

Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Programs in Canada

Annual Report 2015

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT & PHYSIOTHERAPIST ASSISTANT EDUCATION ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

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OTA & PTA Education Programs Annual Report 2015

Background

The Occupational Therapist Assistant and Physiotherapist Assistant Education Accreditation Program (OTA & PTA EAP) is responsible for the accreditation of occupational therapist assistant (OTA) and physiotherapist assistant (PTA) programs across Canada. As of December 2015 there were 32 affiliated education programs, in five provinces, that offered such training. This document summarizes key data, in aggregate form, providing an overview of OTA & PTA education in Canada for 2015.

Overview of Programs

Thirty-two programs completed the annual OTA & PTA programs' survey, representing a response rate of 100 %. The majority of programs (n = 20, 62.5 %) had candidacy status whilst the remaining 12 programs (37.5 %) had been granted accreditation status. All but one program (n = 31, 96.9 %) offered dual profession diplomas, with the one exception offering a Physical Therapy Assistant diploma.

Program Structure

As shown in Figure 1, OTA & PTA programs were generally 20 months in duration and the average program length was 18.8 months. Program duration ranged from 15 to 24 months and included months when learners were on break e.g. summer months (range = 0 – 8). Twenty programs (62.5 %) had such breaks, which typically were four months long (n = 8 programs, 25.0 %). However, one program had a total of eight months when learners were not engaged in program activities. A small percentage of programs (n = 4, 12.5 %) permitted some learners to undertake self-directed learning and complete coursework at their own pace. The proportion of learners opting to complete courses in this manner varied from 2 % to 50 %.

Twenty-one programs (65.6 %) relied solely on traditional face-to-face instruction for the delivery of course material and for interacting with their learners. Eleven programs (34.4 %) complemented such classroom-based instruction with distance education. For the purpose of the annual survey, distance education was defined as “*a teaching-learning situation in which the majority of instruction is offered in other than a face-to-face environment.*” For these programs, 5 % to 100 % of course content was offered in this manner and content was associated with language courses, general elective courses, and computer courses. Generally, core OTA & PTA courses were not offered in this format; however, one program offered all learning activities in an asynchronous manner and the laboratory component involved live sessions and practical demonstrations. With other programs, laboratory components were offered in a face-to-face environment. Programs were also asked to identify whether they had adopted a distributed education model. Here distributed education was defined as “*a teaching-learning situation in which different cohorts of students in different geographical locations/campuses receive the same curriculum face to face with different instructors but standardized delivery and evaluation.*”

Programs are required to seek eligibility from the OTA & PTA EAP to include distributed education sites within the parent program’s accreditation status. At present no program had adopted such a model.

