

NEC CAREER TRACKS: Physiotherapy

Physiotherapists work with patients to improve their range of movement and promote health and wellbeing. This NEC Career Tracks guide tells you about the routes into the profession and looks at the qualifications and skills you'll need.

Why be a physiotherapist?

If you want to make a positive difference to people's lives and work in a career which offers variety, physiotherapy is a good choice. Physiotherapists can specialise in an area like orthopaedics, sports therapy, occupational health or working with older people or children.

- Physiotherapists working in the NHS can progress to senior physiotherapist or move into health service management.
- Researching or teaching in vocational or higher education is also an option for experienced physiotherapists.

What qualifications, qualities and skills will I need?

If you are thinking of training to become a physiotherapist, you will need:

- a good level of personal fitness
- excellent communication skills
- good manual skills
- organisational and administrative skills

To practise as a physiotherapist, you will need a physiotherapy degree or a postgraduate award in physiotherapy approved by the [Health and Care Professions Council](#), the UK regulator for physiotherapists. Once you have qualified and gained employment, your employer will have to arrange an [enhanced DBS \(Disclosure and Barring Service\) check](#).

As a qualified physiotherapist you will also be eligible to apply for full membership and chartered status with the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapy \(CSP\)](#).

“Physiotherapy is a very rewarding career because as a physiotherapist, you work with all population and patient groups, helping individuals affected by injury, disability, illness or ageing, and advising on health and wellbeing. You have career options across health and social care, and can become a consultant, leader, manager or business owner.”

**Karen Middleton, Chief Executive,
Chartered Society of
Physiotherapy**



ROUTES INTO PHYSIOTHERAPY

Studying physiotherapy at university

There are more than 70 BSc Honours degrees in physiotherapy on offer in universities across the UK. Courses cover theoretical disciplines such as cardio-respiratory, neurological and musculoskeletal physiotherapy; anatomy; pediatrics; ethics and professional codes of conduct; research and continuing professional development. Degree courses include work placements in a clinical setting, arranged through the university.

Apprenticeships

Standards for a new physiotherapy degree apprenticeship were approved in spring 2018, meaning it is now possible to become qualified through this route at level 6 (degree level), training on the job and earning a salary, rather than going to university full-time. A masters level academic professional apprenticeship (level 7) was approved in summer 2018. Information about the new apprenticeships is available on the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapists \(CSP\) website](#).

Protecting the professionalism of physiotherapists

Physiotherapy is one of a number of professions in the healthcare sector which has a designated title that means it is protected by law. For someone to use the title physiotherapist legitimately, they must be on the professional register of the [Health & Care Professions Council](#).

The entry requirements for most university degree courses are five GCSEs at grades 9-5 or (A*-C), including English language, maths and at least one science, and an A level or equivalent level 3 qualification in a biological science. Applicants offering A level biology are required to have passed the practical endorsement.

NEC A levels and GCSEs

NEC offers a wide range of GCSE and A level courses to support you in applying for a physiotherapy degree course, including [A level Biology](#), [GCSE English Language](#) and [Maths](#), and [IGCSE Biology](#). We also offer [Chemistry](#), [Physics](#) and [Combined Science](#) at IGCSE.

“ I enrolled on A level Biology after several years away from studying, choosing NEC as I could fit my study around my work and home life. I found the course so enjoyable I decided to change career and study for a degree in order to become a physiotherapist. ”

Jane, A level Biology

Related career choices

Sports Physiotherapist – You need a physiotherapy degree approved by the Health and Care Professions Council, a relevant Master's degree, 1–2 years' work experience as a physiotherapist, and professional registration as a chartered physiotherapist.

Physiotherapy Assistant – You need a good standard of education: four or more GCSEs at grades 9 to 4 (A* to C), including English, maths and science.

