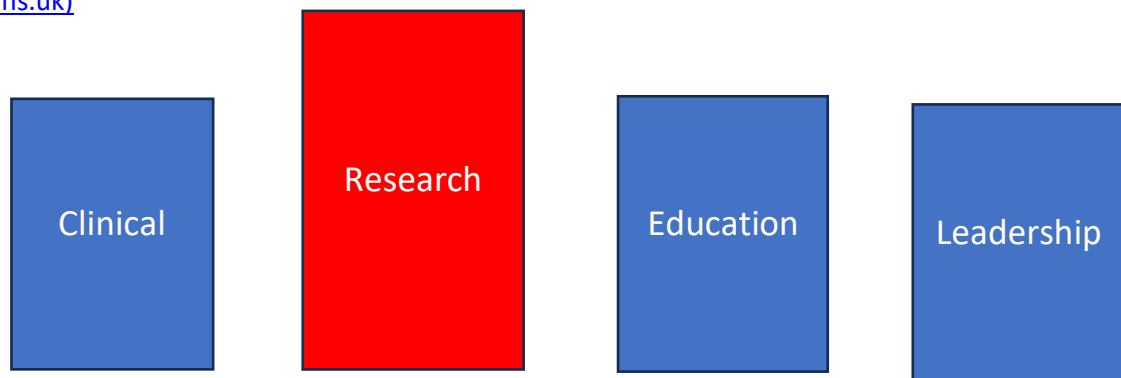


Research Placements in Practice for Sport and Health Sciences Learners

Background

Sport and Health Science learners are required to undertake a variety of practice learning experiences (placements) in order to graduate and register with their professional body. Historically, these have taken place in clinical practice with an emphasis on working with service users and developing practical skills. However, with graduates now expected to have knowledge, understanding and skills in clinical practice, leadership, education, and research (linked to the 4 pillars of Practice) it is essential that practice learning experiences provide opportunities for learners that do not just focus on the development of their clinical/ practical skills but broaden their skill set and enhance their awareness of their role in service enhancement. The four pillars of practice are explained here: [Multi-professional framework for advanced clinical practice in England.pdf](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/multi-professional-framework-for-advanced-clinical-practice-in-england) ([hee.nhs.uk](https://www.hee.nhs.uk))



Why research placements?



The Council of Deans (2019) report on research in pre-registration curricula highlights the importance of learners becoming 'research confident' ([CODH.RIPR .report v3-002.pdf](https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/codh.ripr.report.v3-002.pdf) ([councilofdeans.org.uk](https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk))).

This, and their 2021 report [010621-research-placement-report-FINAL-updated-220621.pdf](https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/010621-research-placement-report-FINAL-updated-220621.pdf) ([councilofdeans.org.uk](https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk)), recommends the use of research placements to enable learners to:

- Increase their knowledge and understanding of research, service improvement, audit, research theory, design, methodologies and dissemination
- Develop their excitement for research and service improvement
- Provide 'hand on' experience of research, audit and service improvement
- Increase their understanding of best/ evidence-based practice
- Develop their professional and clinical reasoning (understanding why they are doing something)
- Increase their understanding of the link between research and service improvement
- Bring research theory to life

- Experience roles that highlight career pathways that are available to them
- Enhance their employability. This links closely to the University of Brighton Graduate Attributes: [University of Brighton Graduate Attributes](#)

This is supported by regulatory bodies such as the NMC ([education-framework.pdf \(nmc.org.uk\)](#)) and HCPC ([Standards of education and training | \(hcpc-uk.org\)](#)) who require education providers to ensure learners have a range of experiences in the classroom and in practice that enable them to develop their understanding of research and evidence based practice. The knowledge and skills developed through these research placements are all those required of health professionals:

[future-nurse-proficiencies.pdf \(nmc.org.uk\)](#)

[Standards of proficiency | \(hcpc-uk.org\)](#)

Health Education England have also created a 'Guide to Practice-Based Learning for Allied Health Professional Students in Research'. This highlights the range of AHP learners undertaking placements in different research settings. The aim is to assist learners to meet their learning outcomes but also to build their research pillar of practice at an early stage. It is hoped that the guide gives educators and others the awareness, confidence and knowledge to embark on this type of placement [Guide to Practice-Based Learning for Allied Health Professional \(AHP\) Students in Research \(hee.nhs.uk\)](#)

What could learners do?