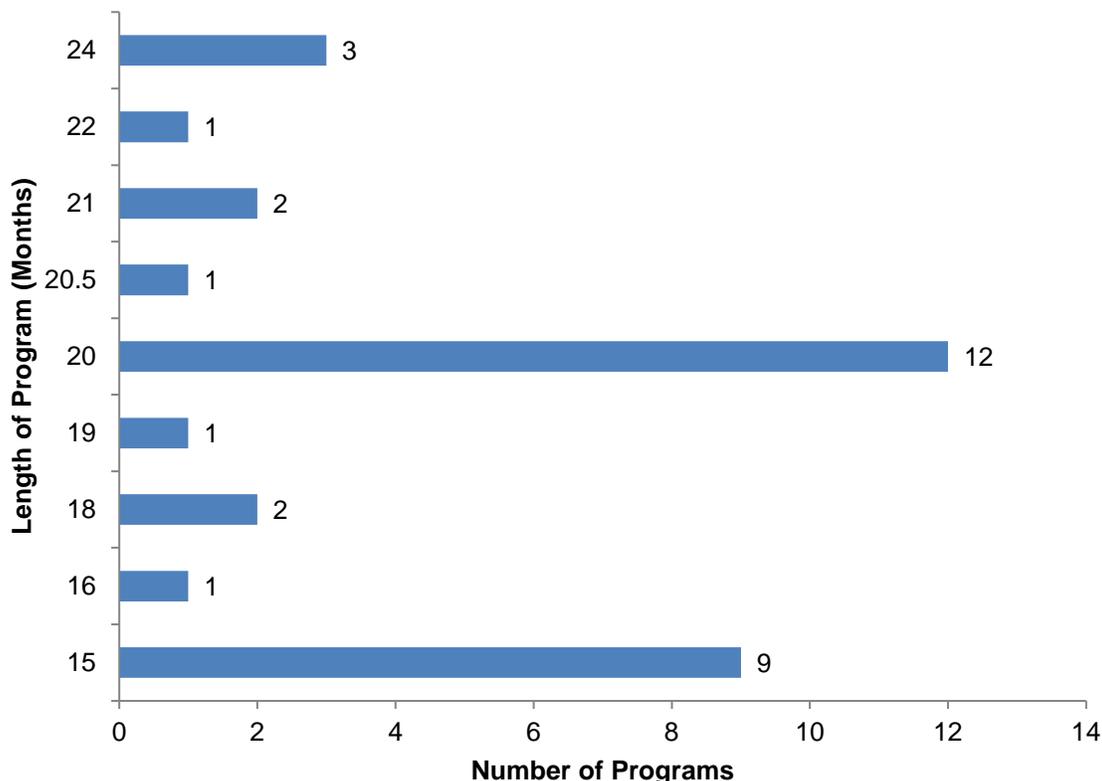


Figure 1: Total duration of 32 affiliated education programs, in months. The average duration of OTA & PTA programs was 18.8 months, the most frequent duration was 20 months, and program length ranged from 15 to 24 months.

All learners were required to acquire clinical fieldwork experience prior to graduation from OTA & PTA programs. As mentioned above, one program offers a Physiotherapy Assistant diploma consequently all clinical fieldwork experiences are supervised by physiotherapists. For the remaining 31 programs, accreditation requirements are such that each learner must obtain 500 OTA and PTA hours prior to graduation, with supervision by both occupational therapists and physiotherapists. The average number of supervised clinical fieldwork hours needed for graduation for these 31 programs was 551 hours, with a range of 500 hours to 800 hours (Figure 2). Clinical supervision was predominately supervised by physiotherapists and these clinical fieldwork hours ranged from 150 hours – 640 hours. Clinical fieldwork hours supervised by occupational therapists ranged from 0 hours to 480 hours.

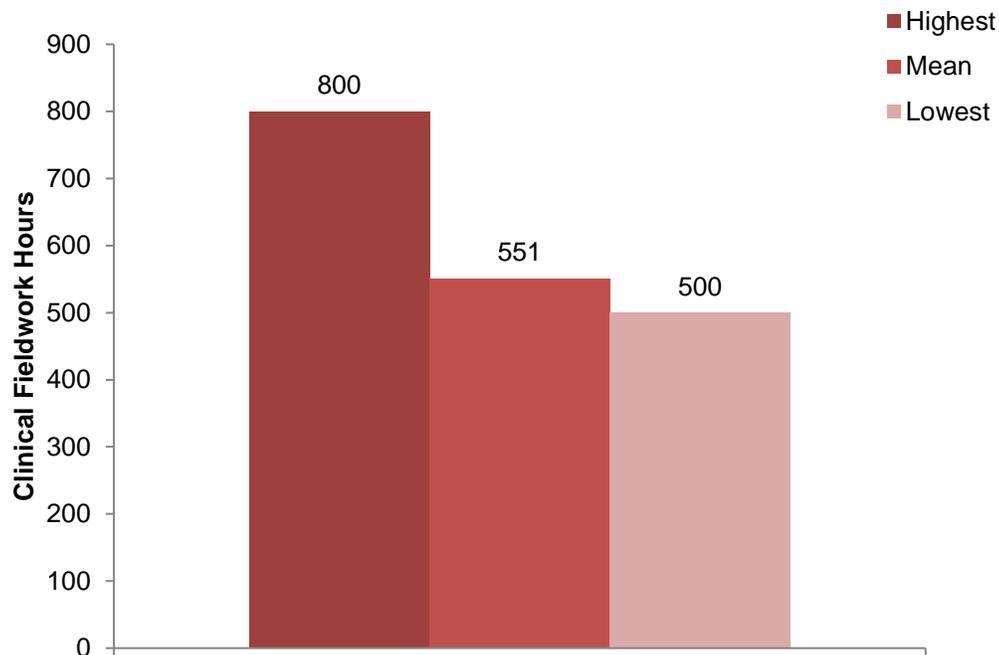


Figure 2: Total number of supervised clinical fieldwork hours required for students who graduated in 2015. The average number of hours required was 551 hours, with a range of 500 hours to 800 hours.

Admissions

The 32 affiliated education programs received a total of 3,889 applications from qualified applicants seeking to commence their studies in 2015 (Figure 3). This was slightly greater than the previous year, where 3,391 applications were received (Figure 4). The number of education institutions that completed the annual survey differed over the last three years ($n = 30$, 2013; $n = 31$, 2014; and $n = 32$, 2015) and may explain the increase in the number of applications from qualified applicants. The admissions rate decreased over this period from 35 % in 2013 to 25 % in 2015. Per program, the average number of applications received was 121 (range = 0 – 860). Unfortunately, from the current data it is not possible to determine whether a qualified applicant submitted an application to multiple programs.

