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Aspiring Workstream Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

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Summary

The Aspiring workstream was established to address the visibility gap affecting the Operating Department Practitioner (ODP) profession among prospective entrants to the healthcare workforce. The foundational phase report set out the methodological basis for this work, an audience intelligence framework built from four personas and accompanying customer journey maps, a three-part survey programme, and a contextual literature review confirming that the awareness gap identified for ODP extends across the wider Allied Health Professions.

Since the foundational phase, the workstream has delivered a set of practical outputs against the priorities identified in that report. These are summarised below.

Targeted webinars

Two webinars were delivered, each designed around a specific persona rather than a single generic format. The first, delivered with the University of Leicester and delivered via Step into Health, targeted the Mark persona (ex-forces personnel considering a second career) with a factual, transition-focused session covering skills translation, funding routes through the Higher Education Pathway for Armed Forces (HEPAF), and application practicalities, supported by a practice partner with lived military experience. The second, delivered via Channel Talent, targeted the Jake persona (16 to 18 year olds approaching university entry) using an interactive patient scenario to introduce the ODP role. Post-webinar feedback for the second session was positive, and several attendees reported that the session had added ODP as a career option they were now considering.

T Level placement guide

A guide was produced to give theatre departments a consistent framework for hosting Health T Level students aged 16 to 19 on industry placement. It resolves the recurring uncertainty around age, consent, radiation exposure, patient dignity, and supervision that had previously discouraged departments from opening placements and provides a supervision model (the Clinical Support Worker Buddy model) that does not draw on registered staff capacity already committed to pre-registration students. The guide is supported by three companion tools: a risk decision flowchart, a per-placement safety record, and a policy and standard operating procedure template for local adoption.

National ODP Day 2026 campaign and evaluation

National ODP Day 2026 was delivered as a coordinated social media campaign across Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and Snapchat through the FutureODP accounts, evaluated in a dedicated reach report. The campaign produced a synchronised peak in activity on and immediately after 14 May across all platforms with dated data. Where a follower and non-follower split was available, the large majority of measured reach came from outside the existing follower base: approximately 87 per cent of Instagram reach and 67 per cent of TikTok viewing came from non-followers or new viewers. The strongest single content asset, a plain-language explainer of the ODP role, drew 20,888 TikTok views, well ahead of any dated ODP Day post, and the dated content that performed best combined explanatory framing with personal career stories.

A separate netnographic study examined independent and organic National ODP Day 2026 content across the same platforms, coding 29 Facebook posts, 25 Instagram posts

and 26 TikTok posts using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. No usable Snapchat content was found within the search parameters, which the study treats as a finding about discoverability on that platform rather than a methodological gap. Across the three platforms that produced data, content was dominated by NHS organisations, higher education institutions, professional bodies and individual practitioners already embedded within the profession, with private healthcare providers offering the clearest, though still limited, extension beyond that community. The profession consistently described itself using the language of invisibility, “hidden heroes”, “unsung heroes”, “behind the scenes”, and the official People, Planet, Progress theme achieved only weak organic uptake, appearing mainly where organisations reshared centrally produced CODP assets, and not at all in the TikTok data. On TikTok specifically, professional identity framing was frequently absent from posts altogether, which the study reads against the HCPC's standards on responsible and non-misleading use of social media.

The study's own conclusion is that, on the evidence of who produced ODP Day content, the day functioned mainly as internal community recognition rather than as a route to visibility beyond the existing professional community. It sets this alongside the reach report's non-follower figures and treats the two as answering different questions rather than as contradictory: the thematic findings describe who authored content, while the reach figures describe who was subsequently exposed to it. A non-follower reached by a post is not thereby shown to have been previously unaware of the profession, only that they did not already follow the FutureODP account. Read together, the study concludes that an annual awareness day of this kind is likely necessary but not, on its own, sufficient to shift public recognition of the profession.

Additional outputs

A number of further outputs have been produced or are in progress alongside the above:

- A Quality Assurance Framework for CODP endorsement, providing the quality criteria against which material submitted to the planned web-based repository will be assessed.
- A National ODP Day media pack, supporting consistent promotional activity across participating organisations.
- A round-up video demonstrating the reach and activity generated by National ODP Day 2026.
- A web-based repository, in development, that will bring together career information and the wider “what is an ODP” material referenced throughout the foundational phase report. This is intended to serve as the single authoritative point of discovery identified as absent in the original landscape review, and to be structured for both human readability and machine readability (Generative Engine Optimisation and Answer Engine Optimisation) so that AI-powered search tools can surface ODP career information accurately.

Conclusion

Taken together, the outputs delivered since the foundational phase provide a fuller and more mixed picture than the foundational phase evidence alone could offer, confirming some of its conclusions and complicating others.

