Provision of early career support to prosthetists and orthotists

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2. Funding

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3. Overview of this report

This report takes an in-depth look at retention and support mechanisms for prosthetic and orthotic professionals in the early stages of their careers. It reviews current resources available to students and recent graduates to advance professionally, identifying gaps in existing support and highlighting challenges students and new graduates face when entering the workforce. Based on these insights, the report puts forward recommendations to guide enhanced early career support and retention. This will assist service managers in supporting new graduates and promote optimised practice-based learning to broaden the scope of practice. This will serve to boost the capabilities and confidence of prosthetists and orthotists as they transition into the vital early stages of their careers.

4. List of abbreviations

AHP	Allied health professionals
BAPO	The British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists
HCPC	The Health and Care Professions Council
HEE	Health Education England
HEI	Higher education institution
ISPO	The International Society of Prosthetic and Orthotics
NHS	The National Health Service
NOMAG	The National Orthotic Managers' Association Group
P&O	Prosthetic and Orthotic
PO	Prosthetist and Orthotist
WHO	World Health Organisation

5. Executive summary

Recent years has shown a clear growth of the P&O profession in the United Kingdom, with a significant increase in registered practitioners from 699 in 1999 to 1,187 in 2023. However, there are concerns about early attrition rates, with 12.8% (1 in 8) of Prosthetists and Orthotists (POs) exiting the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) register within four years of their initial registration[1].

The purpose of the report is to explore the challenges faced by newly qualified professionals and propose strategies to enhance their support and retention. The objectives include reviewing existing resources, identifying gaps, understanding challenges faced by students and recent graduates, and proposing a set of recommendations to guide enhanced early career support. A review of available information, conducted through a scoping review of the literature and various databases, identifies key themes such as available resources, gaps in support, occupational health risks, and the importance of continuous education through practice-based learning. The report was further informed through a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and focus groups, to gather quantitative and qualitative data from students, apprentices, and newly qualified professionals.

Key quantitative findings include a need for more direct involvement of POs in research generation, a need for early career networks, and continuous practice-based learning to improve P&O care quality. The survey responses and focus group discussions provided further insights into the experiences of new prosthetists and orthotists, emphasising the difficulties of adapting to responsibilities and expectations due to a lack of structured preceptorship and mentoring in the early years of practice.

The findings indicate a clear need to strengthen onboarding programs, socialisation, mentoring, and skills development for emerging P&O professionals to achieve this there is a requirement to ensure all POs, regardless of employment model, have access to effective preceptorship, mentoring, and on-boarding programmes.

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6. Introduction

Prosthetists and orthotists are autonomous allied health professionals (AHPs) who assess, design and fit prosthetic and orthotic devices to improve body image, enhance mobility, protect joints, and reduce pain. At the time of this report, approximately 1,200 prosthetists/orthotists (POs) were registered in the United Kingdom (UK). Until recently, to qualify as a PO the completion of a 3–4-year university degree (from the Universities of Strathclyde and Salford) was required, with a focus on biomechanics, material science, and technical componentry, along with anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology. Now there are additional options in the UK including a two-year prosthetic and orthotic master's course leading to registration as a PO (Keele University) and a three-year prosthetic and orthotic degree apprenticeship (University of Derby).

Prosthetic and orthotic (P&O) technicians play a vital role in manufacturing custom devices as specified by POs using their specialised skills. P&O support workers assist in delivering patient care under supervision. Together this P&O workforce provides specialised services to support those with a range of healthcare needs including limb absence, spinal conditions, neurological disorders, congenital disorders, trauma, and musculoskeletal conditions.

Newly qualified POs are critical for advancing this healthcare profession and shaping its future growth. The profession has expanded significantly, with HCPC registrants increasing from 699 in 1999 to 1,187 in 2023. However, a recent report reveals concerning early attrition, with 12.8% (1 in 8) of POs leaving the HCPC register within four years of their initial registration [1]. This report emphasises the need to improve transitional support programs and ongoing professional development opportunities to retain talented POs. Its comprehensive data enables evidence-based decisions to nurture this vital, specialised workforce. Targeted efforts to understand and address pressures like attrition are essential to support the profession's continued advancement.

7. Purpose of this report

This report will focus on the newly qualified workforce and early-career priorities. The strategic goal is to enhance the optimisation of practice-based learning and scopes of practice for early career (first two years of practice) practitioners, aiming to boost the capability and confidence of graduates entering the workforce. NHS England (NHSE) has established the delivery objective to heighten system responsibility for new AHP graduates and enhance support mechanisms, aiming to optimise their contributions to the workforce.

Exploring the landscape, the report will investigate the assets and resources accessible to students and early graduates via a scoping review of the available literature, identifying areas that may require updates. Additionally, via an in-depth survey of UK P&O students and graduates and a series of dedicated focus groups, this report will examine the platforms used to access resources for early career support, highlighting the diverse avenues available. Delving further, it will explore how early career support can benefit both students and graduates, aiming to understand the potential advantages. Finally, the report will assess whether the resources provided for early careers contribute to boosting the confidence of entry-level professionals as they make the transition into employment. Through this comprehensive mixed methods approach, the report aims to provide a thorough understanding of the support ecosystem for early-career prosthetists and orthotists.

The specific objectives of this report are to:

- review the current resources available for students and the newly qualified workforce to advance in their early careers.
- identify gaps in current resources available for early careers.
- identify issues/challenges for students and recent graduates moving into the profession.
- propose recommendations for early career support and retention based on the best available evidence.

