

This is a peer-reviewed, accepted author manuscript of the following conference paper: Murray, L & McMonagle, C 2024, 'Practice educators perceptions of student attributes and experience of supporting prosthetics and orthotics students on practice placement', Paper presented at OT World, Leipzig , Germany, 14/05/24 - 17/05/24.

## Title

Practice Educators Perceptions of Student Attributes and Experience of Supporting Prosthetics and Orthotics Students on Practice Placement

## Summary

Practice placements are a core requirement of Allied Health Profession training. Education is provided to prepare students for placement, but core characteristics are not well defined. A survey of practice educators experience of students from a UK institution aimed to highlight this information.

## Background

Practice Education is an important aspect of Prosthetic and Orthotic (P&O) education and training. This allows students to be immersed in their chosen profession. There has been limited research into the attributes which educators would prioritise the student to display. Furthermore, research considering whether students completing practice placements are able to meet expectations of practice educators is required. This knowledge of key attributes is important in informing the content of the UG programme and Practice Educator training.

The aims were to 1) explore the importance of different attributes of prosthetic and orthotic students on practice placement and factors which might influence educators' perception of this and 2) investigate if students met expectations of practice educators in terms of attributes displayed on placement.

## Method

A cross sectional online survey was designed and circulated on social media via BAPO, ISPO UK and training events with practice educators. Key attributes used in the survey were identified following a review of feedback, informal discussions with practice educators and teaching faculty. The survey gathered demographic data and years of experience as a clinician and practice educator. Practice Educators were asked to rank a range of different attributes considered to be desirable for professional practice. Where applicable, their experiences of supervising University of Strathclyde (UoS) students were also investigated. Open ended questions also sought to understand the experiences of supporting students, including during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and were analysed thematically.

## Results

Thirty-three participants, who have been involved in practice education across the UK and Europe responded. The mean number of years since qualification was 11.22 (SD 7.34) years, with participants having a range of experience of practice education. The attributes ranked as most important were communication skills, enthusiasm, and knowledge base. Participants were grouped into those with more than or less than 5 years of participating in practice education. There were no statistically significant differences between experienced or less experienced practice educators in the ranking of any of the attributes.

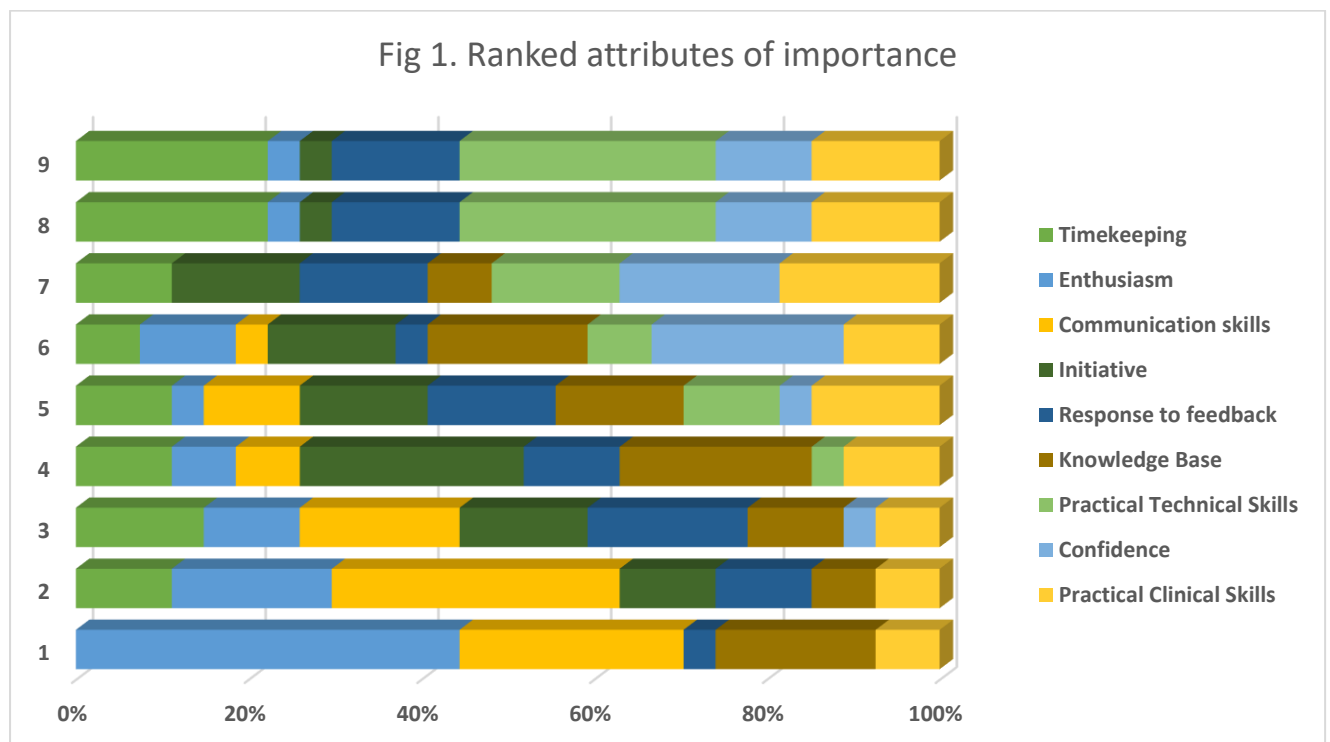
Twenty one of the 33 participants had supported a UoS student since 2019, and of these participants, 89% reported a positive experience of practice education. Attributes in which students were perceived to perform well were enthusiasm, initiative, timekeeping, and response to feedback. Attributes which were considered to require improvement were communication skills, confidence, and practical clinical skills.

## Practice educators perceptions of student attributes and experience of supporting prosthetics and orthotics students on practice placement

From the qualitative feedback about their experience in practice education, four key themes were seen: importance of support for PE and student; important attributes of students; challenges faced and impact of Covid on practice education.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This survey of practice educators has highlighted communication skills, enthusiasm, and knowledge base as the most important attributes for P&O placement students. Of these attributes, Communication skills were highlighted as an area for improvement. Whilst Covid-19 may have been a contributing factor in developing communication skills, work is being undertaken to address this aspect of P&O student education at UoS. A follow-up survey is planned to review these changes. Limitations of the survey included a small number of participants who completed the survey, and low power for the statistical tests conducted. Despite these limitations, this study offers useful insights into the perceptions and experiences of practice educators and highlights important areas for student education development.



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