



Orthoptist

Career Profile

An **orthoptist** specialises in diagnosing and managing a range of eye conditions that affect eye movement and visual development. Understanding the eye and the role of the brain in visual experience are key to Orthoptic work. Orthoptists treat patients of **all ages**. Their caseload is extremely varied. Most of their work with babies and children involves amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (misalignment of the eyes/squint). They also specialise in neurological episodes that cause an eye muscle/nerve weakness resulting in double vision.

Orthoptists work as a **multidisciplinary team**. They usually work as part of a hospital team, but may also work in community healthcare and schools, including special schools. Orthoptics is suited to individuals interested in science and health care.

Qualifications

You will need to complete an undergraduate degree in orthoptics at one of the following:

- [Glasgow Caledonian University](#)
- [University of Liverpool](#)
- [University of Sheffield](#)

Or you can undertake an accelerated postgraduate MSc degree if you already have an undergraduate degree in a relevant* field at:

- [University College London \(UCL Institute of Ophthalmology\)](#)
- [University of Liverpool](#)

** relevant subject areas include biological sciences, chemistry, nursing and psychology. This is not an exhaustive list, however.*



Courses include [theory](#) and [clinical practice](#), and last three years full-time (four years in Scotland). The Orthoptics (pre-registration) postgraduate courses are 2-year full-time programmes. You will apply theoretical knowledge of neuroanatomy and physiology to a wide range of clinical scenarios during practical placements, where you will prepare to become autonomous practitioners. You will also learn essential principles for understanding and undertaking research, with the opportunity to undertake an orthoptic-based clinical research project.

There is a well-developed [preceptorship](#) programme for [newly qualified orthoptists](#), designed by early career orthoptists who recognise the support and skill development required to consolidate their knowledge into practice. For more information visit: orthoptics.org.uk/preceptorship

Responsibilities

As an orthoptist, you'll need to:

- assess, interpret and diagnose eye position and eye movement disorders
- assess and interpret a patient's visual development
- investigate causes of vision and visual field loss
- formulate a treatment plan, which might include prescribing an eye patch, eye exercises or the use of prisms
- manage medicines
- refer patients for further tests or investigations
- monitor patients' treatment and condition
- undertake general administrative duties relating to patient care
- contribute to service improvement and audit
- be aware of public health initiatives

Professional development

You will have the opportunity to attend a range of events and conferences. These events allow you to network with colleagues and keep up to date with developments in the profession. The ability to take further study at Masters, MRes and PhD level are offered by the universities providing orthoptics degrees.

Salary

New graduates are usually employed into a band 5/preceptorship post for at least 12 -18 months. There is no pre-registration year for orthoptics. More details about the NHS pay scale and current rates can be found [here](#).

In Ireland, a new graduate would be expected to enter the HSE pay scale under Basic Orthoptist progressing to Senior Orthoptist and Clinical Specialist. Full details of the HSE pay scale can be found [here](#).



Career prospects

Studying Orthoptics is interesting and challenging with excellent employment opportunities. The qualification is recognised worldwide. 90 to 100% of Orthoptic graduates find employment within 6 months of graduation with most orthoptists being employed in the NHS, where there is an established career structure. Career progression depends on gaining experience and expanding your role within the eye care team.

Clinical

Many AHPs want to maintain clinical contact when taking on new roles and challenges. There are many opportunities to work at the top of your licence. Specific areas of advanced and extended roles may include:

- glaucoma
- uveitis
- cataracts
- low vision and nystagmus
- stroke
- medical retina
- strabismus management (pre/post-operative and assistant in theatre)
- Paediatric ophthalmology
- Neuro-ophthalmology

Education

Orthoptists can move into teaching roles after obtaining appropriate clinical experience. BIOS runs clinical tutor courses which are a good starting point if you wish to pursue a career in academia. You could work towards becoming a lead clinical tutor and developing relationships with the universities. You can deliver ad hoc lectures or take on a full-time academic post. Academic staff usually undertake a mix of teaching, administrative and research activities. Academic roles offer great flexibility and variety in terms of day-to-day work, as well as opportunities to explore and innovate in specific areas of interest. Health Education England supports formal clinical academic careers allowing orthoptists to work clinically, whilst undertaking teaching and research activities – allowing them to retain an element of direct patient care.

Research

As a qualified practitioner, you will have an appreciation of the importance of research through the degree course. There are many ways that you can continue to be involved in research, including engaging with the evidence base in your day-to-day work as a health practitioner. You might support or be directly involved in clinical research delivery, or further develop as a Clinical Research Lead. Orthoptists can specialise in health research while retaining their clinical work.



Management and leadership

There are many ways to transform clinical careers and influence the way that we sit in the wider workforce. You can become involved in:

- Mentoring
- Operational management
- Project management
- Quality improvement
- Commissioning
- Digital leadership
- Sponsored secondments

It's possible to progress through the grades and eventually take up a clinical management post. As the head of an orthoptics department, you'll have responsibility for staff and managing a budget whilst retaining your clinical work.

Work experience

At your interview, you should have a good understanding of what orthoptics is and are advised to observe an orthoptist in practice before applying for a place. This will show your interest in, and commitment to, the profession.

Remember to include details of relevant work experience in your university application. Experience working in a caring or healthcare environment, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, is also useful. Working with children, people with special needs and the elderly is particularly relevant.

For more information or if you would like to arrange work experience local to you, please contact careers@orthoptics.org.uk

Doing orthoptics gives me the chance to be able to help new people every day.

Emmanuel
Graduate Orthoptist