8. Review of available information

Within the wider healthcare system, prosthetics and orthotics play a crucial role by offering individuals prosthetic limbs and supportive devices, thereby enhancing their mobility, independence, and overall quality of life. The demand for well-trained and highly skilled professionals in P&O is on the rise, driven by an ageing population and an increasing number of individuals with disabilities[2]. Early career professionals in P&O encounter various challenges including limited access to professional networks and resources, and a lack of standardised mentoring and preceptorship programmes across private and NHS employment models. The added dynamic nature of the field with continuous technological advancements can also be difficult to navigate for early career professionals.

Recognising the significance of understanding the support available to early career professionals, this section of the report seeks to address the current research gap by offering a comprehensive review of available information. It aims to explore the level of support and guidance accessible to these professionals in terms of training opportunities, mentorship programs, and professional development resources. Through this examination, the report strives to contribute to the growth and advancement of the P&O field, ultimately ensuring that patients receive optimal care.

8.1 Key sources of information and methods

A scoping review of the literature on prosthetists, orthotists, and related technicians and support workers was conducted following PRISMA-ScR guidelines. The eligibility criteria included articles directly relevant to these roles published in English between 1997-2022. Both peer-reviewed and grey literature were included. Grey literature required relevance to the research questions with accessible full-text pages in English.

The bibliographic databases searched were Google Scholar, CINAHL, EThOS, and BASE. Duplicates were removed before grey literature searching. Due to limitations, grey literature searches focused on "prosthetist OR orthotist" without additional terms. Relevant grey literature consisted of reports, PDFs, and webpages from professional bodies, government agencies, training providers, and employers. International professional body guidelines, including the ones from the United States of America (USA) and Australia, were included in the grey literature search. The Bielefeld Academic Search Engine (BASE) and the British Library Thesis Database were also searched for relevant articles. While not exhaustive, this scoping methodology identified potentially relevant literature on prosthetists, orthotists, technicians, and support workers from the past 25 years to inform the review. The inclusion of targeted grey literature alongside peer-reviewed articles provides a comprehensive view of the current landscape.

8.2 Results and identified themes

The literature search identified 64 relevant sources of which 29.7% (19/64) were of academic literature[3–12], and the rest were from the following three categories[13–24]:

- Professional bodies - 20.3% (13/64)
- NHS Education reports/webpages - 18.8% (12/64)
- Government health reports/webpages - 3.1% (2/64)

17.2% (11/64) of records were excluded after screening for lack of relevance. All academic literature focused directly on prosthetists/orthotists. The other literature included UK population demographics on prosthetists/orthotists and several international documents from Australia, Canada, and the USA. The search yielded a wider evidence base, albeit with an international rather than UK focus. Based on the identified sources, the following themes were developed.

- Resources and assets for early-career professionals in prosthetics and orthotics to access research opportunities
- Gaps in available early career support for prosthetists and orthotists
- The need for resources in early careers to mitigate occupational hazards
- Continuous practice-based learning to improve confidence in early careers

Resources and assets for early-career professionals in prosthetics and orthotics to access research opportunities

This scoping review identified a range of resources, recommendations, and challenges for students, graduates, and professionals in prosthetics and orthotics. Although 53 relevant sources were published in the specified timeframe, there is limited research on assets and support networks for allied health early career development. Several concerning challenges face prosthetic and orthotic professionals directly. Andrysek et al.[7] identified gaps in evidence and skills for evidence-based practice. The literature highlights a need for more direct involvement of prosthetists and orthotists in research generation rather than relying solely on professional bodies [12] . The UK professional body which represents POs; the British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists (BAPO) supports this initiative, stating practitioners should participate in research, evaluation, scientific meetings, and publishing.

In an attempt to provide POs with opportunities to get involved with research BAPO partnered with Staffordshire University to create a 'Research Hub'. This research initiative enables POs to get involved in research projects from their conception to completion, learning new research skills, building their confidence, and providing them with exposure to skilled research to guide them as they take their first steps into a research career.

The Orthotic Education Training Trust (OETT) is also available to provide financial support for post-graduate training and education to improve research skills and knowledge and welcomes applications for funding from UK orthotists[25]. The requirement to partake in research is also clearly outlined in the HCPC's standards of proficiency for POs [26].

This report emphasises the need for expanded research resources tailored to supporting those entering the P&O workforce. Building the specialist evidence base through greater engagement of prosthetists and orthotists in research is also vital. Targeted efforts to grow the specialist evidence base and cohort of researchers within prosthetics and orthotics will be vital to inform support strategies.

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Gaps in available early career support for prosthetists and orthotists

Despite some available resources, gaps remain in early career support for P&O students and graduates. Online resources exist like the National AHP Preceptorship and Foundation Support Programme[19] which aims to ensure high-quality preceptorship and foundation support for AHPs transitioning into employment. However specific research on establishing early career networks is lacking[7, 12, 27]. Further efforts are needed to grow tailored transitional programs, mentoring, and professional development. There is also a requirement to ensure all POs, regardless of employment model, have access to such progammes and initiatives.

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The need for resources in early careers to mitigate occupational hazards

Another key area highlighted within the literature relates to occupational health risks for practicing prosthetists and orthotists, emphasising the need for early career support in this area. Anderson et al. [3] conducted the first study characterising P&O injury experiences, highlighting a high incidence of musculoskeletal disorders, concluding that reducing injuries is vital to retaining experienced professionals, and suggesting a preventative focus is needed [5].

In a recent survey, three-quarters of respondents reported experiencing musculoskeletal pain [6]. Noise and chemical exposure risks are also recognised, indicating systematic investigation of appropriate preventative strategies is warranted [4]. These risks are also supported by more recent research, which indicated that POs consistently reported that their working environments were poor, causing job dissatisfaction and a risk of attrition[28]. BAPO has published guidance on working environments that employers should use to ensure the working environment is suitable for the P&O workforce[29].