Learners are normally on placement for a range of weeks so the objectives for the placement need to be realistic in terms of what is going to be achievable in the time available. Learners will also have varying levels of familiarity with research and may be UG or PG level and therefore realistic objectives will need to take that into account. There are a number of opportunities that learners could be involved with e.g.

- Setting up journal clubs for your team / professional area
- Shadowing and networking with research active staff / research planning meetings
- Observation of research team meetings, planning and implementation of studies, and decision-making
- Spending time with Research teams in local Trusts/ Organisations to find out about their role
- Developing dissemination materials for example posters, to promote the importance of research for staff, raising research visibility, or describing a particular research method/methodology/technique
- Assisting in the designing of data collection tools (e.g. surveys, interview schedules)
- Carrying out or contributing to data analysis (where participants have provided appropriate consent, for example involvement of placement learners has been anticipated and is specifically referred to on the patient information sheet)
- Assisting with ethics applications, or shadowing an ethics committee
- Literature searching and appraising – assisting writing literature reviews
- Contributing to research-related peer reviewed publications (e.g. conference abstracts, writing/revising a section of a paper, or helping to plan a paper).

- Writing short articles for publication (e.g. newsletters, magazines, non-peer reviewed journals)
- Presenting their work and developing their presentation skills (for example, presenting to the study team and/or to fellow students; co-presenting (with staff) about their placement experience at Conferences)
- Assisting with recruiting participants when planned through research governance processes of the project and only if ethical approval allows this and appropriate training carried out
- In exceptional circumstances, carrying out or assisting with data collection, where appropriate (NB: NHS funded studies or where data collection is on NHS sites with patients, this is likely to require a Letter of Access or Honorary Contract, which is not likely to be feasible for a student research placement)
- Carrying out audits
- Visiting teams in specialist centres to observe and learn about their objectives and everyday work
- Visiting sites to observe and shadow research working on projects in a setting
- Liaising with student bodies nationally that promote research
- Shadowing teams that are undertaking systematic reviews of the literature

The Council of Deans (2021) report also provides case studies that showcase research placements: [CODH.RIPR_report_v3-002.pdf \(councilofdeans.org.uk\)](https://www.councilofdeans.org.uk/CODH.RIPR_report_v3-002.pdf)

What do I need to consider?



You would be able to discuss the needs of the learner / placement with the practice learning lead for that course but, in general, you will need to consider:

- The learner should have expressed an interest in carrying out a research placement
- The learner should be made aware of the topic of the research in advance to ensure no conflict of interest and that they are able to make an informed choice about the placement
- You need to consider the placement learning outcomes, length of placement and what projects or activities would be realistic
- Consider if you can support 2 learners as evidence shows that the 2:1 model enables peer learning and reduces burden on the educator [Markowski - 2021](#)
- Think ahead about projects that learners could be part of and include this possibility in the ethics application, participant information sheets before ethical approval is given
- Ensure that there is ethical clearance for learners being involved with the operational aspects of your project i.e. helping with recruitment, data collection, data analysis
- How you will provide supervision and support – with leadership placements in the School, a model that has worked well is a 30 min meeting at start of each research placement day and then the learners work together to set themselves daily/ weekly objectives and complete tasks
- Whether this is a remote, face-to-face, or hybrid placement (where could they have some space/ meet you if on-site?)

- Is this a split placement where the learner can also link with clinical teams (ideally related to the topic of the research, this can be planned via placement leads). To avoid confusion from practice educators' about the need for learners to demonstrate all placement objectives within the clinical side, it is important to clarify that the whole placement is a research placement and that the clinical part is more to provide context for the research side (being in a setting relevant to the specific research project).
- Induction and what information the learner would need to know, or preparatory work, in advance
- Whether the study data collection is ongoing, or complete – which influences what activities you could offer the student
- Safeguarding / boundaries for learner
- Research ethics and confidentiality (what ethical clearance do you have for involving learners in your projects)
- Be clear about managing expectations around authorship, and let learners know that submission of a paper/abstract does not guarantee them a publication - it would be helpful to explain the peer-review process to them. Regarding authorship, the ICMJE criteria should be used [ICMJE | Recommendations | Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors](#) and the learner would likely be an author.)
- Familiarisation with assessment paperwork that would need to be completed (placement leader will explain this all to you and can help support)
- Any relevant in-house training that would support the placement. This could be general e.g. GDPR or clinical.
- Emotional support. Please remember that qualitative data collection and analysis (in particular) can be emotionally-demanding, depending on the topic (Kumar and Cavallaro, 2018; Woodby et al., 2011). Novice researchers are often unprepared for its impact and often lack support with this. Experienced researchers may forget that engagement with qualitative data can have an emotional impact. Depending on the topic, it could be appropriate to ask learners whether they have personal experience of the research topic and also ensure that there is regular debrief times, peer support and time for their own well-being (McGourty et., 2010; Velardo & Elliot, 2018).