GAINING EXPERIENCE IN A MEDICAL SETTING

If you have no experience of working in a hospital, clinic or GP surgery, it would be useful to consider a period of paid or voluntary service to help you secure a place on a physiotherapy undergraduate or postgraduate degree course. There are a number of ways to gain experience in a medical setting. The main ones are:

- 🔴 **work experience placements** e.g. in an NHS or private hospital, for a charity such as the Red Cross, or for a physiotherapist in private practice
- 🔴 **volunteering**, which enables would-be physiotherapists to work alongside experienced staff; volunteering could be through a one-off project, be a regular commitment with an organisation or charity such as St John Ambulance, or be part of a gap year before you go to uni
- 🔴 **paid employment**, full or part-time, especially valuable if it includes training
- 🔴 **caring for a sick relative or friend**, reviewing and reflecting on your experience and what you learnt from it



Did you know?

- 🔴 Around 23,000 physiotherapists work in the NHS in England (*Source: NHS Workforce Statistics in England, non-medical staff, 2004-2014*).
- 🔴 The World Confederation for Physical Therapy (WCPT) www.wcpt.org is the sole international voice for physical therapy and represents more than 450,000 physiotherapists worldwide.
- 🔴 Physicians from Ancient Greece such as Hippocrates and Galen are believed to have been the first practitioners of physical therapy, advocating massage, manual therapy techniques and hydrotherapy to treat people in 460 BC.



CASE STUDY

How a career break led Emily to change direction in her work with children

Emily always knew that she wanted a career working with children in some capacity. Having previously worked as a teaching assistant, she was keen to carry on working with children following a career break after the birth of her daughter, but was looking for a change of career. She decided on physiotherapy but needed an A level in biology before applying to do a physiotherapy degree at university after her daughter started school.

The versatility of her online biology A level course with NEC meant that Emily was able to pick and choose when she studied and was able to work to her own schedule, fitting her learning around her family commitments. Now well on the way to achieving her goal of becoming a physiotherapist working with children, Emily plans to work in the NHS once qualified and is looking forward to developing a career doing something meaningful and rewarding.

Q & A: WORKING AS A PHYSIOTHERAPIST

1 How much do physiotherapists earn?

Qualified physiotherapists can expect to earn between £22,000 and £41,000 based on a 37.5 hour week, depending on experience. Sports physiotherapists earn between £23,000 and £45,000 a year. Physiotherapy assistants earn between £15,000 and £22,000 a year.

2 What sort of conditions do physiotherapists treat?

Physiotherapy can help with a wide variety of physical conditions. They include stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, back pain, whiplash, sports injuries, arthritis, chronic heart disease, asthma and cystic fibrosis.

3 What does a physiotherapist do day-to-day?

A physiotherapist's daily tasks are likely to include helping patients with spinal and joint problems, to recover from accidents, or supporting them to recover from sports injuries or strokes. If you work with older patients, you'll be helping them become more mobile if they have physical problems. Physiotherapists also work with children who have physical and mental disabilities.

4 What treatments and techniques do physiotherapists use?

Commonly used treatments and techniques include physical manipulation and massage, therapeutic exercise, electrotherapy, ultrasound, acupuncture and hydrotherapy.

5 What administrative tasks do physiotherapists have to do?

Keeping notes of patients' treatment and progress is an important part of the physiotherapist's job.

6 Where do physiotherapists work?

Physiotherapists work in hospital departments like pediatrics, outpatients, intensive care, orthopaedics and stroke services. They can also work in settings specialising in occupational health and women's health. Some physiotherapists are based in health centres and may also treat patients in their own home.

7 Which other health professionals do physiotherapists work with?

You'll work closely with nurses, occupational therapists, health visitors and social workers.

CASE STUDY

Return to learning points Tom towards a new career in physiotherapy

For Tom, the dual commitments of a part-time job in an office and looking after a young family whilst his partner went out to work, made studying for a qualification a huge undertaking. But that didn't stop him pursuing a career in physiotherapy.