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The HCPC standards of proficiency for P&O include the importance of understanding health maintenance [26], further highlighting the need to address these occupational concerns during early careers. Targeted efforts are essential to monitor and mitigate occupational health risks for emerging prosthetists and orthotists through workplace evaluations, training, safety protocols, and preventative strategies. Resources must be dedicated to safeguarding the health of these vital specialists to ensure sustainable workforces.

Continuous practice-based learning to improve confidence in early careers

Structured training programs are key to building confidence. A previous study indicated that interactive performance-based training on clinical outcome measures significantly increased prosthetists' confidence [10]. Whilst training reportedly increased the use of and confidence in standardised outcome measures, enhancing clinical practice[11], studies have indicated that a lack of training and motivation are barriers to the use of outcome measures in the UK[30].

Another recent qualitative study[31] using the National Orthotic Managers Association Group (NOMAG) explored orthotists' perspectives on achieving positive outcomes and barriers to using outcome measures in orthotic care. The orthotists felt that successful outcomes depended on setting agreed-upon goals between the orthotist, referrer, and patient. To ensure early career practitioners are able to navigate these barriers, build confidence, and develop skills which ensure productive and effective patient and clinician engagement, continued learning on psycho-social models of healthcare and patient goal setting is required.

These findings support the requirement for continuous practice-based learning to improve P&O care quality. While existing studies demonstrate the positive impacts of tailored training programs, further research is needed on translating training into improved service delivery. Expanding access to impactful training that boosts capabilities and confidence should be a priority for emerging prosthetists and orthotists. Targeted implementation paired with evaluation of training effects on both competence and service outcomes will be key to optimising early career development and improving patient care.

These findings support the requirement for continuous practice-based learning to improve P&O care quality.

9. The state of play in the United Kingdom

Our synthesis of the available literature identified several key gaps in the current resources available for early-career prosthetists and orthotists. Transitioning from education into the profession poses several challenges for new graduates, which may have contributed to high attrition rates in the first years of practice. To address these gaps and challenges, this review proposes a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening support structures and retention among emerging prosthetic and orthotic professionals.

To develop targeted recommendations for early career support in prosthetics and orthotics in the UK, data collection is needed to identify gaps in current resources and understand the specific challenges faced by students and recent graduates entering the field. By directly surveying and interviewing those in the initial years of practice, crucial insights were gained into factors impacting career development, transitions, and retention at this stage.

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With an evidence base established through analysis of the needs, barriers, and priorities voiced by new practitioners, this data can inform proposals for targeted recommendations focused on strengthening support structures, onboarding, mentorship, and targeted professional development for emerging talent in this vital field. The goal is to develop an informed, pragmatic, and sustainable approach to enhancing early career experiences, success rates, and retention based on the actual needs and perspectives of prosthetic and orthotic trainees and novices in the UK context.

9.1 Research design and methods

This study utilised a mixed-methods approach combining surveys embedded in a prosthetics and orthotics workforce questionnaire and a focus group to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The survey collected closed and open-ended responses on topics like career goals and support needs. A semi-structured focus group further explored survey themes with early career professionals. The quantitative survey data underwent descriptive analysis and the qualitative focus group data underwent thematic analysis. Integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of support for those entering the prosthetics and orthotics field. The sequential design with the focus group building on the survey results provided an opportunity to expand on key issues emerging from the initial survey. Overall, the mixed-methods approach leveraged the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide robust insights.

9.2 Quantitative results

The survey was completed by a total of 146 UK PO students and apprentices, with 140 students and 6 apprentices participating. The key findings are presented below.

9.2.1 Registering as a prosthetist/orthotist in the UK after graduation

Of the student and apprentice respondents, 92% reported that they planned to register as a prosthetist/orthotist in the UK after graduation (see Figure 1). The remaining 8% explained that they did not plan to register for various reasons. Eight of these respondents were international students or wished to work internationally, one was interested in a research career, and one was unhappy with UK pay and conditions.

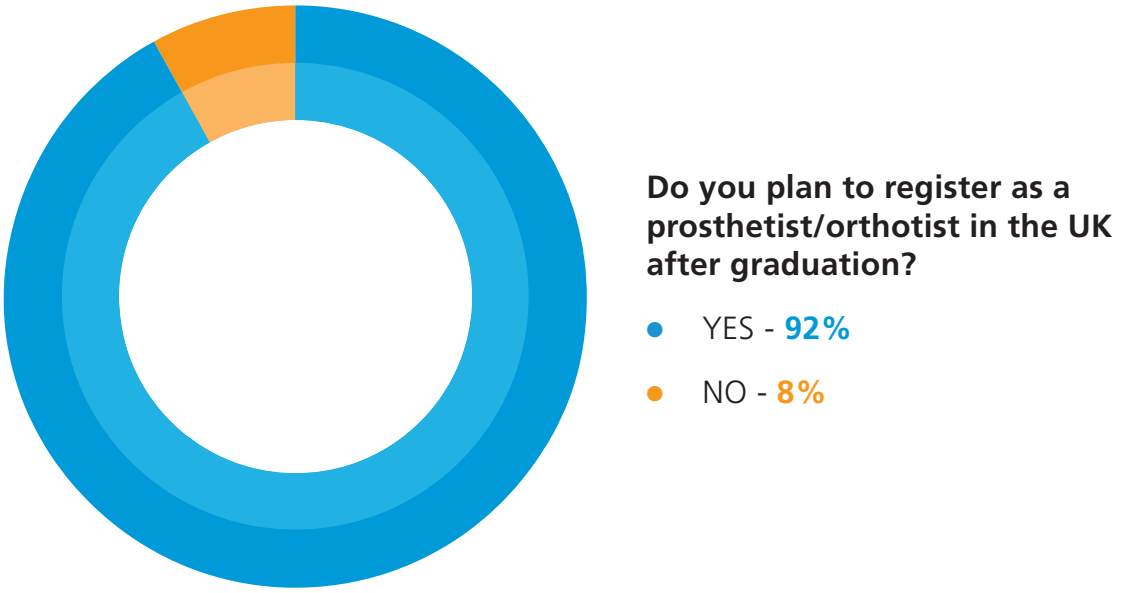

Figure 1: Survey responses for plans to register as a PO in the UK after graduation.