There were three programs (9.38 %) that did not receive any applications and/or accept any learners for this calendar year. The remaining 29 programs admitted and enrolled 972 learners (mean = 30, range = 0 – 101), representing an overall admissions rate of 25 %. There were four programs (12.5 %) that admitted all qualified applicants and there were an additional seven programs with admissions rates greater than or equal to 75 %. Approximately half of the programs ($n = 15$, 46.9 %) were unable to admit qualified applicants due to a lack of spots within the program.

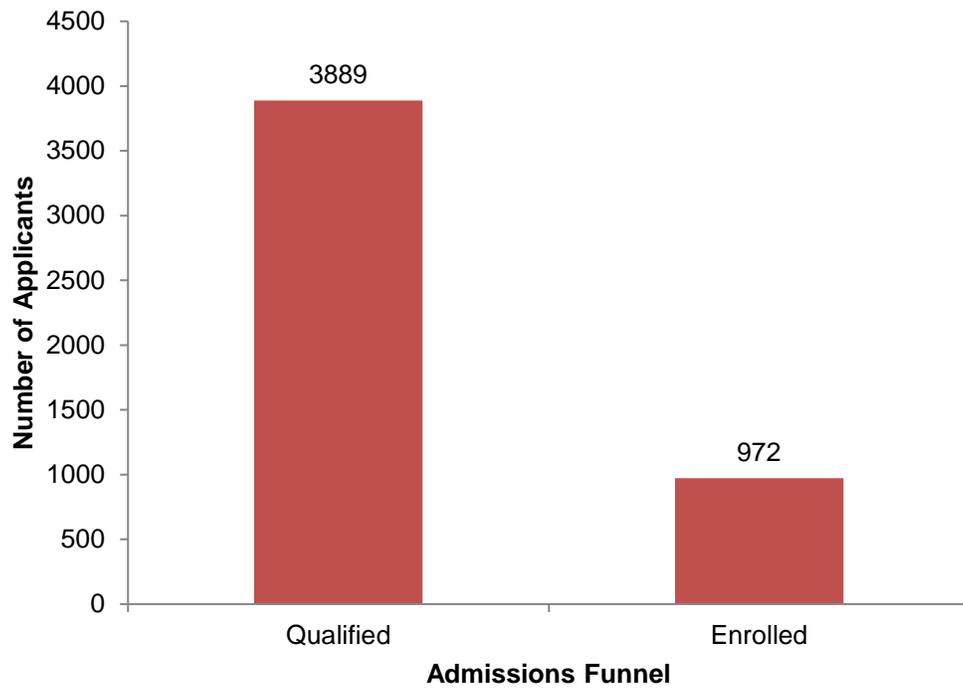


Figure 3: Admissions funnel for all affiliated OTA & PTA education programs. A total of 3,889 applications were received from qualified applicants for a 2015 start. A quarter of these applicants (n = 972) were admitted and enrolled in 29 programs, as three programs did not admit any learners.