Each course has a placement lead that can support you to think about and set up the placement (including training about the assessment paperwork and learning outcomes). They are also available throughout the placement should you need guidance or extra support.

What are the benefits for the you and the organisation of providing research placements?



- Learners bring with them the latest knowledge, practice skills, theory, evidence-base, guidelines which may also help you / your team keep up to date with best professional / healthcare practice
- They bring a new perspective to your team and can offer ideas, suggestions to enhance your role
- Growing the future workforce and supporting practice learning

- Having learners assist you/your team with projects or activities that you may not have the time to implement
- Learners can bring enthusiasm and energy for the research topic, and for research in general. Research placement supervisors have found that placement supervision has had a positive effect on their own motivation
- By doing research *with* learners we're effectively learning with them; they're learning what we're still finding out ourselves (see Elton 2008)
- Evidence demonstrates that graduates seek employment based on placement experiences so offering placements may help the future pipeline of researchers
- Being a practice educator supports your own continuing professional development
- Research placements attract placement tariff (not available for apprentices)

Page 8 of the HEE guide also presents advantages for service users, learners, researcher, service and organisation: [Guide to Practice-Based Learning for Allied Health Professional \(AHP\) Students in Research \(hee.nhs.uk\)](https://www.hee.nhs.uk/resources/publications/guide-to-practice-based-learning-for-allied-health-professional-ahp-students-in-research)

Examples of Research placements.

- 1) Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy : supported by Catherine Aicken and Kathleen Galvin

Two Occupational Therapy (MSc Pre-Registration) students did a mixed research/clinical placement analysing anonymised qualitative interview data from a research study about experiences of living with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) and receiving services in Sussex, over 8 weeks. MND is an incurable, progressive, life-limiting neurological condition. (The clinical side of their placement was in neurology, through which they met people living with MND). Working with two supervisors, the students were introduced to the study through engaging with the study materials (Participant Information Sheet, consent form, interview topic guide). This gave an opportunity to discuss ethical issues, consent (participants had consented to re-use of their anonymised data) and confidentiality and to describe qualitative interview techniques. The 'taught' component of the placement consisted of a presentation introducing qualitative analysis methods (with some reading references provided), and a workshop to practice analysing qualitative data, early on in the placement.

The students divided their time between the research and clinical components of the placement, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all of their research supervision was via Teams. On 'research days' the supervisors booked a one-hour slot first thing in the morning, to discuss progress, and through these we introduced topics such as reflexivity, and the students could ask questions and raise topics for discussion. Often, the whole hour was not needed, and 30 minutes was sufficient. There were no research team meetings to attend or data collection activities to shadow, as the data collection was complete.

Both students chose to select one interview, and thematic analysis as a method, and they identified candidate themes (they were aware that these themes would only stand in this type of analysis, if they applied across the whole dataset) and they wrote a reflexive account sensitised by time in their clinical placement. We became aware of the need to give students guidance about the expected length of the written work – although this was unassessed, students expected a word-count, and were uneasy about the lack of one. We were impressed at how far the students progressed during

the placement, and with the depth of their insights on the data and reflections on the analysis process. One challenge during the placement was lack of clarity between the clinical supervisors and research supervisors about whether each placement competency needed to be demonstrated through both components of the placement (which the students felt would be very demanding), or in the placement overall. This was resolved – competencies could be met through either component of the placement (research or clinical).

This placement was followed by a shorter mixed research/leadership placement with two BSc Physiotherapy students, on the same study. Placement supervisors drew on their colleagues' experience on the OT MSc students' placement, and gave students clear expectations about outputs: they presented brief powerpoint presentations about what they found.

