
The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy [CSP] CSP Education Position Statement: Widening Participation

Introduction

This position statement sets out the approach that the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) takes to supporting the delivery of a more diverse physiotherapy workforce that reflects the population it serves. As the UK's professional, educational and trade union body for physiotherapy, the CSP seeks to shape, support and drive initiatives aimed at increasing the diversity of the physiotherapy workforce as described in this document.

The position statement may be used with higher education institutions (HEIs) to promote increasing diversity in the physiotherapy student population; with managers to encourage equal access to CPD opportunities and career pathways for physiotherapy support workers; with members of the public to stimulate interest in choosing physiotherapy as a profession; and with commissioners to ensure that they recognise the value of supporting flexible routes to qualification as a means to diversifying the workforce.

The position statement will be kept under review to ensure its currency and updated as necessary.

Scope

As the educational, professional and trade union body for 53,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers, the CSP leads and supports the development of the UK's physiotherapy workforce to ensure that it continues to be fit for purpose as population healthcare and service needs change. The CSP achieves this outcome by working with and through its members and stakeholders to influence and inform the strategic and policy developments shaping the physiotherapy workforce at a national and local level.

CSP's approach to widening participation

The widening participation agenda is about fair access to opportunities for education and training, and improving the under-representation of groups within given employment or education sectors. It has grown in prominence within UK further and higher education, and is a stated priority for the government in Westminster and the three devolved administrations. Recent health policy has promoted increased diversity within the NHS workforce. The CSP believes that the physiotherapy profession should reflect the population it serves. A workforce comprising individuals of different ages, abilities, races, sexual orientation, religious, social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds demonstrates greater cultural competency and understanding, which is essential in responding to service and patient needs.

The physiotherapy workforce has begun to diversify, with growing numbers of qualified members and students who are male, older, from a black or minority ethnic (BME) background, having different sexual orientations or who have declared a disability. Equality and diversity is embedded throughout all curricula, and mechanisms are in place to ensure support is available for all students, including those with different requirements, within university and placement settings. The CSP monitors and promotes engagement with widening participation initiatives through quality assurance and enhancement activities. Inclusive curriculum design is promoted to facilitate discussion and increased awareness concerning individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The CSP also collaborates to produce guidance for educators, such as "Into Physiotherapy: welcoming and supporting disabled students".

Qualifying programmes must continue to respond to the widening participation agenda and improve the levels of diversity for the benefit of patients and the profession. More should be

done to promote physiotherapy actively to school students as a career choice, emphasising that it welcomes and supports individuals with different requirements and from different backgrounds.

The CSP welcomes and supports widening participation initiatives targeted at the physiotherapy workforce, and is extremely concerned that decisions in recent years have led to a reduction in programmes that facilitate the widening participation agenda. Whilst current funding arrangements for physiotherapy education, which ensure that the majority of applicants do not need to consider the potential financial implication of tuition fees, provide an important means of supporting widening participation objectives, a variety of entry-routes should be funded. Some part-time and work-based routes in England have been decommissioned, yet it is often these flexible programmes that enable under-represented groups to study physiotherapy.

It is hoped that the mandate given to Health Education England (HEE) from NHS England in April 2013, which specified that the “the levels of applications to NHS funded courses from groups currently under-represented” must be improved, will encourage commissioners to reverse this trend. The CSP strongly supports the provision of programmes which provide flexible routes to qualification and innovative approaches to student recruitment, and note that the level of exit qualifications achieved are comparable, regardless of whether or not students entered the profession from a non-traditional educational background.

Support Workers

Widening participation is not just focused on those seeking to directly enter the workforce as physiotherapists; widening access to education and training for support workers throughout their career pathways is also fully supported. This includes developing clear career paths, and facilitating the progression of those support workers who wish to become qualified physiotherapists. As already noted, the decommissioning of flexible qualifying programme routes is deeply detrimental to this aim. Furthermore, innovative programmes, which provide multiple exit points (such as a foundation degree route within an honours degree programme), designed to support the whole physiotherapy workforce, have been designed by HEIs, but not commissioned. It is hoped that the recommendations of the Cavendish Review, in addition to the HEE mandate, will encourage the commissioning of these programmes, thereby diversifying and widening entry to the profession.

There is a long-standing tendency for support workers to have significantly less access to education and training in comparison with health professionals. Support workers should have equal access to CPD opportunities, and they should be guaranteed paid time off for this purpose. Part of developing clear career paths for support workers is to ensure that CPD expectations are set, and plans to meet learning and development needs are made. For instance foundation degrees enable the experiential learning that support workers have gained to be recognised, directly linking their employment with education. It can also be an effective way of preparing support workers for entry onto a qualifying physiotherapy programme should they wish to pursue this route.

References and further reading

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