Orthoptist

Introduction

Orthoptists diagnose and treat abnormal eye movements and vision problems. A lot of work is with children, for example, treating strabismus (squints) and amblyopia (lazy eye). However, they treat people of all ages. In some clinics, they help doctors to diagnose and treat conditions like glaucoma.

Work Activities

Orthoptists diagnose and treat problems with vision, and abnormal eye movements.

They treat problems such as:

- amblyopia (lazy eye)
- diplopia (double vision)
- strabismus (squints)
- poor binocular vision (not being able to use both eyes together properly).

Orthoptists see patients of all ages. For example, as experts in childhood vision screening, they test children's eyesight at the age of four to five, in school. In older adults, eye problems are often linked to problems such as stroke, thyroid disorders and injuries in accidents. Some people with physical and learning disabilities have problems with eye co-ordination.

Orthoptists can use a variety of tests to diagnose eye problems. Visual problems can give clues that the patient has a serious underlying health problem such as stroke or multiple sclerosis. This means that orthoptists also need to know about general health conditions.

Diagnosis can include:

- Eye pressure tests (tonometry) and testing the patient's field of vision (perimetry), which can help to diagnose glaucoma.
- Fundus photography - taking pictures of the retina.
- Biometry - measuring the length of the eye to assess cataracts before operations.

Glasses can sometimes be all that's needed to correct problems such as squints and lazy eye. However, some children need further treatment. Orthoptists can treat one lazy eye (amblyopia) by covering the better eye with a patch for several hours each day. The orthoptist monitors the situation. Some patients need surgery to straighten the eyes; the orthoptist manages the care and assessment of the patient after the operation, working closely with the eye surgeon.

The orthoptist can treat some conditions using exercises, or by adding extra lenses or prisms to spectacles.

Orthoptists are part of a team, working with people such as specialist doctors and surgeons, nurses and health visitors.

They work in hospital eye departments, health centres, schools and local clinics.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To be an orthoptist, you'll need:

- An interest and ability in science, especially biology.
- The desire to treat people's eye problems.
- Patience, tact and sensitivity.
• The ability to reassure people and put them at their ease.
• Communication skills to explain things and give advice clearly.
• The ability to persuade people, as they might be reluctant to wear glasses or a patch, for example.
• Accurate record-keeping skills.
• Written skills.
• Organisational skills.
• Teamwork skills.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

NHS employees are paid on a rising scale within defined pay bands, according to their skills and responsibilities. The pay rates given below are approximate.

In the NHS, orthoptists earn in the range of £21,176 - £25,472 a year, rising to £30,460 - £40,157 with experience. People in senior positions can earn up to £67,134 per year.

Pay rates in the private sector are broadly in line with those of the NHS.

Hours of work

Orthoptists usually work 37.5 hours a week, Monday to Friday.

Where could I work?

The NHS employs most orthoptists (in hospitals and in the community). A small number of orthoptists work in private hospitals, in university research and in teaching undergraduate orthoptists.

Opportunities for orthoptists occur in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised on the NHS Jobs website, in local/national newspapers and on job boards.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes and training

To become an orthoptist, you need to complete a degree course in orthoptics.

Degree courses are available at the universities of Liverpool, Sheffield and Glasgow Caledonian. They take three years to complete and include subjects such as theoretical and clinical orthoptics, optics, the anatomy of the eye, physiology and pathology. Students also spend time gaining clinical experience in hospitals and community settings.

Having completed your degree, you will be able to apply for registration with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC); you need this to work as an orthoptist.

The University of Liverpool runs a Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Year 0) course. This is for people who don't have the academic A levels usually needed for entry to the University's orthoptics degree (or other health-related and veterinary courses). Please see the University's website for information about entry requirements.

Progression

In the NHS, orthoptists can follow a structured career path. Progression might lead into an orthoptist specialist and then advanced orthoptist role. You could also move into a research or teaching post.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

This career is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to.

This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.
Qualifications

For entry to a degree course in orthoptics, the usual minimum requirement is:

- 3 A levels. Biology will usually either be preferred or essential.
- GCSEs at grade C and above, to include English, Maths and a science subject. Liverpool University specifies that you should have 6 GCSEs at A*-C, taken in one sitting, including English, Maths and Biology or Science.

Equivalent qualifications, such as Edexcel (BTEC) level 3 Nationals and the International Baccalaureate Diploma, might be acceptable for entry - please check prospectuses carefully.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A-level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Courses

If you don't have the qualifications needed to enter a degree in orthoptics, you might be able to start one after completing a college or university Access course, such as Access to Science. You don't usually need any qualifications to start an Access course, although you should check this with the course provider.

The University of Liverpool runs a Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Year 0) course. This is for people who don't have the academic A levels usually needed for entry to the University's orthoptics degree (or other health-related and veterinary courses). Please see the University's website for information about entry requirements.

Funding

To get financial support from the NHS, you need to meet certain criteria. If you meet the criteria, you'll usually have your tuition fees paid in full and you might get a bursary. You will receive a £1,000 grant each year. You can apply for a means-tested bursary of up to £4,395 each year (or more in London).

For more information, see the NHS Business Services Authority website.

Statistics

- 13% of people in occupations such as orthoptist work part-time.
- 2% have flexible hours.

Further Information

Professional institutions

Professional institutions have the following roles:

- To support their members.
- To protect the public by keeping standards high in their professions.

The British and Irish Orthoptic Society is the professional institution for this career.

Contacts

- **Health Careers**
  Website: [www.nhscareers.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk)

- **NHS Wales Careers**
  Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare
  Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk
  Website: [www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090)

- **NHS Jobs**
Website: www.jobs.nhs.uk

**Step into the NHS**  
NHS careers  
Tel: 0345 6060655  
Website: www.stepintothenns.nhs.uk

**Skills for Health**  
Skills for the health sector  
Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP  
Tel: 0117 9221155  
Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk  
Website: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

**Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)**  
Address: Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BU  
Tel: 0845 3006184  
Email: education@hcpc-uk.org  
Website: www.hcpc-uk.org

**NHS Education for Scotland (NES)**  
Scottish enquiries  
Address: Westport 102, West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN  
Tel: 0131 6563200  
Email: enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk  
Website: www.nes.scot.nhs.uk

**NHS Business Services Authority**  
Website: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk

**Eyecare Trust**  
Address: PO Box 804, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 9DF  
Tel: 0845 1295001  
Email: info@eyecaretrust.org.uk  
Website: www.eyecaretrust.org.uk

**British and Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS)**  
Address: 62 Wilson Street, London EC2A 2BU  
Tel: 01353 665541  
Website: www.orthoptics.org.uk

**Related Careers**

- Dispensing Optician  
- Optometrist