9.2.2 Career goals

When asked about their career goals, respondents were able to select all career goals that applied from a list of fourteen options in addition to the option of specifying their responses (see Figure 2). The most popular career goal was to work as a prosthetist in the UK, selected by 41% of respondents. This was followed closely by the goal of working as a dual practising prosthetist/orthotist in the UK (39%). The third most popular response (39%) was to work as an advanced clinical practitioner, or consultant prosthetist/orthotist, and 27% of respondents indicated a desire to work as an orthotist in the UK.

The most popular career goal was to work as a prosthetist in the UK (41%)... 39% indicated a desire to work as an advanced clinical practitioner...

Career goals of P&O students and new graduates

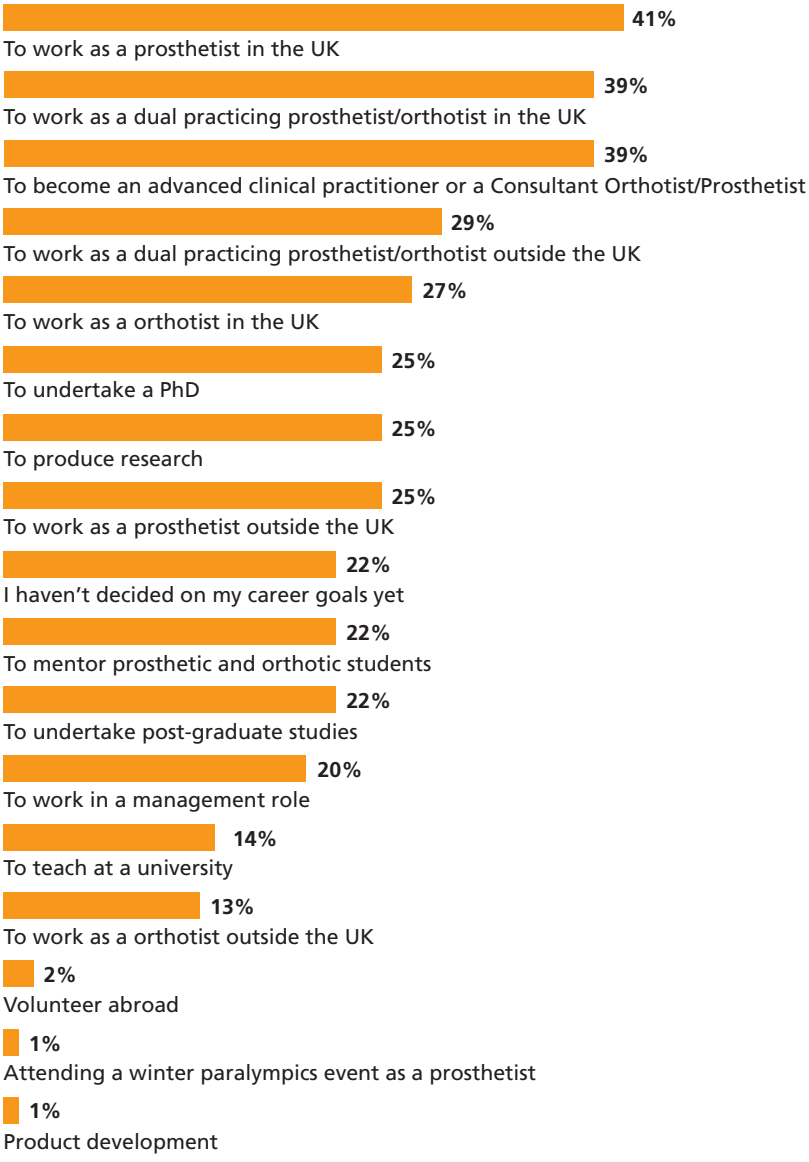

Figure 2: Survey responses for career goals.

9.2.3 Desired work setting

Of the students and apprentices surveyed, 66% who responded to the question on work settings reported that they would like to work in the NHS, and 37% reported that they would like to work for a commercial company. Additionally, 23% reported that they would like to be self-employed, and 18% indicated that they would like to work as a locum. Finally, 23% of respondents reported that they were unsure about what setting they would like to work in.

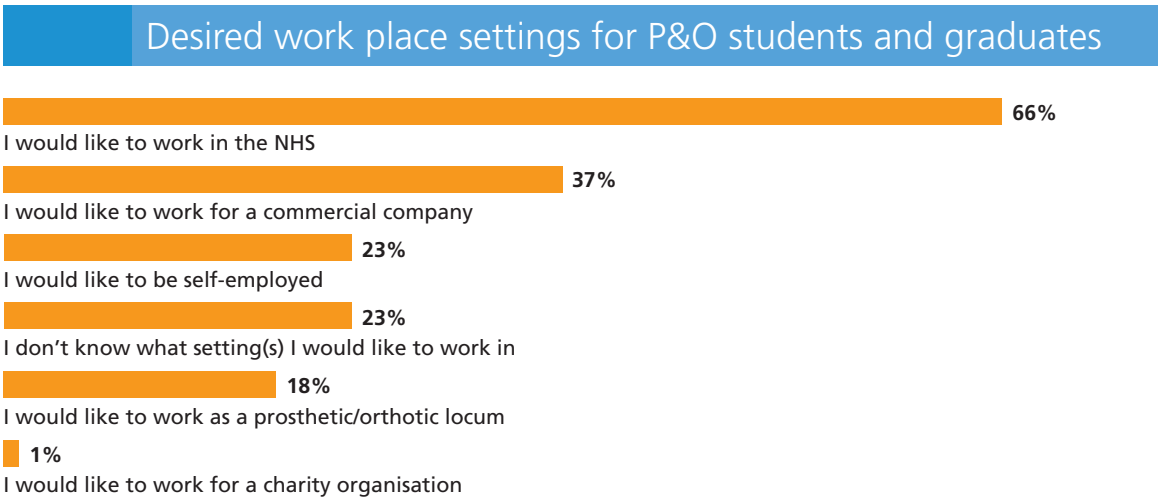

Figure 3: Survey responses for desired workplace settings.