As the MND study was not externally funded, it has been difficult for staff to find the time to complete the analysis. Through the two research placements (OT, Physiotherapy), students provided new perspectives on the data and enthusiasm for the topic, giving the staff research team an impetus to complete and write up their analysis of the study. Reflecting their contribution to the analysis, we will invite students to be co-authors on a future publication. MND placement participants reflected how their placements gave them something extra and interesting to discuss in job interviews, which they felt enhanced their employability.

This placement is showcased on The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists website with animations talking about providing research placements (including for other AHP students): [Research and leadership placements | RCSLT](#)

2) Paramedic Science – Supported by Catherine Aicken

A third-year BSc Paramedic student volunteered on a WHO study led by Nigel Sherriff and Alexandra Sawyer about access to and provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) during the Covid-19 pandemic. She had been maintaining the study edublogs site (study website), and had chosen a related topic for her dissertation. Staff offered her a research placement in recognition of her contribution to the study. The placement supervisor checked with the Course Lead and established that Paramedic Science students' clinical competencies were not likely to be transferable to a research placement, however the student was on track to meet her clinical competencies with time to spare. This meant that the placement would not be assessed at all, and learning outcomes could be tailored to the experience that the student wanted to gain (informed by what would be possible in the timeframe). As she had already joined the research team, it was considered appropriate to give her access to anonymized qualitative interviews with healthcare staff, however as an additional precaution she was not given access to anonymized interviews with patients.

The placement was part-time, over 6 weeks, with one supervisor, and a mixture of remote and face-to-face supervision. At this time, data collection was still ongoing, and staff were just beginning to analyse the data themselves. The student was already familiar with the study's objectives and rationale, but the study materials were discussed as a way of introducing the study. Unlike the University's staff research team members, the student had experience of healthcare delivery during the pandemic (albeit not specifically SRH), so she provided a different perspective, which advanced the analysis. Her involvement helped the team progress with submission of abstracts to conferences, on which she is a co-author. As for the MND placements, she will be invited to be a co-author on relevant paper(s).

As this placement was attached to a current study, the student had the opportunity to sit in on research team meetings, including one meeting of the whole (international) research study team.

Doing a placement on an ongoing study gives more opportunities for 'socialisation' for placement students: the chance to see how research is planned and implemented, to meet research teams and collaborators, and to observe (and potentially contribute to) the day-to-day running of a research project. One consideration was the timing of the placement, which was not long before the end of the course, and the Course Lead and placement supervisor were keen to ensure that research placement participation did not detract from the student's performance in her exams. Reflecting this, and it was made clear to the student that she could choose her time commitment to the placement depending on her revision schedule (this may not be possible for assessed placements).

Within a year of graduation, the student has already obtained a job in clinical research (which is unusual for a new BSc graduate) which takes her a step closer to her aim: a clinical research career.

3) Nursing

Nursing BSc placements have taken two forms – they are less time and over a longer period. One student has shadowed a team delivering a national multi-centre study that was funded by Burdett Trust for Nursing. The student has shadowed the team in delivering the project and followed the implementation of different phases of the project. They have joined the team in presenting findings at a conference to experience the whole cycle of a research project. As the study involved three teams at different sites in the UK the student also visited one of the other sites and shadowed staff there.

The student has written about their experience: *"I was supported to take part in a short research project via University of Brighton and in conjunction with Birmingham City University. I had been observing a research study that Professor Galvin was managing, and this visit came out of it. I spent the day observing initial visits to care homes discussing a trial for equipment that would be beneficial in potentially reducing hospital admissions. The two researchers were incredibly generous with their time and knowledge and gave me so much advice and insight into why nurse led research is so important. It genuinely added to my love and excitement for research and was a springboard onto other projects. I am about to do another research / quality improvement three-week placement with the ICB this summer and am very much looking forward to it"*.

A second model, supported by Turin Funding and QR funding, facilitated a student to visit a specialised setting as a European placement. The student observed and undertook literature reviews to explore challenges for UK overseas territories in providing services that mirror UK based NHS services. This was a two-week clinical 'spoke' placement with a longer period engaging with the literature and disseminating the information via relevant Professional bodies.

If you are interested in finding out more about research placements, please speak to the Practice Learning Lead for your profession or contact Dr Channine Clarke (Head of Practice Learning and Development) who can offer support and signposting to the right contact. (C.clarke@brighton.ac.uk)

Thank you for considering this.

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