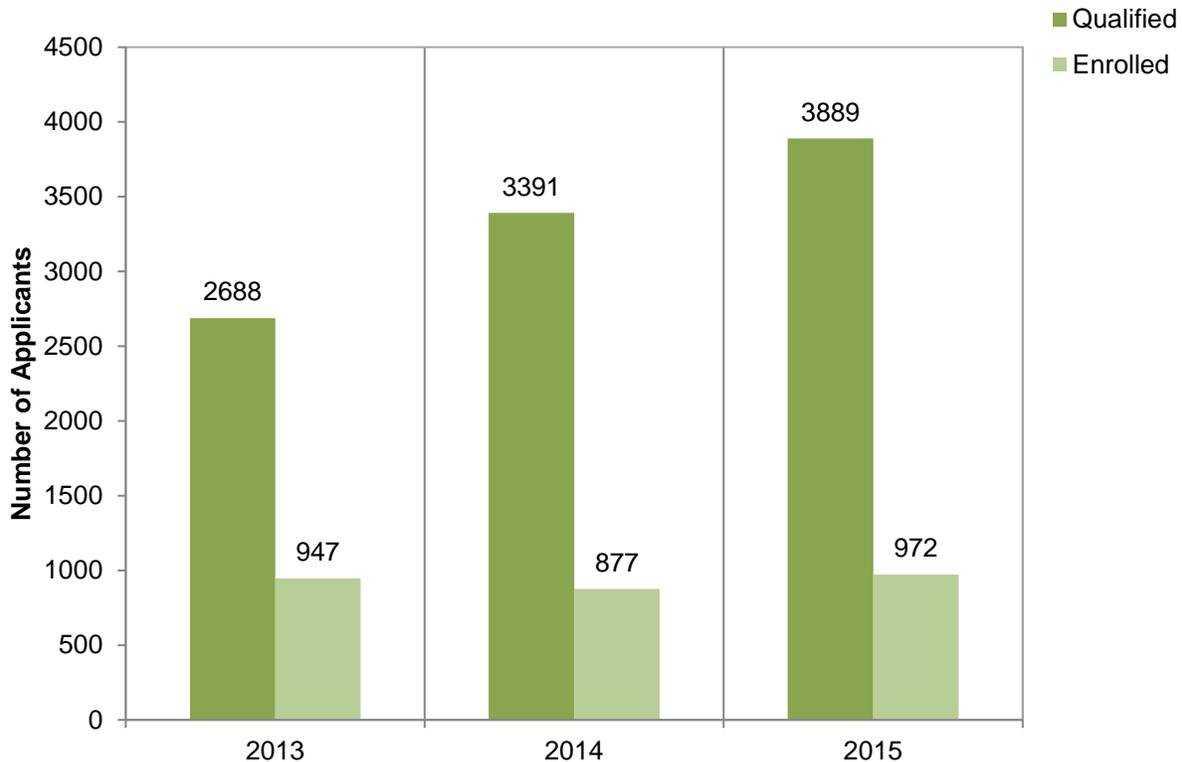


Figure 4: Admissions funnel for OTA PTA programs across Canada from 2013 to 2015. The number of education institutions that completed annual surveys differed in each year, $n = 30$ (2013), $n = 31$ (2014), and $n = 32$ (2015). The number of applications received from qualified applicants increased by 1,201 over this period. The admissions rate decreased from 35 % in 2013 to 25 % in 2015.

Programs considered a number of factors and learners had to meet certain requirements prior to admission to a program. From a predetermined list of ten admissions criteria, programs selected all those that were relevant for their programs. There was a substantial difference in the number of requirements associated with admissions to the 32 programs. For one program, successful applicants had to meet only one requirement whereas one program assessed applicants based on eight of the ten criteria. As depicted in Figure 5, the majority of programs ($n = 30$, 93.8 %) required applicants to be a high school graduate or the equivalent. Other commonly required admissions criteria or considerations were: *Mature student status* ($n = 23$, 71.9 %), *Clear criminal record* ($n = 19$, 59.4 %), and *Immunization records* ($n = 18$, 56.3 %). Programs considered *Reference letters* ($n = 1$, 3.1 %), *Volunteer hours* ($n = 3$, 9.4 %), and *First aid* ($n = 5$, 15.6 %) to a lesser extent during the admissions process. Eighteen programs (56.3 %) identified additional criteria used to assess applicants. Half of these programs required applicants to take an entrance test ($n = 9$, 28.1 %) and other programs required applicants to take the Health Occupations Aptitude Exam ($n = 1$, 3.1 %), to have obtained a minimum grade in high school English, Biology, and Mathematics ($n = 3$, 9.4 %), and to have an understanding of both professions through either personal or practical experience ($n = 1$, 3.1 %).

There was also a great deal of variation in tuition costs of the affiliated programs, with approximately a six-fold difference between the lowest and highest tuition (range = \$3,541 - \$21,356). On average, the expected tuition costs for the duration of programs was \$10,681.64 (Figure 6). From a historical perspective, tuition costs have been fairly consistent for the past three years with the highest cost remaining unchanged at \$21,356.00 (Figure 7).

Enrolment

At the time of the annual review, there were 29 educational institutions that had learners in OTA & PTA programs. As shown in Figure 8, a total of 1,617 learners were enrolled in these programs and on average there were 50 learners per program (range = 0 – 173). Eighty-two percent of learners were female (n = 1,321) and there were only four programs with a population of male learners over 30 %.

Learner Retention and Graduation

Twenty-nine programs graduated 582 learners in 2015. However, there were an additional 439 learners who left programs prior to graduation representing an overall attrition rate of 43 %. This was similar to the attrition rate for the 2014 cohort of learners, which was 41 %. Attrition rates varied from institution to institution, with one program reporting attrition equivalent to 71 % (Figure 9). Conversely, there were four programs (12.5 %) with attrition rates of 0 %, where no learners left the program prior to graduation.

