

**SECTION 10:  
STUDENTS  
SECTION**

## Thinking of working abroad?

AHPs are likely to gain both personally and professionally from working overseas but the purpose should be to facilitate function and inclusion for people with disabilities.

There are usually two main reasons why students choose to go abroad.

1. Seeking a placement abroad, either an official elective as part of their university course or just to gain experience during their holidays.
2. To work abroad following graduation either on a voluntary basis or paid.

Other reasons why a student may wish to go abroad may include:

1. Accompanying a partner
2. Have family and friends abroad
3. Travel and adventure
4. International experience
5. Personal development
6. Study
7. Clinical work

It can be quite difficult for students to find appropriate work abroad. Please be understanding. Although as visitors we probably gain at least as much as our hosts, the interests of the host country must always come first. Providing opportunities for students, places demands on a host organisation that can be unmanageable in some low-income contexts.

It can also be quite difficult for students to find appropriate work abroad due to the supervision that needs to be provided for students. Nevertheless, there are opportunities to find student placements abroad. The first port of call should be your university which might have established links to organisations and hospitals abroad. Fellow students who went through placements abroad are also a good source of information as it will help you to draw on previous experiences.

There are lots of small organisations/charities who welcome general volunteers but they are not likely to appear on the top pages when you do a search online but might require a thorough search to identify these.

There are also gap year organisations and of course independent projects as well as planned electives. A second language is always an advantage and it might involve significant costs (£200 - £500 per week).

Here are some examples of organisations that may be able to help you'

<http://www.worktheworld.co.uk/>

<http://www.challengesworldwide.com>

<http://www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/>

Make sure you keep documentation from your university, such as your course transcripts, details of the curriculum, course/programme/module handbooks and university student handbooks. These will be essential if you work internationally at a later stage – you will almost certainly need to provide your original documents, or certified copies, during the application process.

You should also keep in touch with your personal tutor/reference provider after graduation, because they may have to be approached for references.

If you prefer to secure a placement via an agency, such as:

- Work the World <http://www.worktheworld.co.uk>
- Projects Abroad <http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk>

Please consider that you need to pay for their services and air fares are not usually included.

## **Physiotherapy students:**

The CSP developed resources for its student members which can be found in the following

link: <http://www.csp.org.uk/professional-union/careers-development/employment/working-internationally/volunteering-electives>

CSP student members are covered by the organisation's insurance subject to conditions outlined in the respective documents <http://www.csp.org.uk/professional-union/practice/insurance>

If you are not yet qualified (or even if you are but have not yet received your HPCP registration) you must **not** work (paid or unpaid) as a physiotherapist.

## **Speech and Language Therapy students:**

**CTI do not recommend that student Speech and Language therapists work abroad unless with a supervised university project.**

Private arrangements are also not recommended. CTI strongly recommends the following guidelines for student Speech and Language Therapists:

If you have not qualified at home, you must **not** work (paid or unpaid) as a Speech and Language Therapist elsewhere, either. This will require scrupulous care in how you present yourself to others who may not appreciate that you are unqualified.

Before travelling during the pre-registration year, an SLT should fulfil **all 3** of the following criteria:

- 1. You should have successfully completed at least 50% of your pre-registration training course**
- 2. AND you should have successfully completed at least two clinical placements in your home country, including one with adult clients and one with children.** This applies regardless of your expected area of clinical practice overseas, as patients are often not filtered through clear clinical pathways
- 3. AND you should have robust arrangements for clinical supervision in person on site throughout your period of overseas work.** Your supervisor should have at least four years' post qualification experience. Skype/email/telephone supervision is not appropriate for students.
- 4. Students must not provide dysphagia care in a low income context unless under the supervision of an SLT with at least four years specialist dysphagia experience. See note on Eating and Drinking Difficulties Section.**

## Occupational Therapy students:

- If you have not yet qualified and received your HCPC registration, you must **not** work (paid or unpaid) as an Occupational Therapist anywhere in the world. See the College of Occupational Therapists code of ethics preface clause iv and standard 5.1.
- The College of Occupational Therapists offers guidance on international placements for BAOT student members which can be found here :

<https://www.cot.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/public/CODE-OF-ETHICS-2015.pdf>

<https://www.cot.co.uk/students/international-placements>

You will need to check with your university about arrangements for international placements as they may or may not offer them. Your university may have exchange programmes in place for international placements. Some universities may expect you to meet certain standards before going on international placement.

Regarding insurance

Information about professional liability insurance for occupational therapy students is available on the website

<https://www.cot.co.uk/independent-practice/briefing-66-professional-indemnity-insurance-baot-members>.

Discuss also with your college as they may have arrangements.

If you are going to arrange a placement for yourself, make sure you have enough time to organise it. Some companies can arrange them for you; however, this can be a very expensive option. Many countries where OTs are practicing have a local OT association.