Because he couldn't commit to a set time each week to study, Tom chose a distance learning course with NEC and began working towards an IGCSE in biology. The flexibility and independence of a distance learning course suited Tom and gave him the chance to study for the first time since leaving full-time education. 'Although it may be difficult to fit your studies in sometimes, as long as you create a good schedule to ensure you meet the deadlines, it will be worth it for what you get out of it,' he says. Having successfully completed his biology IGCSE, Tom enrolled on NEC's biology A level course, and is deciding whether to on to university or look for an assistant therapist role.



FIND OUT MORE

Professional bodies

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) The physiotherapy profession's largest membership association, led by members. The CSP also campaigns on behalf of all physiotherapy staff and the physiotherapy profession.

Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC)

The UK regulator for health, psychological and social work professionals, including physiotherapists. Practitioners in all the professions covered by the HCPC have their registration reviewed every two years.

Volunteering

Do-it <https://do-it.org>

A national database of volunteering opportunities, searchable by postcode and organisation. A possible source of volunteering opportunities in medical settings.

British Red Cross <http://www.redcross.org.uk/>

A charitable organisation that works according to the principles of international humanitarian law and the statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

St John Ambulance <https://www.sja.org.uk>

The UK's leading first aid charity, providing first aid in communities, keeping people safe at events and working alongside the National Health Service in response to 999 calls through volunteering.

Undergraduate degree courses

There are lots of websites that list undergraduate degree courses. They include links to course details for each university. Three of the most popular and authoritative sites are:

- UCAS <https://www.ucas.com/>
- What Uni <https://www.whatuni.com/>
- The Complete University Guide <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/>.



Volunteers of St John Ambulance, the charity saving lives and supporting communities across the nation.

Photo © St John Ambulance 2018

HOW NEC CAN HELP YOU FULFIL YOUR AMBITION TO BE A PHYSIOTHERAPIST

Essential GCSE qualifications

You'll need maths, English language and at least one science to be eligible for a place at university to study for a BSc in Physiotherapy.

Click below for information about studying these essential GCSE qualifications with NEC:

[Maths GCSE](#)

[English Language GCSE](#)

[Biology IGCSE](#)

[Chemistry IGCSE](#)

[Physics IGCSE](#)

[Combined Science IGCSE](#)

Qualification gaps at A level

If you're planning to study physiotherapy at university, you'll also need A levels, including an A level in a biological science. Students offering A level biology need to have passed the practical test. You can read more about studying A level biology with NEC here:

<http://www.nec.ac.uk/courses/biology-a-level>.

Whether you're short of a subject to add to those you passed at school, or are aiming for a better grade in a subject you already have, NEC can help.

About NEC courses

- NEC courses are designed by teachers, examiners and distance learning experts, so you can be certain that they cover the curriculum and are designed for independent study.
- NEC courses are delivered online through learn@NEC, so you can study at a time and place to suit you and be part of a national and international community of people studying with us.
- As an NEC student, you will have a personal tutor who is a qualified subject expert to support you in your studies, giving you feedback on assignments and preparing you for your exams.

Course fees

NEC course fees cover:

- all course materials
- tuition by a subject specialist
- online diagnostic exercises and assessments
- quizzes, videos and e-books

Whatever subject you want to study, you can sample our course materials before you sign up. When you've made your choice, you can enrol at any time and start studying when it suits you.

Visit www.nec.ac.uk to find out more.

Distance learning is flexible

Learning to fit your lifestyle:

- Download and print the course materials and study wherever you are
- Read an e-book on your daily commute
- Watch a video or listen to a recording on your mobile phone or tablet

“I've been able to work as part of a team and had the opportunity to practise in a wide variety of roles.”

Henry

Disclaimer: the information in this Career Tracks was up-to-date when it was published at www.nec.ac.uk. If you are thinking of a career as a physiotherapist, you are advised to make direct contact with the organisations cited here, or call our Advice Team on 0800 389 2839.

NEC's Career Tracks provide an insight into the most popular career choices made by our students. As well as information on the qualifications you need for your chosen career, entry routes and training, NEC Career Tracks look at the personal qualities you will need and list websites where you can find out more.

© NEC, 2018



NEC is the trading name of The Open School Trust, an independent registered charity. Charity number: 328414.