

# Career Tracks Physiotherapy

Where to start  
What qualifications do you need  
Career routes  
Relevant training  
How can NEC help

[www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk)





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## Your future, your goals

**Gain qualifications, start a career, change direction. Whatever your goal we'll help you achieve it.**

At the National Extension College (NEC) we've been providing distance learning to help young people and adults learn to change their future for over 55 years. During that time, we've seen, on many occasions, how someone's life can be transformed by taking the right course at the right time.

Each year thousands of students, like you, from around the world, access our quality courses and expert tutor support to develop their knowledge and skills, and achieve their goals.

Some of our students need qualifications to go on to further or higher education. Some plan to take professional courses in areas such as teaching or healthcare and just need that essential GCSE or A level to make it happen.

Whatever your reason for studying, we look forward to welcoming you to NEC as a student.

This guide will give you an overview of how to embark on a career in physiotherapy, what qualifications you will need, and how NEC can help.

For more information on the courses we offer, visit our website **[www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk)**.

# Are you thinking about a career as a physiotherapist?

This NEC Career Tracks guide tells you about the routes into the profession and looks at the qualifications, qualities and skills you'll need, and how NEC can help you.

## Why be a physiotherapist?

Physiotherapists work with patients to improve their range of movement and promote health and wellbeing. If you want to make a 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.

**Sounds like you?  
Read on.**

## 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 (HCPC)**, 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 CBE, Chief Executive, Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

# NHS bursary

In January 2020, the UK government announced the introduction of an NHS bursary benefiting those studying midwifery, nursing, physiotherapy and other allied health care professions.

## What is the bursary?

All students studying courses in relevant professions, from September 2020, will receive at least £5,000 a year to help cover living expenses. This is not a loan so will not have to be paid back.



## Additional support

As well as the £5,000 per year afforded to all students, some students will be eligible for up to £3,000 more funding.

There is up to £3,000 additional funding, for:

- ▶ specialist disciplines that struggle to recruit, including areas such as mental health nursing
- ▶ an additional childcare allowance, on top of the £1,000 already on offer
- ▶ areas of the country which have seen a drop in people accepted onto nursing, midwifery and allied health courses over the past year



## Can I get any further funding?

Depending on your personal circumstances, you may be eligible for other student funding. Receiving the bursary does not exempt you from applying for tuition fee loans or maintenance loans through the Student Loans Company.

**Student Finance England**

**Student Finance Wales**

For more information about additional funding available, visit the **UCAS website**.

# 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; paediatrics; ethics and professional codes of conduct; research and continuing professional development. Full-time physiotherapy degree courses take three years. The courses include work placements in a clinical setting, arranged through the university.

The entry requirements for most university degree courses are five GCSEs at grades 9-5 (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.

Find out more about **studying physiotherapy at university**.

### 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 and Care Professions Council (HCPC)**.



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, NEC A level Biology student

## Apprenticeships

Standards for a new physiotherapy degree apprenticeship were approved in 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. You usually need two or three A levels, preferably including biology, to do a physiotherapy degree apprenticeship.

Information about the apprenticeships is available on the **Chartered Society of Physiotherapists (CSP)** website.

### 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 a 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 a private practice.
- ▶ **volunteering**, which enables aspiring physiotherapists to work alongside experienced staff; volunteering should 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 going to university.
- ▶ **paid employment**, full- or part-time, especially valuable if it includes training.
- ▶ **caring for a sick relative or friend**, reflecting on your experience and what you learnt from it.

## 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.



## The essentials

### A level Biology

Enjoy discovering the key processes and systems that support life itself with our online A level Biology course.

As you explore topics such as cardiovascular disease, cystic fibrosis, the human genome, biodiversity and forensic biology, you'll learn

how to critically evaluate scientific information and evidence and gain a broader understanding of how biology shapes everyday life.

As part of studying **A level Biology** online, you'll apply theory to practice through 18 core practical experiments suitable for completion at home. You can also decide whether you want to gain a practical skills endorsement alongside the A level course – a requirement for certain university and career routes.