Contact local associations to find out what support they can provide in finding and supporting you in a placement. See

<http://www.wfot.org/Membership/CountryandOrganisationProfiles.aspx> to find contact details for OT associations

## Professional Liability Insurance (PLI)

**Physiotherapists:** As a CSP member you are covered for temporary work abroad (except Australia, USA and Canada) as long as you hold a full membership, the placement is on a

temporary basis and you are registered and licensed to work as a physiotherapist in the host country.

**Speech and Language Therapists:** The professional liability insurance provided by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists **does not** extend to overseas work.

## STUDENT EXPERIENCES

### Physiotherapy student

In 2015, I spent four weeks in a rehabilitation clinic in Pokhara, Nepal and the overall experience was amazing as I treated local patients with a range of different conditions, met healthcare professionals and students from around the world, experienced physiotherapy in a low resource setting and explored the local area during my free time.

When completing an elective through a third-party company, a significant fee is often involved. A portion of these fees will be donated to the clinical site you are at and given that most electives are in low resource settings, this revenue stream is well received by the sites and they will happily welcome students to ensure a continuation of the funds.

It is important to strike a balance between spending time at the clinical site and meeting the requirements asked of you and enjoying the non-clinical activities. There may also exist the opportunity to attend outreach projects or to visit other clinical sites that are known to your supervisor or local elective manager, which can really add value to your time overseas (for example, whilst in Nepal, myself and a group of other students from the house had the opportunity to visit a [leprosy hospital](#) – a unique and memorable experience)

Unlike clinical placements in the UK, local staff are not duty bound to guide your learning or provide teaching, so the amount of clinical experience achieved is entirely down to the student. It is of course advisable to be as proactive as possible to gain the most from your time there, but when you consider factors such as language barriers and clinical inexperience, it is easy to see how a student can become a passive observer whilst on an overseas elective.

Another factor to consider is how the more relaxed atmosphere of an overseas elective can potentially lead to a drop in ethical or professional standards, as there will be no formal assessor or guidelines for performance directing you. It is important, therefore, to act as if

on a clinical placement in the UK and maintain the level of service and professional standards expected by students in the UK.

It will probably also be the case that you will experience treatments and approaches to care and rehabilitation that are different to those practised in the UK. One such experience in Nepal was the prolific use of electrotherapy in the clinic. Every patient received electrotherapy of some sort whether indicated or not. This led to a discussion about the validity of using electrotherapy on all patients and the lack of evidence around electrotherapy. Our supervisor responded with the simple answer that because the patients have such little faith in manual therapy and exercise prescription alone, they must be provided with an electrotherapy modality for them to feel that they are receiving treatment, thereby ensuring participation with therapy. This demonstrated to me the need to be understanding towards local beliefs and attitudes towards healthcare as circumstances in countries such as Nepal are very different to those in the UK and care must be taken not to be dogmatic in the application of Western practices over those practised in the low resource nation, especially if such practices cause no harm to the patient (as was the case with the use of electrotherapy in the clinic I was based at).

I would recommend an overseas elective to anyone wishing to experience physiotherapy in a different setting to the UK.

If you are currently considering volunteering overseas, please see the Useful Resources section on the [ADAPT website here](#) for ideas on projects and locations.

If you have already decided that an overseas elective is for you, the following points may be worth considering:

- If going through a third-party company, they will always say that the placement is great – they are trying to sell it to you! Ask to be put in touch with someone who has done the placement before to see how they found it. Look for a company who is honest and upfront with putting you in touch with previous students immediately, as a delayed response may suggest something has gone wrong previously.
- Get a named contact that can personally and consistently deal with your application so that you are not passed from person to person each time you contact them.
- Ensure that you choose a specific placement in a well-established clinical site so that it meets what you are looking for.

- Ensure that the clinical site is used to having foreign students at their location. Is it developed for students with a structured programme?
- Whenever possible, give feedback to both the supervisor and the company as to how the elective could be improved so as to make it more enjoyable for subsequent students.

#### Post-stroke upper limb rehabilitation



#### Electrotherapy



#### Pros:

- Opportunities to meet and network with healthcare professionals from around the world
- Gain clinical experience
- Language barriers can help develop non-verbal communication skills and strategies
- Working in a low resource setting develops problem-solving skills

#### Cons:

- Can be very expensive if a third-party company is used
- Not knowing the language presents an opportunity for learning, but it can impede effectiveness of treatments
- Quality and consistency of supervision is variable
- Potential to become a passive observer if not proactive