9.2.4 Seeking career guidance

Of the students and apprentices surveyed, 21% reported that they sought career guidance when defining their career goals, 46% did not seek career guidance and 33% did not respond to this question. They reported asking placement supervisors, lecturers, prosthetists, and orthotists about their own experiences, and speaking with the university careers service to discuss possible career options.

9.3 Confidence in the undergraduate course

Overall, there was strong confidence that the undergraduate course is preparing students and apprentices for the skills employers are looking for; 26% rated their confidence as 5/5 (extremely confident), 42% rated it as 4/5, 14% rated it as 3/5, and only 2% rated as 2/5. Three students commented on the need for more activities directly related to prosthetics and orthotics, and one student commented on being behind due to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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9.3.1 Employment opportunities

Student/apprentice survey respondents were asked if they had begun to seek out employment opportunities; 9% stated that they had and one reported having received a job offer.

9.3.2 Applying for their first job

Among the respondents, 7% reported feeling extremely confident about applying for their first job, rating their confidence as 5/5, 17% rated it as 4/5, 38% rated it as 3/5, 8% rated it as 2/5, and 2% rated their confidence as 1/5, not confident at all. Students provided the following comments about factors that could improve their confidence in applying for their first job:

- mock interviews
- speaking to recent graduates
- clinical experience
- Curriculum Vitae revision
- application answers and interview preparation
- help from the university with job applications
- patient practice
- exposure to the NHS clinic and prosthetic and orthotic companies
- and developing skills outside of the undergraduate course

Respondents were asked if they had tried to develop skills, outside of their undergraduate course, to boost their readiness for work (see Figure 4); 25% of students relied solely on the undergraduate course to develop their skills, and some reported participating in volunteering (29%), shadowing (17%), summer jobs (17%), additional courses (5%), and internships (1%).

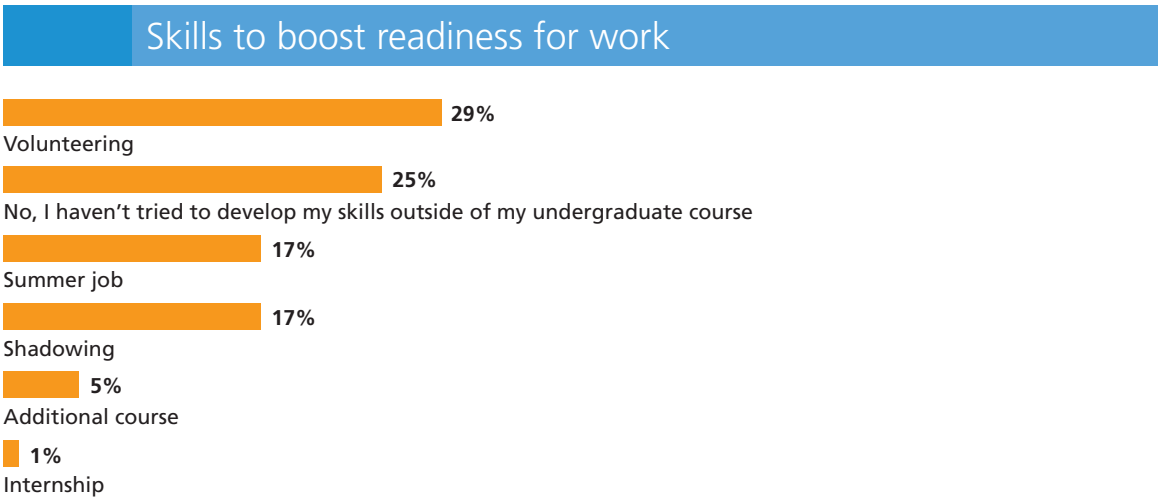

Figure 4: Survey responses for skills to boost readiness for work.

9.4 Preparing to enter the workforce

Students/apprentices were presented with four options and asked to rate their importance when preparing to enter the workforce, with soft skills training (skills needed to communicate, lead, and get along effectively in the workplace, e.g. communication skills) the most highly rated option in terms of importance. Most respondents also ranked curriculum vitae (CV), writing skills, and career guidance as highly important.

The importance of skills in terms of preparing for entering the workforce.

