning outcomes.
 - is evidence based/informed.

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- enables the graduate to attain the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes.
 - emphasises the responsibility to manage self by maintaining own health and well-being in order to be fit to practise.
 - enables the graduate to autonomously carry out the physical therapy process of history-taking, examination and assessment, analysis, diagnosis, clinical decision-making, prognosis and treatment/care planning, interventions, promotion of health and well-being, prevention of ill-health and disability, review and modification of interventions, measurement and evaluation of outcomes and use of new technologies.
 - emphasises a person-centred, active, functional rehabilitation approach making use of the International Classification of Functioning where appropriate.
 - equips the graduate to practise as a competent analytical consumer of evidence and an evidence-informed practitioner, with the potential to further develop research skills.
 - enables the graduate to practise across the age spectrum in a variety of health service delivery settings which include (but are not limited to) hospitals, clinics, industrial, occupational, primary healthcare services, private and public settings, education, community (urban and rural) services, leisure and sport settings.
 - prepares the graduate for working ethically and inclusively with all peoples by developing and strengthening ethical and cultural competence and embracing diversity. ^{4,5}
 - includes alternative service models to help prepare the graduate for working internationally.
 - prepares the graduate to contribute to service delivery/development, management, leadership and quality improvement initiatives.
 - includes learning and hands-on experience in the clinical environment under the direct management and supervision of experienced physical therapists. Clinical education should progress in complexity and level of responsibility through the programme. Some supervision may be delegated to other members of the inter/multi-professional team.
 - includes inter-professional education and collaborative practice models.
 - equips the graduate to make full use of technological opportunities.
 - is delivered by physical therapists, and other faculty members, who are able to transfer knowledge, skills and attributes relating to the process of physical therapy and functional rehabilitation approach, including the critical analysis of theories and methods of physical therapy and the critical consuming of research.
 - is delivered by a faculty team and clinicians who can, between them, teach and assess the full range of requisite subjects.
 - is internally and externally monitored and evaluated for quality of educational provision, student experience and student outcomes.
 - is delivered in an institutional and educational context that maximises its effectiveness.
 - Develop accreditation/recognition standards and processes that independently assess and validate the entry level education programme to ensure it is of a standard that affords graduates full statutory and professional recognition to practise. These standards and processes should complement statutory professional regulation requirements.
 - Advocate for recognition of the importance of, and sufficient support and funding for, continuing professional development activities which:

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- Ensure professional learning opportunities across the life-long continuum of learning which will enable the physical therapist to progress from novice to expert/experienced professional, to adapt to complexity and change, to be a reflective practitioner, and to progress through their career.
 - Explore and promote the means by which the physical therapist may record their learning and its impact on practice. Tools (e.g. portfolios, diaries, reflective accounts, logs, apps etc.) should be clinically applicable and cost effective, and take advantage of technological opportunities and innovations.
 - Promote the use of educational approaches to help the physical therapist communicate, supervise, educate and transfer skills and knowledge to others in effective ways.
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Glossary (www.world.physio/resources/glossary)

Academic standard

Accreditation

Advanced practice

Assessment

Bachelor's degree

Collaborative learning

Competence

Continued competence

Continuing professional development (CPD)

Diagnosis

Evidence-based practice (EBP)

Faculty

Learning

Practice settings

Reflective practice

Regulation of the profession

Scope of practice

Specialisation

Standards of practice

Approval, review and related policy information	
Date adopted:	Originally adopted at the 13th General Meeting of WCPT June 1995. Revised and re-approved at the 15th General Meeting of WCPT June 2003. Revised 2007 to incorporate the Position Statement: Education for entry-level physical therapists (1995) and adopted at the 16th General Meeting of WCPT, June 2007. Revised and re-approved at the 17th General Meeting of WCPT June 2011. Revised and re-approved at the 18th General Meeting of WCPT May 2015. Revised and re-approved at the 19th General Meeting of WCPT May 2019.
Date for review:	2023
Related WCPT policies:	WCPT policy statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of physical therapy • Regulation of the physical therapy profession WCPT guidelines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education • Guideline for the development of a system of legislation/ regulation/recognition of physical therapists • Guideline for qualifications of faculty for physical therapist professional entry level programmes • Guideline for delivering quality continuing professional development for physical therapists • Guideline for the clinical education component of the physical therapist professional entry level programme

References

1. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Evidence based practice. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-EBP (Access date 2 September 2019)
2. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Ethical responsibilities of physical therapists and WCPT member organisations. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-ethical-responsibilities (Access date 30 August 2019)
3. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Physical therapist practice specialisation. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-specialisation (Access date 5 September 2019)
4. World Confederation for Physical Therapy. Policy statement: Diversity and inclusion. London, UK: WCPT; 2019. www.wcpt.org/policy/ps-diversity (Access date 3 June 2019)
5. Physiotherapy Board of Australia, Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand. Physiotherapy Practice thresholds in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. Wellington, New Zealand: Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand; 2015. www.physioboard.org.nz/sites/default/files/PhysiotherapyPractice%20Thresholds3.5.16.pdf (Access date: 18 September 2018)

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