The persona-led approach has held up under direct delivery. The two webinars were built around different personas and used deliberately different formats as a result, a factual transition-focused session for Mark, an interactive scenario for Jake, and the feedback gathered from the second session supports the foundational phase finding that story-led,

accessible content is what moves a prospective entrant from unaware to considering the profession.

The National ODP Day 2026 campaign provides the first operational test of the awareness objective itself, and the two evaluation strands together give a more qualified answer than either would alone. The reach report shows a clear, synchronised peak in activity, and where measurable, the majority of people reached were not already connected to the profession's accounts. The content data adds a specific and actionable finding: a plain-language explainer of the ODP role substantially outperformed dated, campaign-branded content, which supports the case, already made in the foundational phase, for prioritising lay-language, story-led material over institutional messaging.

The netnographic study qualifies this picture rather than confirming it. Examined by who produced ODP Day content, the day functioned mainly as recognition within the existing professional community, NHS organisations, higher education institutions, professional bodies and practitioners already in the profession, rather than as content originating from or aimed at genuine outsiders. The official People, Planet, Progress theme was carried almost entirely by reshared CODP assets and did not appear organically on TikTok at all, and TikTok content, the platform most likely to reach younger prospective entrants, frequently omitted any explicit statement of what an ODP does. The study's own reading is that these two findings, insider-dominated production and substantial non-follower exposure, are not in conflict; they answer different questions. Reach data show the content travelled beyond the existing follower base. They do not show that the people reached were previously unaware of the profession, only that they were not already following the FutureODP account. On the study's central question, whether National ODP Day generates visibility beyond the existing professional community, the answer it reaches is largely no, with the caveat that the reach data leave open how much genuine new awareness sat within that exposure.

This has a direct bearing on the workstream's audience priorities. The 16 to 18 year old and career-changer groups that the Jake and Sarah personas represent are, by definition, outside the existing professional community, and the netnographic findings indicate they are not well served by the content currently produced around ODP Day, particularly on TikTok. One further gap remains open: the reach report notes that a like-for-like comparison with ODP Day 2025 is not possible from platform analytics alone, so the year-on-year trend in reach cannot yet be evidenced from this data source.

A related point applies to the balance of delivered activity across the four personas themselves. Of the four, Mark and Jake have each had a dedicated output built specifically around them, the veterans' webinar and the Channel Talent session respectively, and the National ODP Day content and its evaluation have, in practice, spoken mainly to a general public and school-leaver audience. Sarah Mitchell and Fatima Rahman have not yet had an output built specifically for them. This is not a gap in the underlying work: both personas shaped the audience intelligence framework and the survey programme from the outset, Survey 2 was designed with career changers in mind, and the foundational phase report already sets out what each persona needs, NHS-branded and search-led channels rather than social media for Sarah, and community organisations, NARIC, and existing NHS staff networks for Fatima. The gap is specifically in delivery. Two of the four audiences the workstream exists to reach have shaped the strategy without yet receiving material built for them.

This matters for how the outputs still in progress are scoped. The repository and the media pack are being developed around content forms, short explainer video, story-led testimony, that were validated for Jake and, in adapted form, for Mark. If these outputs are built with only a school-leaver or further education audience in mind, they risk reproducing the same imbalance rather than correcting it. A career returner deciding between ODP and returning to a previous role needs different material, addressing flexible working, apprenticeship progression, and term-time contracts, reached through NHS Jobs and NHS Careers search content rather than TikTok or Instagram. An internationally qualified practitioner needs material addressing qualification recognition, NARIC processes, and the risk of being treated as overqualified for entry-level roles, reached through community networks and existing internationally qualified staff groups rather than a general awareness campaign. Both are distinct pieces of work, not smaller or later versions of the material already produced for school leavers, and should be scoped as such alongside the repository and media pack development already underway.

The T Level placement guide addresses a structural barrier identified in the foundational phase rather than an awareness or messaging barrier: it removes the operational uncertainty that had been preventing departments from opening placements at all, and does so through a mechanism, the Clinical Support Worker Buddy model, that does not compete with existing pre-registration placement capacity. This also has a secondary function relevant to earlier findings in this workstream. Survey 3 (school-age students) returned zero responses in the foundational phase because of the multi-tier consent requirements attached to under-18 research, and the foundational phase report identified structured placement frameworks as one of the few practicable routes to building the institutional relationships that future research with this age group would depend on. The T Level guide is a step toward that, though it does not by itself resolve the under-18 evidence gap.

Overall, the workstream has moved from an evidence-gathering and framework-building phase into a delivery phase. Webinar feedback and campaign reach are consistent with the direction the foundational phase evidence pointed toward, but the netnographic findings show that consistency in intent has not yet translated into content produced by, or clearly explaining the role to, audiences outside the existing professional community. The main outstanding tasks are to close the year-on-year comparability gap noted above and to complete the remaining planned outputs, principally the repository and the careers advisor materials, that were identified but not yet delivered.