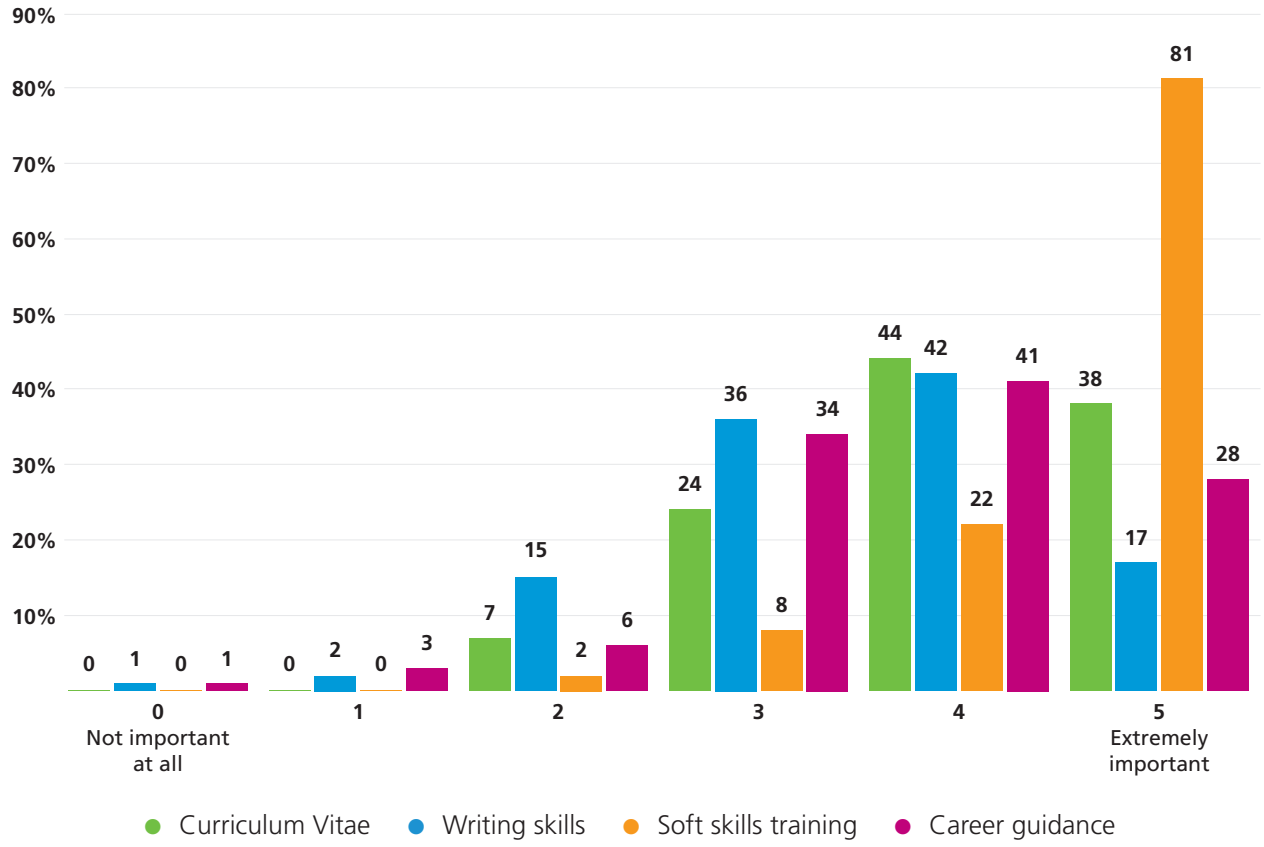

Figure 5: Survey responses for the importance of skills in terms of preparing for entering the workforce.

9.4.1 Job application

Out of the PO workforce survey respondents, 62 were newly qualified (0-2 years' experience), with 34% stating that they used resources and guidance to navigate the job application period. The most commonly used resources included university lecturers, resources, CVs, interview sessions, and careers services, as well as various online resources such as the BAPO website, email adverts, company-specific job postings, LinkedIn, internet research, and company and NHS Trust websites. Friends and colleagues were also sought out to review CVs and cover letters. Additionally, applicants refreshed their knowledge of the field using university notes and researched interview questions. Most participants found these resources and guidance useful in their job application process.

9.4.2 Transitioning from student to work life

Out of the 62 newly qualified prosthetists/orthotists who responded, the majority rated their transition from student life to work life positively, with 23% rating it as extremely well (5/5), 35% as 4/5, and 16% as 3/5. However, 3% rated their transition as 2/5 and 2% as 1/5. Participants suggested that better support from university career services, more time to have clinic appointments with senior clinicians, and improved skills training would have further improved their transition from student life to work life.

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9.4.3 Employer support for new graduates

Respondents were asked if their employer had provided various types of support for new graduates that they benefited from (See Figure 6). Less than half received employer support in the form of the ability to shadow senior colleagues (44%), access to senior staff to discuss patient treatment plans (40%), and increased appointment times (33%). Only 19% of new graduates reported having regular protected CPD time, with less (13%) having regular 1-1 meetings with their line manager.