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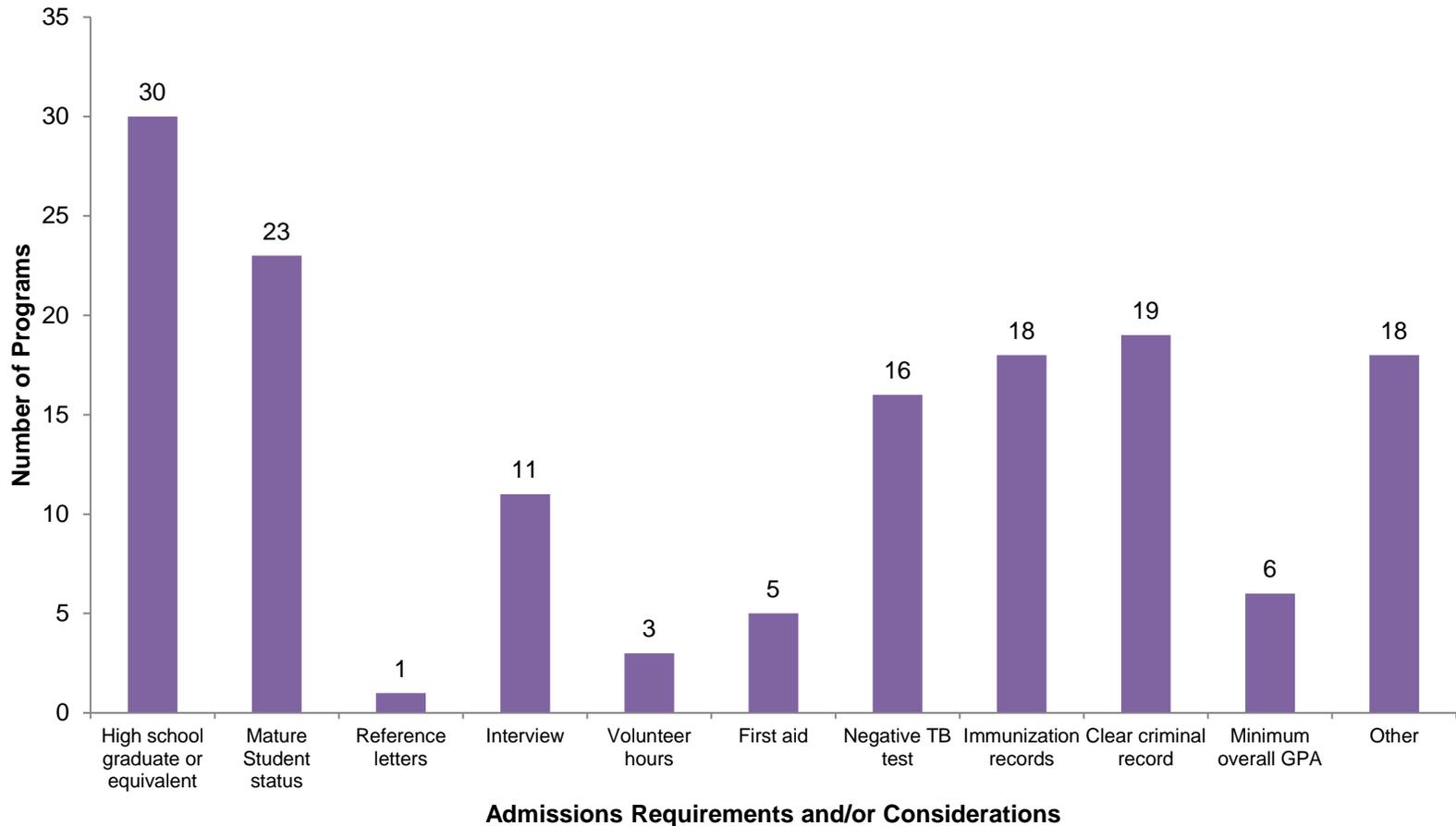


Figure 5: Admissions requirements for OTA PTA programs across Canada. The majority of programs required applicants to be high school graduates or the equivalent. Programs stated additional criteria and these were classified as 'Other'.

