


QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE NUMBER 2

SUPPORTING STRUGGLING STUDENTS

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Occupational Therapy is a highly skilled and complex profession. Learning how to practice safely and effectively comes with a range of challenges which are unique to every student. This might depend on their background, prior knowledge, interest or a range of other factors.

For many students their experiences of being on practice placements are their first experiences of being in work environments. They can be confronted with a range of circumstances and scenarios that they have not previously encountered. Whilst some can 'hit the ground running', there are others who will take time to build and adjust. The competency needs to be reached by the end of the placement. We do not expect students to have got there by halfway.

There are a range of support mechanisms in the University to support a student who is struggling. In the first instance it is helpful for them to contact the contact tutor. If this is not possible the OT Practice Education Team can also offer advice. You can also encourage the student to contact the central University support services via 'Student Connect' (studentconnect@cardiff.ac.uk) or their personal tutor. A range of processes can also be brought in to structure more support. For example, additional visits from the contact tutor or use of the 'Underachievement of Competence Policy'. Whilst the name is somewhat blunt it allows the team to structure support and expectations. The earlier we are aware of concerns the better.

The level of function needed to pass or achieve a credit increases with each subsequent placement. Whilst difficulties can emerge on a first placement, it is also possible for difficulties to arise as the demand on the student increases throughout the course.

A student may have failed or struggled on a previous placement. However, there can be a very wide range of reasons for this and we are unable to share a student's results with you. We will always encourage students to be open with practice educators and to share their future learning needs as a minimum. It is OK to ask how students got on previously or if there are areas they found difficult so that you can support their learning. However, they do not have to tell you even if this might put them at a disadvantage.

Many students who may have struggled at a point in a placement go on to pass and successfully become Occupational Therapists. Sometimes they may have needed support with something in particular or may simply have needed more time to meet the learning objectives. Seeking support is often the key to enabling success.

When supporting a student with reasonable adjustments or disability issues, it can be difficult at times to understand where the difficulty lies. In these circumstances open dialogue and discussion offers the best route to understanding and resolution. Please contact the contact tutor or the Practice Education team.

Supporting a student who is struggling can be emotionally and physically difficult. Ensure that you have a route to access support in your own right and please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

ABOUT

This Quick Reference Guide has been produced to support Occupational Therapy Practice Placement Educators when supporting student placements as part of the BSc, PGDip and MSc Occupational therapy Programmes.

It is designed to supplement our formal training and act as a reference for use in practice.

For further information please contact:

hcareotpracedu@cardiff.ac.uk

or visit

<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/healthcare-sciences/about-us/practice-education/useful-resources-and-guidance>

Please get in touch if you have any questions.

The OT Practice Education Team are happy to help



Indicators of when the balance is right

- There is regular, two way feedback about strengths and learning needs which can utilise a strength based approach.
- You are able to have an open and honest conversation about any difficulties
- You are in contact with the Contact Tutor and / or Practice Education Team from an early point.
- You have explored whether there are any underlying difficulties, disability issues or personal circumstances which might be impacting on learning + directed towards support.



Indicators of when more support is required (red flags)

- The student is unable to work to the standard required despite the support in place
- The relationship between the educator and student begins to feel tense or it is not possible to have an open conversation.
- Where there is an increasing impact on clinical work. For example, time needed to support or requests from patients not to engage with the student.
- Repeated contacts and support from university and lead coordinator without being able to resolve the difficulties.
- If the balance just doesn't feel right or there is disruption to work life balance for educator
- If there are wellbeing concerns for either educator or student
- If educator is needing a lot of support from their supervisor or manager regarding the placement
- Disruption to clinical capacity of educator over and above what might normally be expected when supporting a student.

When you notice indicators that more support is required please raise it as soon as possible with your own supervisor, the local Practice Education Lead, the Contact Tutor and / or the Cardiff University OT Practice Education Team. Please make sure that the student is involved. We don't expect you to have all of the answers

TOP TIPS

The learning contract and placement objectives can be very useful in structuring support and measuring progress. Use them to develop a clear action plan in supervision.

It should never be a surprise for the student that they are struggling. They should be aware of the difficulties so that they have the chance to act upon any concerns.

We have a range of mechanisms to structure support but if the ultimate outcome is that the student has failed the placement, we need to evidence due process to objectively demonstrate this outcome to the student.

Due to a range of rules and safeguards it is not possible for a student to fail a placement unless they have had the fully allocated time available to try. This can be difficult when there are a lot of learning objectives outstanding and limited time remaining. The University can support with these conversations.

You cannot do this alone and we do not expect you to. Contact the contact tutor or Practice Education Team for support.

Try to use a variety of tools to help develop and understand learning from different angles.

If things remain unclear it might be useful to identify the specific areas that are causing the difficulty – Self, practice, professionalism, service area

