



Enablers to support practice education in the UK – the journey to co-produced evidence informed actions to increase practice education capacity and quality

Lisa Brown¹, Dr Bethan Collins¹, Kate Brady¹, Nicola Drake¹, Carolyn Hay²

1 - University of Salford, 2 - Royal College of Occupational Therapists

Project funded by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT)

Context

- The **University of Salford** is in the Northwest of England, UK.
- The **Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT)** is the professional body for occupational therapy in the UK.
- Rapid **expansion** of pre-registration occupational therapy education in UK
- Significant proportion of practice learning takes place in **National Health Service (NHS)**
- RCOT Occupational therapy **workforce strategy 2024-2035** (RCOT, 2024) focuses on practice educators
- RCOT commissioned a **piece of research** to identify priority actions to support practice education.

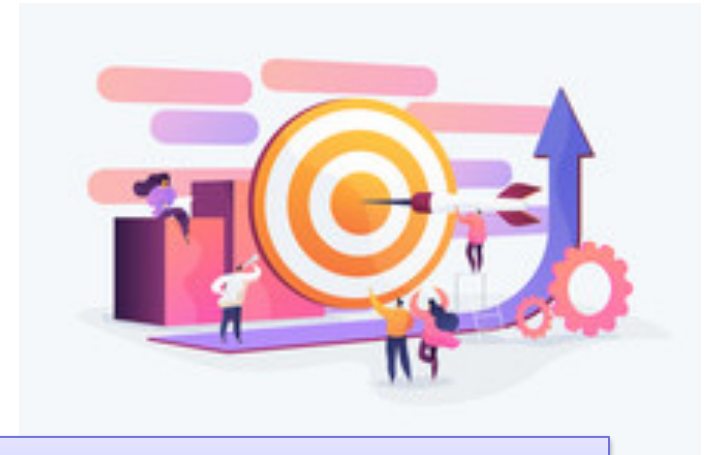


Aims

Identify practice educators' perceived enablers and barriers to supporting practice-based learning

Identify factors that **enable or limit capacity** within practice contexts

Identify factors that **enable or limit quality** within practice contexts



Explore whether **profession-wide practice-based learning assessment documentation** would be valued by educators

Method

- Student researchers supported project as a practice learning opportunity
- Mixed methods approach, underpinned by appreciative inquiry (Lewis et al., 2016).

Online survey shared via social media, e-mail, word of mouth at events
Sought perspectives about capacity, **quality and assessment documentation**
395 completed surveys

Focus group participants recruited via survey
Two focus groups about **capacity**, two about **quality**. All four focus groups discussed assessment documentation
MS Teams focus groups (n=23)

Data analysed using Excel and SPSS.

Key points from survey used to structure focus groups

Focus groups transcribed and analysed thematically

Results - demographics

Survey demographics

- 395 responses
- Two-thirds of respondents aged between 35 and 54.
- Other demographics (gender, ethnicity etc) mirror the HCPC statistics of Occupational Therapists in the UK.
- Responses came from all UK regions.
- Practitioners mostly were experienced with >11 years experience and across a variety of settings

Focus group demographics

- 23 participants across 4 groups
- All participants were women, from a variety of regions in all 4 nations.
- Participants experienced, working in a variety of settings

Results - Themes

- Five key areas that overlap relating to capacity and quality:
 - Assessment documentation
 - Training and development needs
 - Enablers including time, resources and recognition for practice educators
 - Equitable distribution of learners across practice
 - Communication between universities

Assessment Documentation

- **Practice assessment documentation can be an enabler or a limiter both for capacity and quality.**
- Some documentation is long, difficult to complete, unclear and time-consuming. This makes educators less able to take students and can raise questions about equity across programmes
- Some regions share documentation: this is helpful.
- If nationwide documentation were to be proposed, it would need to be easy to complete and be supplemented with adequate training and support. It could support consistency of experience.