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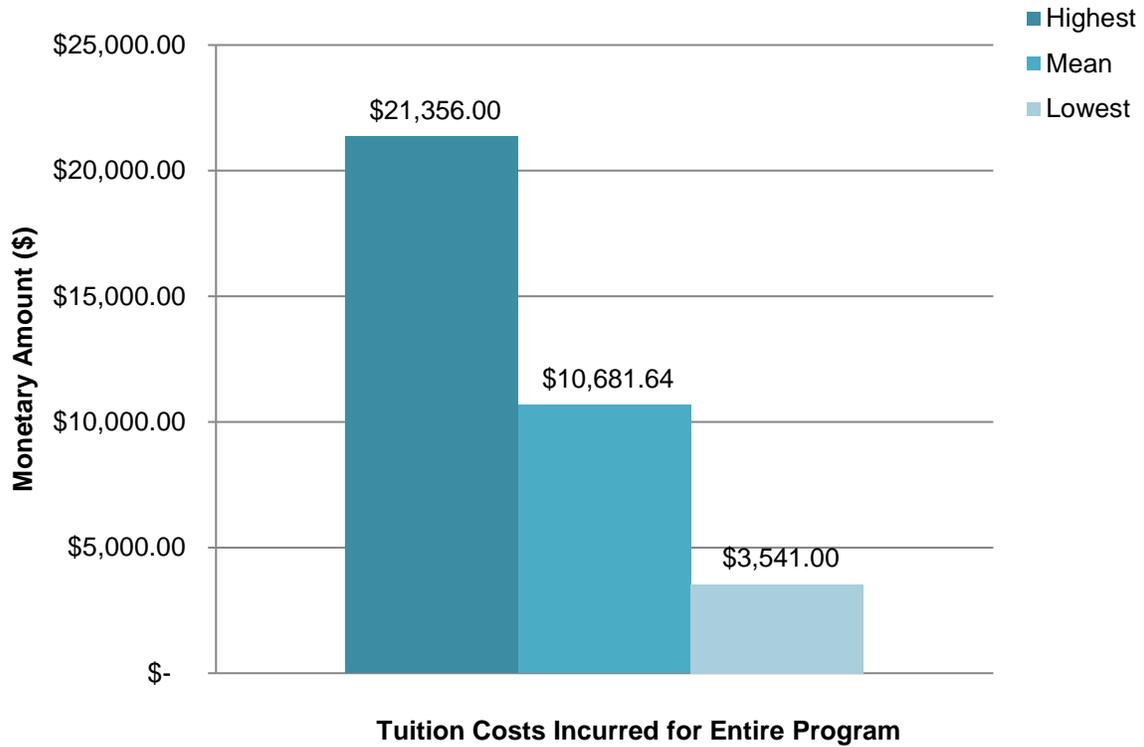


Figure 6: Range of total tuition costs incurred by learners for OTA & PTA programs. The mean tuition cost was \$10,681.64 and tuition ranged from \$3,541.00 to \$21,356.00.

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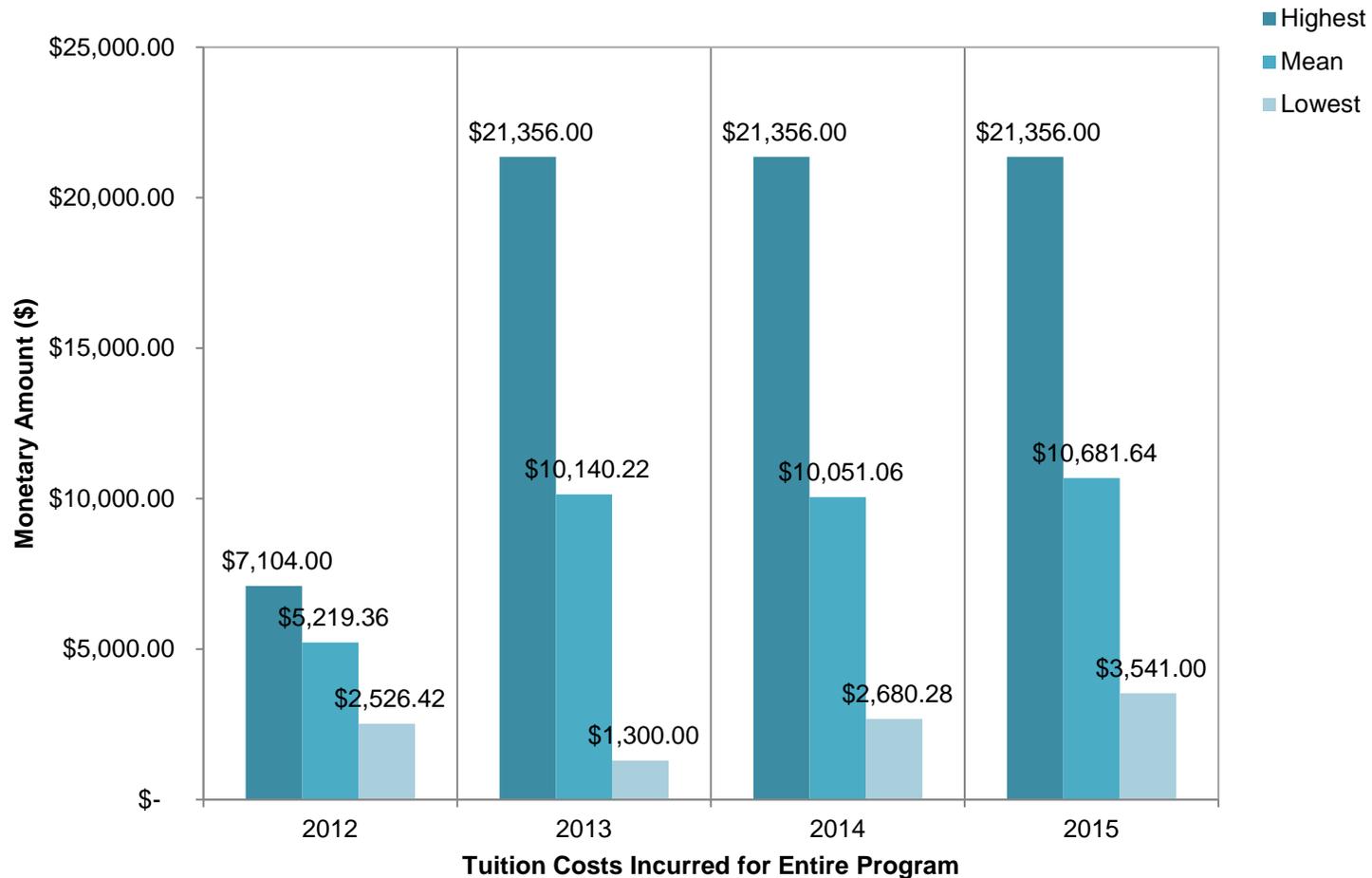