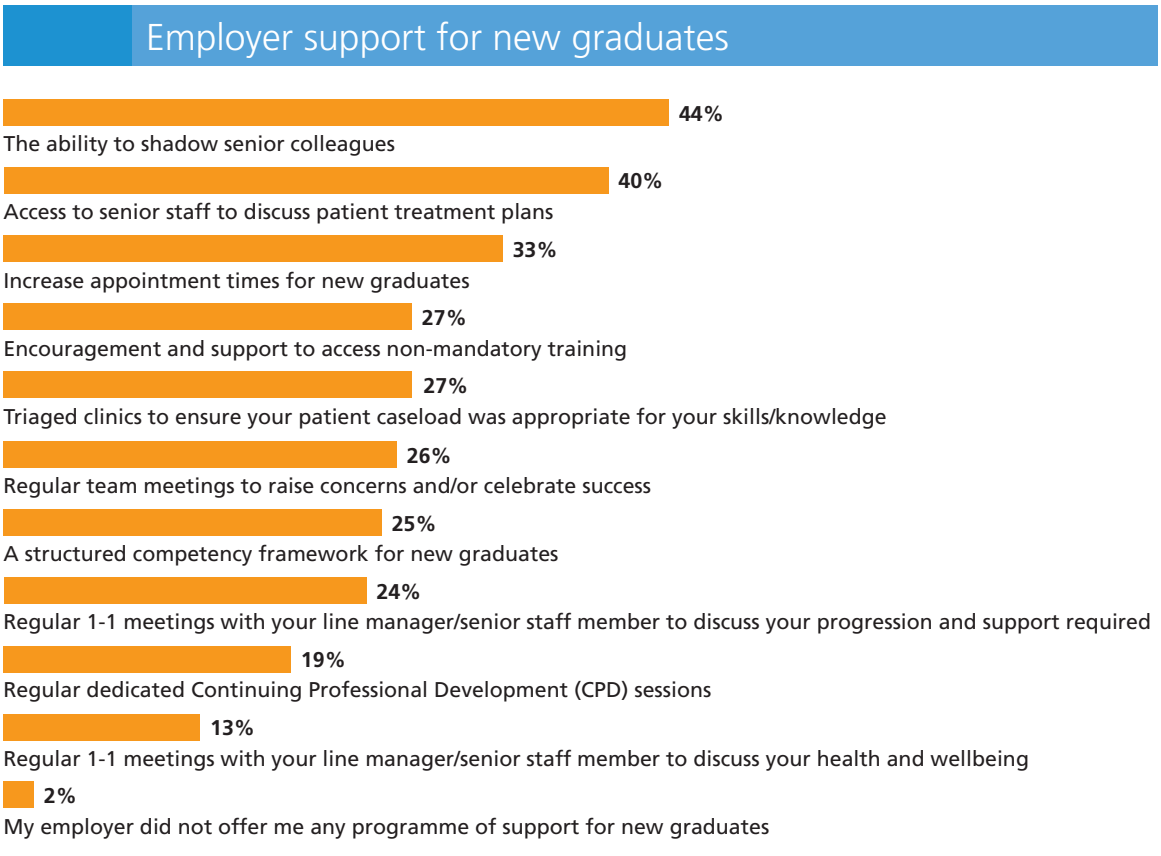

Figure 6: Survey responses for employer support for new graduates.

Out of the respondents, 66% reported that the support they received as a new graduate was beneficial to them, 10% said it wasn't beneficial, and 24% did not respond. Some new graduates reported that they did not receive enough face-to-face support during COVID-19 lockdowns, leading to a struggle to learn on the job. Other participants felt they could have used more 1-to-1 support and shadowing with colleagues. Some new graduates reported that support was reduced once clinicians went off sick or clinics became busy, leaving them to figure things out for themselves. Finally, some participants found it difficult to work with more senior/experienced clinicians due to the amount of lone working across different sites.

9.4.4 Preparedness at the start of the first job

A total of 10% of new graduates rated themselves as being extremely (4/5) prepared for the start of their first job. Of the remaining respondents, 29% rated themselves as 4/5, while 29% rated themselves as 3 out of 5, 10% rated themselves as 2 out of 5, and 2% rated themselves as 1 out of 5. When asked about the challenges of being prepared at the start of their first job, respondents provided several reasons, such as the gap between graduating and starting work due to COVID, the need for more resources to understand the P&O workforce in the UK, time management, moving to a new country, and confidence with patients.

9.4.5 Confidence in the first year of work

Of the POs who responded, 15% rated themselves as having felt extremely confident in their first year of work (5/5). While 23% rated themselves as 4 out of 5, 26% rated themselves as 3 out of 5, 15% rated themselves as 2 out of 5, and 2% rated themselves as 1 out of 5. When asked about the factors that could have improved their confidence in their first year of work, respondents mentioned several factors, such as more blending of university knowledge into work knowledge, better placement information, longer learning in the field of interest, contact with previous graduates, regular meetings to discuss areas of improvement, more experience, more shadowing with colleagues, more support, better university courses, and easier access to extra clinical training.

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9.5 Qualitative Results

A focus group of five recent UK prosthetic and orthotic graduates provided additional insights into early career experiences. Echoing the survey, participants emphasised the need for enhanced mentorship and professional development. Several key themes emerged:

Transition challenges - The stress of new responsibilities, a lack of structured onboarding, and complex patient cases for which the university did not adequately prepare them.

Support and training - The value of guidance from lecturers, senior staff, and experienced colleagues when facing challenging cases. A desire for more structured skills and knowledge development.

Job searching - Difficulties securing jobs after graduation, including lack of application support, and coping with rejection. However mock interviews and senior assistance were beneficial.

Pandemic impacts - Disruptions to education and clinical practice time. Insufficient university support during the pandemic, but additional courses helped fill skills and knowledge gaps.

Overall, the focus group highlighted the need for improved transitional support, onboarding, training, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Despite pandemic-related challenges, participants expressed a willingness to engage in development opportunities to advance their competencies and confidence for workplace success.

9.6 Key findings

Integrated analysis of the survey statistics and focus group themes provided a more comprehensive understanding of the gaps in existing early career support frameworks.

The quantitative and qualitative results were largely consistent. Both groups emphasised the need for more mentorship, training, and professional development opportunities in the transition from education to the workplace.

Key conclusions are that new graduates and current students face multifaceted challenges moving into practice, including a lack of preparedness, time management difficulties, and insufficient confidence with patients.

While some early career respondents felt confident initially, most reported feeling underprepared and wanting more transitional support from universities and employers, along with expanded clinical shadowing and training opportunities to build competence.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative data decisively indicate a need to strengthen onboarding programs, socialisation, mentoring, and skills development for emerging P&O professionals. Implementing targeted evidence-based interventions could significantly benefit confidence, workplace readiness, and retention rates.