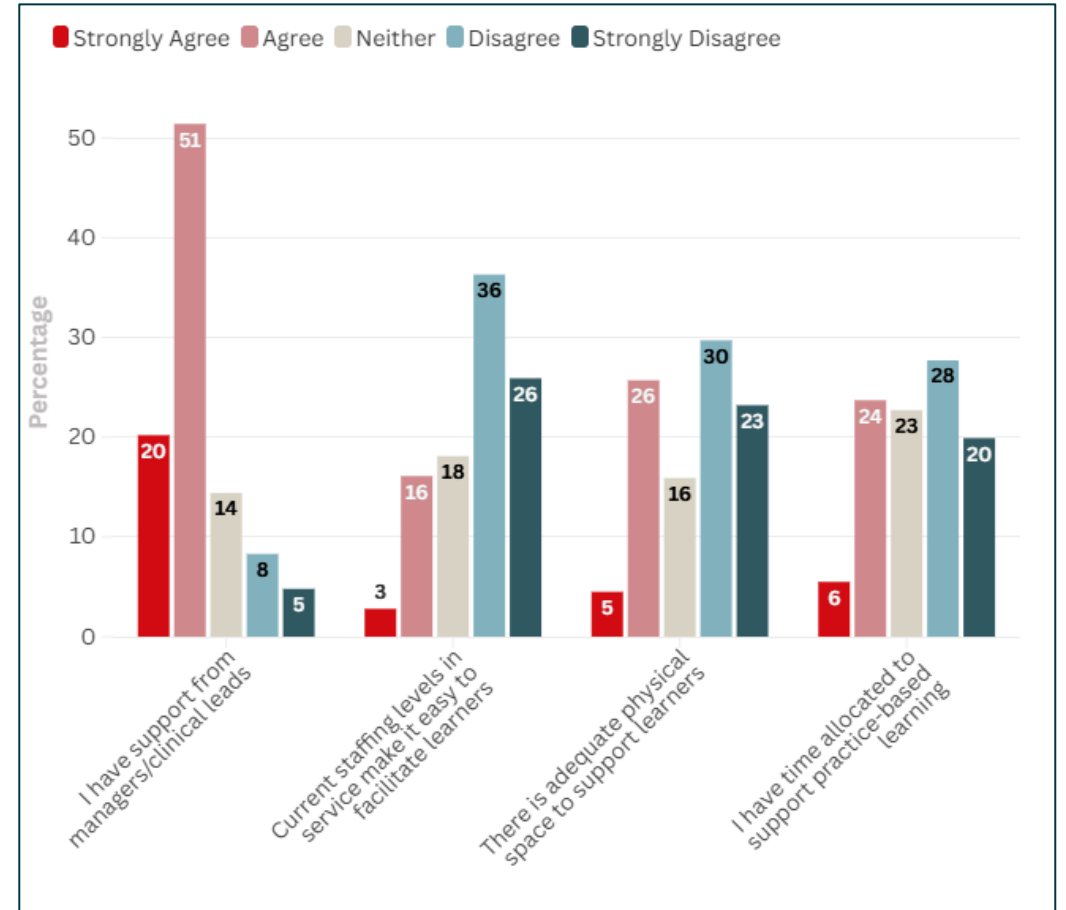
Training and development needs

- **Training and development of practice educators could support both capacity and quality.**
- 81% of respondents to the survey have undertaken practice educator training; having undertaken training correlates with educating learners.
- Respondents prefer training to be 0.5-1 day long, to be both on-demand and annual and in a variety of formats.
- Peer learning and discussion is considered valuable by educators.
- Topics to include: failing students; learners with diverse needs; University expectations; assessment process, different approaches to supervision.

Enablers including time, resources and recognition for practice educators

- Support from leaders present however staffing / time / physical space can be barrier
- Suggested enablers to increase quality and capacity:
 - Protected time for educators
 - More support and resources available for practice educators and students
 - Increased recognition of educator role

“it's about promoting the advantage of having students to career and professional development”



Equitable distribution of learners and communication

- There is a perception that the allocation of learners to different settings is not equitable

“We are allocated students in line with fair share model (per whole time equivalent therapist) this has ensured we put time into planning our student placement model and the expectation we have students on a rolling basis means the team are less concerned about making time for a student”

- Good working relationships between practice educators and the HEIs is also considered an enabler of both quality and capacity of practice-based learning opportunities

Conclusion

- Practice educators across the UK are **positive about supporting learners** and most are experienced, trained and active in delivering practice-based learning.
- **Quality and capacity rely on similar enablers**, including time and resources, clear assessment documentation, strong HEI relationships, team approaches and supportive organisational culture.
- Educators consistently highlighted a need for **better information, training and development** to strengthen both confidence and capacity.
- Key barriers remain, including **limited time, facilities and recognition** for the practice educator role.
- Findings point to several system-level actions, including **streamlined assessment processes, equitable allocation models**, and **enhanced support from RCOT** to grow practice-based learning capacity and quality.

References

Brown, L., Brady, K., Drake, N. & Collins, B. (2025) *Perceptions of capacity and quality of pre-registration occupational therapy practice-based learning in the UK*. Final Report. Salford UK: University of Salford.

Lewis, S., Passmore, J., & Cantore, S. (2016). *Appreciative Inquiry for Change Management: Using AI to Facilitate Organizational Development*. Kogan Page.

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2024) *Occupational therapy workforce strategy 2024–2035*. London: RCOT. Available at: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/support-the-profession/workforce-strategy/downloads-accessible-versions> Accessed on 24.11.25

Any Questions?

Contacts: l.a.brown2@salford.ac.uk / b.collins2@salford.ac.uk / carolyn.hay@rcot.co.uk

Connect with us on LinkedIn: [otlisab](#) / [bethan-collins-90a64a1b2](#)