Figure 7: Tuition costs for OTA & PTA programs from 2012 to 2015. The highest tuition cost remained unchanged from 2013 to 2015 and the lowest tuition amount was \$1,300 in 2013.

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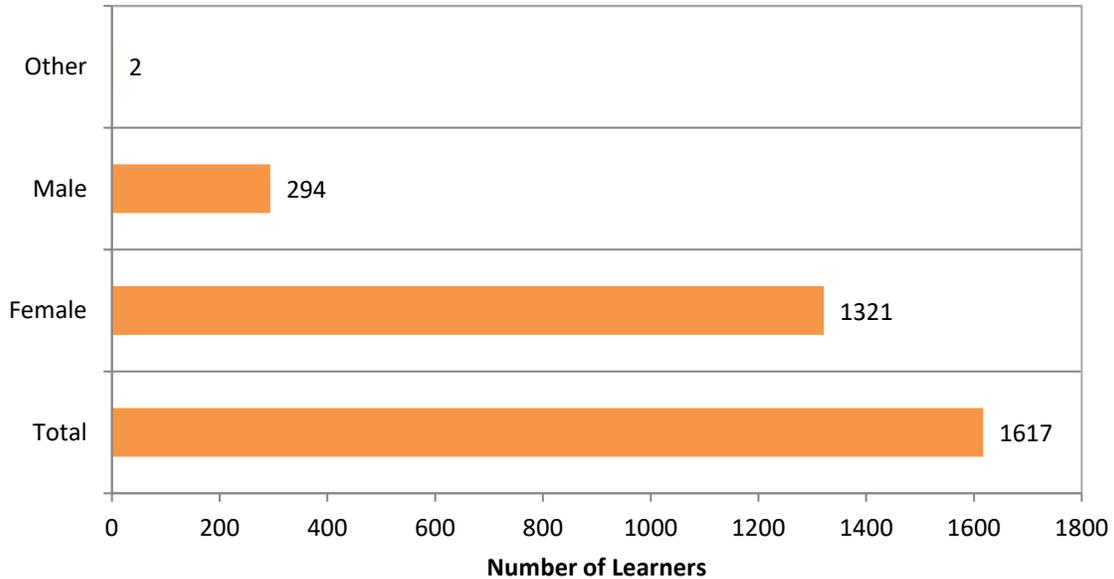


Figure 8: Demographics of learners in OTA & PTA programs across Canada. There were 1,617 learners enrolled in 29 programs and learners were predominately female (n = 1,321, 82 %). Males represented approximately 18 % of the learner population and two individuals identified as 'Other'.