10. The support ecosystem and the ways forward

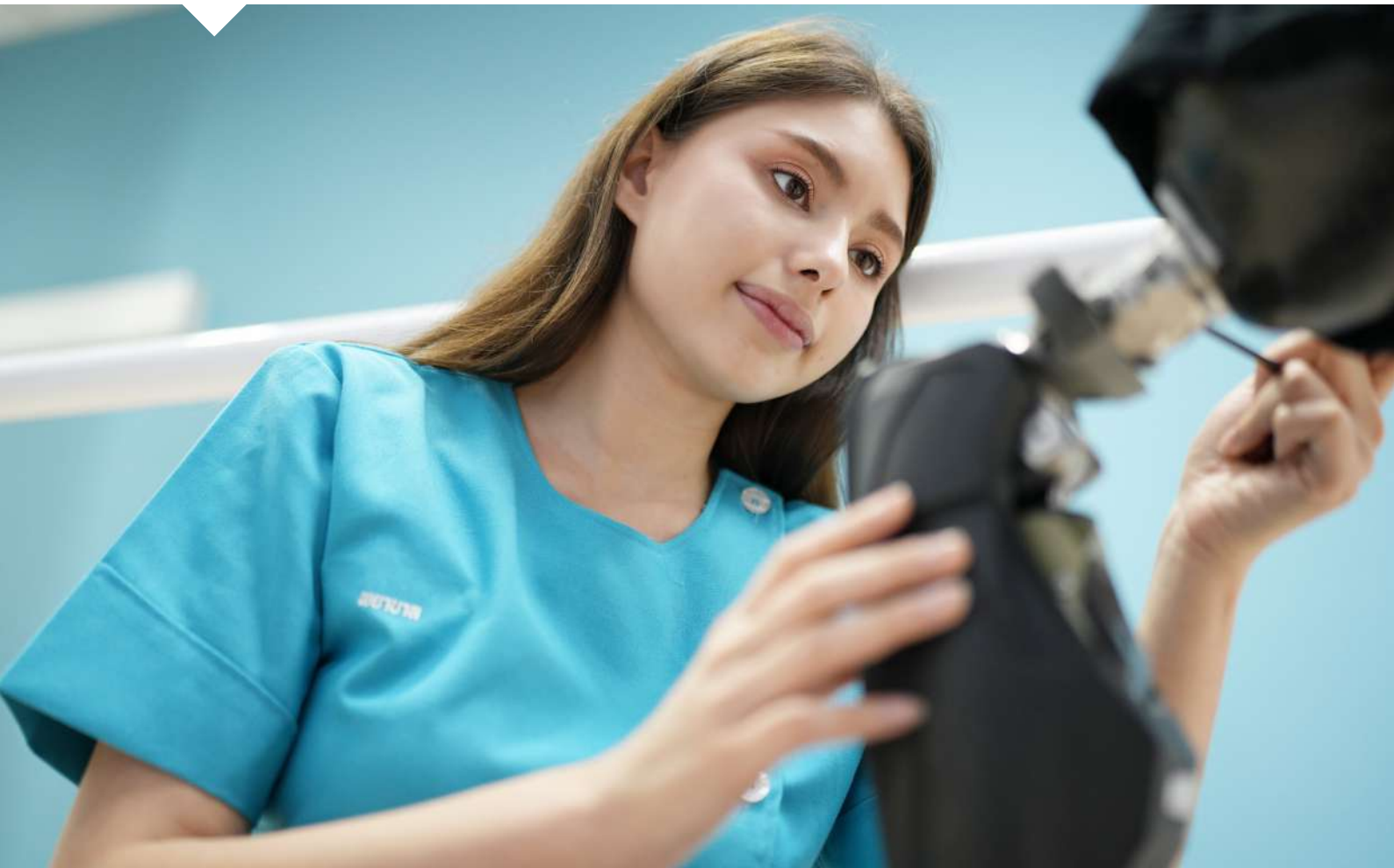
The survey revealed most P&O graduates felt only moderately prepared for their first jobs, with few rating themselves as extremely prepared. P&O professionals face multifaceted challenges transitioning from student roles, including lacking understanding of real-world practice, difficulties managing time with new responsibilities, and insufficient confidence in handling patient cases. External factors such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and gaps in post-graduation support systems contribute to early career professionals feeling underprepared.

The focus group provided further insights into the experiences of new prosthetists and orthotists. Participants emphasised the difficulties of adapting to responsibilities and expectations. For example, the lack of structured onboarding and training on entering the workplace posed challenges, as did encountering complex patient cases for which they felt their education alone had not fully prepared them. Participants also noted that simply the stress of new work duties and accountability created significant hurdles. However, they highlighted the critical value of support and mentorship from more experienced colleagues in managing challenging scenarios.

Integrating the survey responses and focus group commentary indicates a pressing need to enhance training and support for prosthetists and orthotists transitioning from education into practice. Specific recommendations from participants included more assistance from universities and employers in the early years of practice, greater opportunities for continued learning on the job, and more extensive practical training to boost competence.

This indicates room for improvement in preceptorship, mentoring, and on-boarding programmes for PO graduates.

While some beneficial resources currently exist, more systemic efforts are warranted to support new P&O entrants in the UK context. Exploring successful international strategies and increasing investments into this profession's pipeline could significantly strengthen early career assistance frameworks. Addressing these gaps will ultimately enable the field to better nurture newcomers and equip them to deliver high-quality patient-centred care.



11. Recommendations

This report found gaps in support for early-career prosthetists and orthotists in the UK. Survey and focus group data revealed challenges for new graduates transitioning into the workplace, feeling unprepared and lacking confidence. To strengthen the support ecosystem, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Integrate enhanced training and transitional support for prosthetists and orthotists moving from education into practice by introducing structured and standardised preceptorship programmes and onboarding.
- Implement a standardised workplace mentoring program for new prosthetists and orthotists with adherence to BAPO's standards for appointment lengths for new graduates, opportunities to shadow senior colleagues, protected and regular continued professional development (CPD) time, and scheduled 1-1 health and well-being and progress meetings.
- Improve transitional support to strengthen training, mentoring, socialisation, and networking opportunities.
- Develop targeted, evidence-based interventions to significantly benefit confidence, workplace readiness, and retention rates among new graduates.

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