Purpose: The use of anatomical knowledge and skills by physiotherapists to examine, diagnose and treat patients is a cornerstone of the physiotherapy profession. The ever-increasing scope of physiotherapy practice raises questions regarding the anatomical knowledge and skills to be taught during a limited three-year undergraduate physiotherapy degree in the United Kingdom. The anatomical expertise expectations for an entry-level physiotherapist by the over 50 different British societies of physiotherapy specialties is unclear, with no published core anatomy for physiotherapy curricula. USA traditional pedagogies for teaching anatomy within physiotherapy may not be transferable to the UK. The core anatomy curriculum for physiotherapy is influenced by national qualification and regulatory frameworks, e.g. a typical undergraduate physiotherapy training (UK) vs postgraduate doctoral training (USA). The aim of the study is to create core anatomical learning objectives for knowledge and skills for NHS Band-5 physiotherapists in the UK.

Methods: A two-phased Delphi methodology created a consensual anatomy curriculum. During the 1st-Delphi-Phase, an Expert-Panel of four physiotherapists highly experienced in teaching anatomy compiled a list of Learning Objectives (LOs) and accompanying Rationales, which typically were clinical situations/scenarios/cases that a newly qualified entry-level physiotherapist would encounter. During the 2nd-Delphi-Phase, a Teacher-Panel of seven physiotherapists who taught anatomy to physiotherapy students in the UK reviewed over 200 LOs created by the Expert-Panel, and scored them as Accept, Modify, Decline or Unclear. The Expert-Panel reviewed the comments from the Teacher-Panel, tallied LO and Rationale scores separately and adjusted the LO and/or Rationales. The Expert-Panel banked LOs with 6 or 7 Accepts. LOs with less than 6-Accepts were either rejected or revised and sent back to the participants for a 2nd Round of Reviewing, where LOs with at least 6-Accepts were also banked.

Results: Over 175 LOs were banked and accepted on an 85% acceptance threshold and spanned all eight areas: Introductory Concepts, Principles and Basic Histology; Head and Neck Region; Thoracic Region; Abdomen, Pelvic & Perineum Regions; Upper Limb Region; Lower Limb Region; Spine Region; Neuroanatomical Region. LOs were to create anatomical knowledge, and key anatomical skills, such as palpation and conducting manual tests on model patients. The 'Head and Neck' and 'Abdomen, Pelvic & Perineum' Regions had the highest number of declined LOs, most of which were earmarked for postgraduate training. Basic, rather than comprehensive assessment skills were generally envisaged as appropriate for entry-level physiotherapists.

Conclusion(s): A core anatomy curriculum for entry-level physiotherapy jobs has been created making a cut-off demarcation for postgraduate training. It takes an integrated approach and includes anatomical skills, unlike existing anatomy curricula for medical students. The integrated approach suits the existing integrated physiotherapy modules containing anatomy within the UK, where pure anatomy modules are rare.

Impact: The anatomy curriculum brings clarity to students, teachers, clinical supervisors and future employers on the expected standard of anatomical knowledge and skills for entry-level physiotherapists. The designing of teaching resources and the regulatory bodies for training physiotherapy students may be influenced by the new curriculum. The new anatomy curriculum will require anatomy teachers for physiotherapy who are both physiotherapy and anatomy trained.
Funding acknowledgements: No funding was received.