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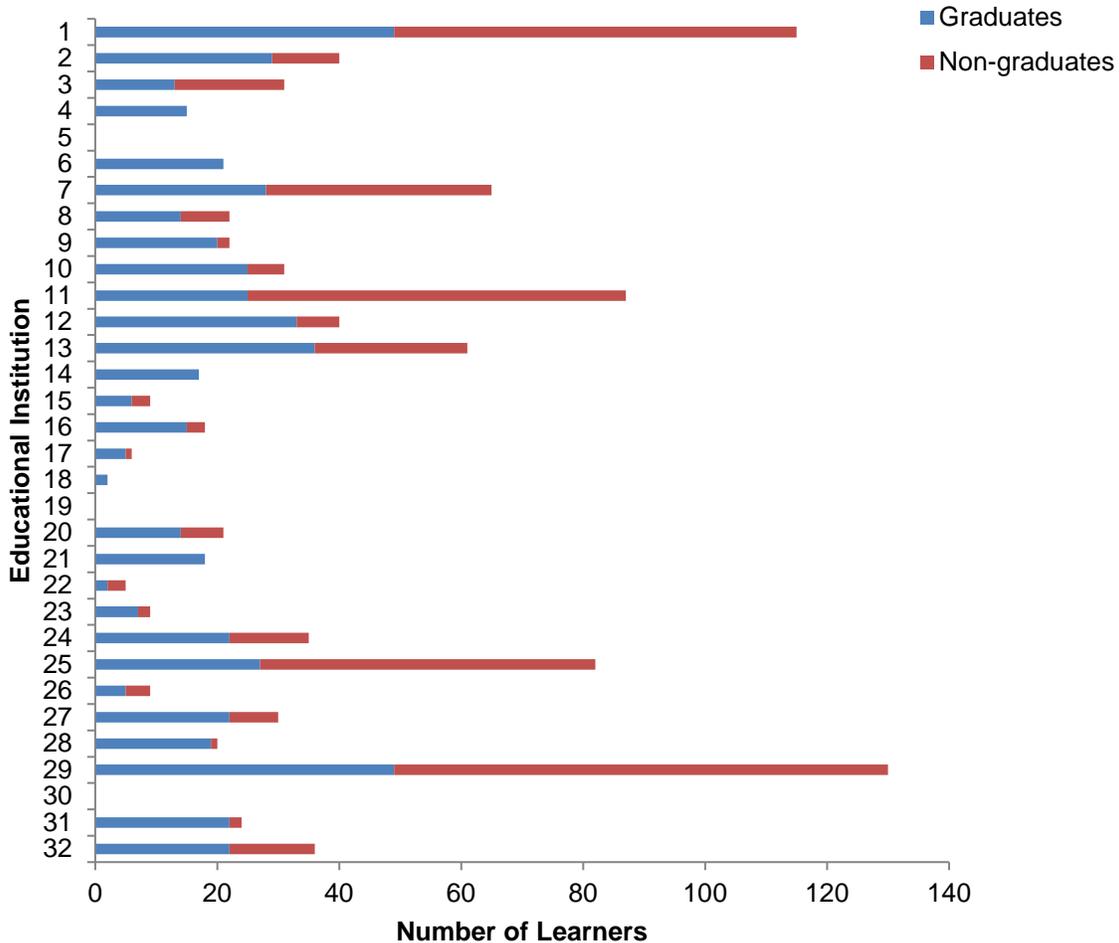


Figure 9: Number of graduates and non-graduates for OTA & PTA programs for 2015. A total of 582 learners graduated from 29 programs in 2015. The overall attrition rate was 43 % and ranged from 0 % to 71 %.

Faculty and Staff

Academic faculty, additional faculty, and instructors were responsible for the delivery of program content to learners. For the 2015 academic year there were a total of 339 teaching personnel for the 32 OTA & PTA programs (Table 1). This translated into an overall faculty to learner ratio of 1:4.8 and ratios for individual programs ranged from 1:1 to 1:26.7. The total number of physiotherapist faculty members (n = 74) was slightly greater than occupational therapist faculty members (n = 67). The accompanying total full-time equivalent (FTE) was 33.7 and 26.2 for physiotherapist and occupational therapist academic faculty respectively. There were no physiotherapist core faculty associated with three programs and four programs did not report any occupational therapists as core faculty. In 2015, 13 programs employed a total of 64

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additional faculty members (13 FTE) and 23 programs had 134 additional instructors (9.5 faculty). The total FTE associated with support personnel, such as laboratory assistants, was 86.9 (range = 0.1 – 6) and the corresponding FTE for technical staff was 79.4 (range = 0 – 24). Support personnel and technical staff were shared with other programs at 31 of the 32 educational institutions.

Table 1: Number of academic faculty, additional faculty, instructors, support staff, and technical staff associated with 32 affiliated OTA & PTA education programs and the accompanying FTE.

	Number of Personnel	Total Number of FTE
Physiotherapist Faculty	72.8	33.7
Occupational Therapist Faculty	67	26.2
Additional Faculty	64	13
Other Instructors	134	9.5
Support Staff	NA	86.9
Technical Staff	NA	79.4
Total	339	248.6

The nature of OTA & PTA education in Canada has remained fairly consistent over the past few years. In 2015, there were no significant changes in key reporting areas such as program duration, admissions rates, selection criteria, and learner demographics.

Contact Information

For more information about the data presented in this document or about the OTA & PTA EAP, please contact Amanda Walton at amanda.walton@otapta.ca. A list of all affiliated education programs is available on the [OTA & PTA EAP website](#).