## Occupational Therapy Student

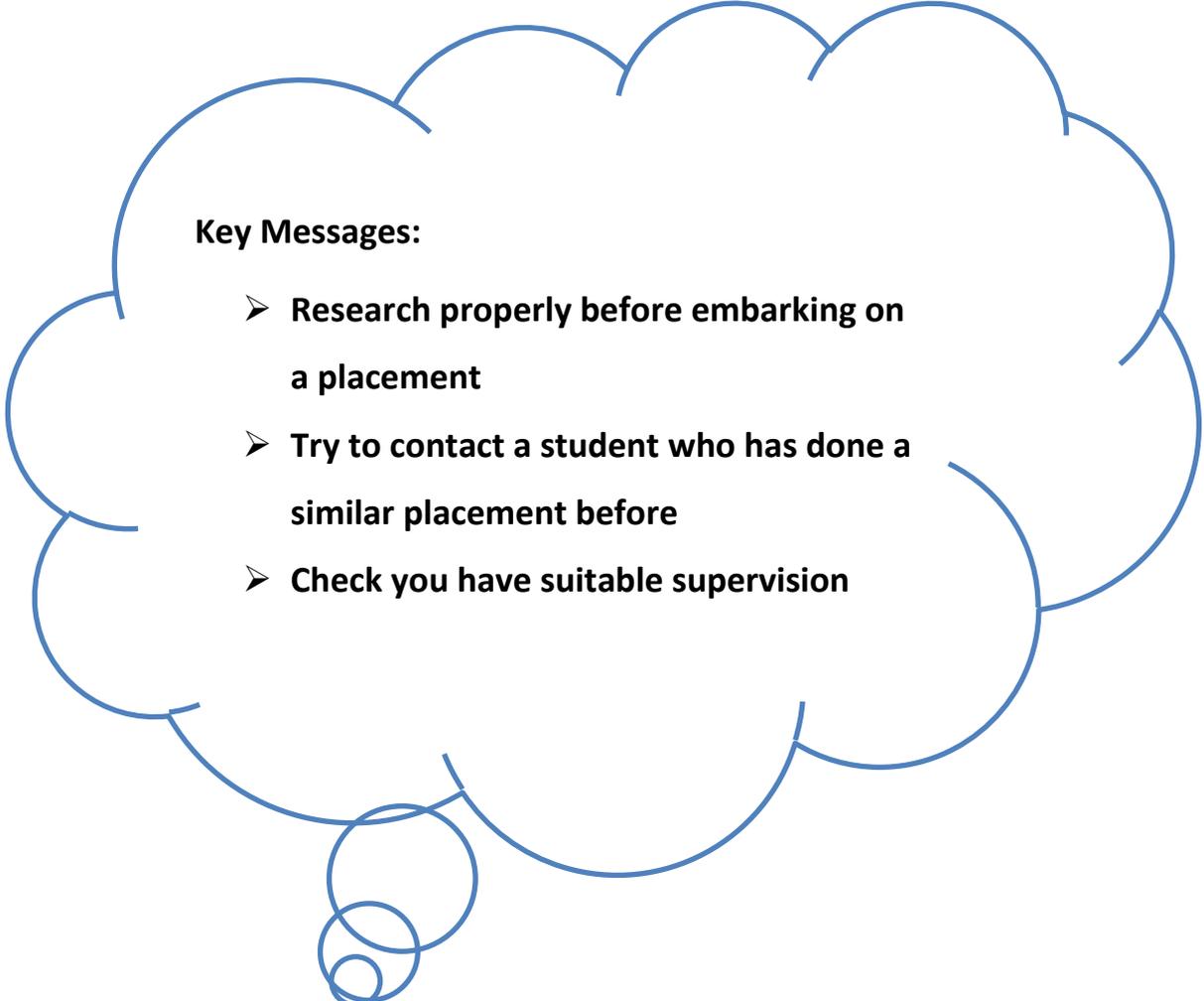
My first experience of volunteering abroad as a student was not linked to my university; rather it was with a student run charity. I volunteered in a country in Eastern Europe over my summer break from university. This experience gave me professional and personal skills for the future, as well as fantastic memories. I've had the opportunity to reflect on the great experiences, as well as some of the difficulties I experienced during that placement, namely the issues of supervision and sustainability.

Although a formal supervision structure was in place, it was not always sufficient to deal with the clinical, cultural and safeguarding issues that arose on a daily basis. Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure safe clinical practice, and even more so when you are working as a student in what might be an unfamiliar culture.

The sustainability of this project was an issue that was commonly discussed however solutions were difficult to identify and put in place. During my time volunteering I was grappling with the issue that the support we offered was only available during the summer months and by students.

When I qualified as an occupational therapist I had the opportunity to complete another volunteer placement, in a different country in Eastern Europe, this time for a period of 6 months. Due to my previous experience I was mindful to research the charity that offered the placement. During the interview process I asked about supervision and sustainability. I was reassured when the charity were able to answer my questions, giving clear advice on these issues demonstrating that this was something that they valued. On this placement I was offered formal supervision with a local occupational therapy lecturer. This was very important as my supervisor was not only able to offer clinical guidance, but also ensure that the project and my practice were informed by local knowledge and experience, making it more culturally safe and relevant. Sustainability of the project was ensured by referring into and working alongside a newly established local occupational therapy practice.

I would urge students that are considering a placement abroad to ask questions and research the supervision offered and the sustainability of a placement.



**Key Messages:**

- **Research properly before embarking on a placement**
- **Try to contact a student who has done a similar placement before**
- **Check you have suitable supervision**