# Q & A: Working as a physiotherapist

## 1. 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.

## 2. What does a physiotherapist do day-to-day?

A physiotherapist's daily tasks are likely to include helping patients with spinal and joint problems or 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.

## 3. What treatments and techniques do physiotherapists use?

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

## 4. What administrative tasks do physiotherapists do?

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

## 5. Where do physiotherapists work?

Physiotherapists work in hospital departments like paediatrics, 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.

## 6. Which other health professionals do physiotherapists work with?

Physiotherapists work closely with nurses, occupational therapists, health visitors and social workers.

## The essentials

### GCSE Maths

Maths is an essential skill, that we use everyday, in all areas of our lives. From adding up a weekly shop, to working out how to decorate a room – maths enables us to find patterns and structure, and opens up a wide range of opportunities.

Our **GCSE Maths** online course is written by experts in the field. Well-structured materials covering topics – such as fractions, decimals and trigonometry – will enable you to gain confidence in basic mathematical skills, before progressing to more challenging areas.

### GCSE English Language

Gaining a GCSE in English language is vital for future career progression and a minimum requirement for many further education courses. However, it's not just a 'means to an end', this course will help you develop your reading and writing skills, and enable you to communicate and express your ideas more effectively.

Studying **GCSE English Language** online is a flexible way to gain key skills, that you'll use in all aspects of your life. Supported by a personal tutor, you'll explore the use of words in different contexts and gain a deeper understanding of the power and influence of the spoken and written word.



# 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 his dream of a career in physiotherapy.

As 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 A level Biology course, and is deciding whether to go on to university or look for an assistant therapist role.



## The essentials

### IGCSE Biology

From the tiniest microscopic cell to vast, complex ecosystems – studying biology enables you to explore and understand life on Earth, in all its forms.

By exploring our natural world, you'll begin to consider some of the big challenges we face. From preventing and curing disease to

sustaining a healthy planet for future generations, biologists have a crucial role to play!

Supported by an expert personal tutor, you'll explore topics using our online resources and through practical experiments you can do at home. As you progress, key connections that exist in our natural world will be revealed and you'll consider the impact biology has on our everyday lives.



# Find out more

## Applying to university

The **Complete University Guide** and **What Uni** can help you with degree subject and university choice.

**UCAS** has all the information you need about how to apply for an apprenticeship, how to apply to university, finance and support, and making and tracking your university application.

## The NHS

**NHS Jobs** lets you search for physiotherapy roles by postcode and job title, and salary levels.

**NHS Health Careers** includes information on your career options, pathways, skills and training plus real life stories.

## Professional bodies

- ▶ **Chartered Society of Physiotherapy** - 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 and Care Professionals 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

### ▶ **St John Ambulance**

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

### ▶ **British Red Cross**

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.

### ▶ **Do-it**

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



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 work in physiotherapy

## Essential GCSE qualifications

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

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

**GCSE Maths**

**GCSE English Language**

**IGCSE Biology**

**IGCSE Chemistry**

**IGCSE Physics**

**IGCSE Combined Science**

**IGCSE Double Science**

## Qualifications gaps at A level

If you're planning to study physiotherapy at university, you'll need A levels, including A level Biology. Students offering A level Biology need to have passed the practical endorsement.

**A level Biology**

**NEC's full range of A levels**

## Distance learning is flexible

Learning to fit your lifestyle:

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

## Course fees

NEC course fees cover:

- ▶ all course materials
- ▶ tuition by a personal tutor who is a subject specialist
- ▶ online diagnostic exercises and assessments
- ▶ quizzes, videos, ebooks, and webinars.

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](http://www.nec.ac.uk) to find out more.

## 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** our online learning platform, so you can study at a time and place to suit you and be part of a national 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.



*Disclaimer:* the information in this Career Tracks was up-to-date when it was published in January 2020. 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 Course Advice Team on 0800 389 2839.

## Career Tracks

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.