Recommendations

The following recommendations follow from the outputs summarised above and from the three recommendations already carried forward from the foundational phase report (completing the careers advisor webinar, developing a careers advisor resource package, and preparing a targeted social media campaign, the last of which has now been delivered for National ODP Day 2026 and evaluated).

1. Complete and publish the web-based repository

The repository remains the single output most directly tied to the foundational phase's central finding, that the primary barrier is discoverability rather than an absence of material. It should be built with structured, machine-readable markup rather than standard HTML alone, consistent with the Generative Engine Optimisation and Answer Engine

Optimisation approach set out in the foundational phase report, and should draw on the Quality Assurance Framework as its content gatekeeping mechanism.

2. Progress the careers advisor webinar and resource package

Both were identified in the foundational phase and have not yet been delivered. Careers advisors were repeatedly identified across Survey 1 and Survey 2 as an underinformed influence on career decisions, and this remains unaddressed.

3. Build explicit professional identity framing into TikTok content specifically

The netnographic study found that TikTok content frequently carried no explicit statement of what an ODP does or what the role involves, and that the People, Planet, Progress theme did not appear organically on that platform at all. TikTok also produced the highest new-viewer share of any platform and the single highest-reaching post of the campaign. Because the audience is already there, the priority is ensuring what they encounter actually names and explains the role, rather than relying on personal or lifestyle content alone.

4. Broaden who produces ODP Day content, not only who it reaches

The netnographic study found ODP Day content was produced almost entirely by NHS organisations, higher education institutions, professional bodies and existing practitioners, with private healthcare providers the only material extension beyond that community. Reach and production are separate levers: the reach data show content already travels to non-followers, but the study is explicit that this does not establish those non-followers were previously unaware of the profession. Widening the base of people authoring content, rather than optimising distribution of insider-authored content further, is the more direct route to the workstream's visibility aim.

5. Treat non-follower reach as exposure, not proof of new awareness, in future evaluation

Both evaluation strands make the same point: a non-follower reached by a post may already work in healthcare and simply not follow that account. Future campaign evaluation should look for a more direct measure of prior awareness, for example a short intercept question on the FutureODP landing content or repository, rather than relying on follower composition alone as evidence that new audiences are being reached.

6. Establish a standardised, comparable analytics capture protocol

The reach report's own limitations, an unavailable custom date window on Instagram, viewer-days rather than unique viewers on TikTok, and no direct login access on Snapchat, prevented a like-for-like year-on-year comparison. Agreeing a fixed capture window and consistent metric definitions with each platform team ahead of National ODP Day 2027 would allow a genuine year-on-year comparison for the first time.

7. Prioritise explainer and story-led content at scale

The single strongest-performing asset in the campaign was a plain-language explainer of the ODP role, and the best-performing dated content combined explanation with personal career stories, consistent with the netnographic finding that named individual testimony on Instagram gave the profession's own "behind the scenes" framing a more personal

counterpoint than Facebook's institutional gratitude-led posts. This should inform the content mix for the repository, the media pack, and any future campaign material, over institutional or procedural framing.

8. Continue and formalise T Level placement expansion

Beyond its direct role in workforce pipeline development, the placement programme is currently the most practicable route to the sustained institutional relationships that primary research with under-18 prospective entrants would require. Tracking which schools and colleges engage through placements would build a pool for future consented research.

9. Develop persona-specific editions of the media pack

The webinar and journey mapping work show that a single format does not serve all four personas. Adapting the media pack into persona-specific versions, for example separating school-leaver, career-changer, ex-forces and internationally-qualified messaging, would extend the differentiated approach already applied to the webinars into the wider promotional material.

10. Explore a broadcast or documentary-style production as a longer-term awareness vehicle

The evidence within the netnographic review's discussion, which cites Griffin (2026): a workforce lead observed that young people are already familiar with professions such as physiotherapy and paramedic practice specifically because of their television and media presence, while smaller allied health professions remain largely unknown regardless of clinical significance. The review draws a related point from an account of running healthcare study days for 12 to 18 year olds (Hewkin, 2008), in which students readily named doctors, nurses and paramedics as familiar roles, drawing that familiarity from medical television dramas, but did not spontaneously name ODP among them. This points to a channel outside the digital and social media activity the workstream has concentrated on to date. A broadcast or documentary-style production, following a patient's journey through perioperative care, would reach audiences that the campaign's own reach data show mainly circulate within or just beyond the existing professional community, and would work on a timescale closer to the sustained, multi-year campaigns the netnographic review's discussion contrasts with a single annual awareness day. This is a substantially larger undertaking than the workstream's other outputs, with a longer production timeline and a different funding and partnership model, and would need to be scoped and resourced separately rather than folded into the current campaign or repository work.