How to support a student at risk of failing a practice placement

Whilst being relatively rare, students failing practice placements does happen and can be a very stressful situation for all concerned. These guidelines are aimed at reducing some of the stresses and ensuring that a fair process is in place to help support the student, and practice educator concerned.

In failing a practice placement, a student is being made aware that for whatever reason s/he has failed to reach a satisfactory standard in the required learning outcomes for the practice placement.

One of the key aspects in managing this is early detection – the sooner a student's performance can be identified as not satisfactory then the more opportunity available to the student to attempt redeem the situation.

Normally, by the midway review, the student needs to be informed that he/she is failing the placement.

- The word “fail” must be clearly used in this discussion
- All attributes/knowledge gaps where the student is not passing must be clearly indicated to the student and examples must be given by the practice educator
- Practice educator must write in the midway comments sections on the assessment form that the midway review has indicated that the student is failing the placement and list the areas causing concern.

The Practice Educator must contact the student’s Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) at Queen Margaret University. A discussion will then ensue to decide the most appropriate form of action to ensure support for both student, and practice educator.

Whilst each situation will vary and requires to be handled appropriately, there are key aspects as how to best work forward. Honesty is paramount and requires both Practice Educator and student to be open within the learning relationship. Clarity is important, make sure the student is very clear as to where their weaknesses lies and they might best address these. This will involve the setting of weekly goals/objectives for the rest of the placement so that the student has an agreed plan to move things forward. The student’s PAT can help in any of this process. The PAT will document agreed actions taken on the Link Lecturer’s Report Form. A copy of this report will be held in the student’s practice placement file at the University

Guiding principles

- Inform the student as soon as possible if their performance is causing concern.
- Inform QMU as soon as possible if the student’s performance is causing concern – preferably later than the midway review.
- Encourage the student to talk with their PAT at the University at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure that the student receives honest, non-judgemental feedback which focuses on the key areas causing concern.
- Document these discussions have taken place on the weekly supervision record. Both practice educator and student should sign this.
- Set weekly goals/objectives with the student for the remainder of the placement – making these realistic and achievable. Write these down on the Learning Agreement and again both Practice Educator and student should sign this.
- Schedule weekly feedback sessions indicating progress on the set goals/objectives and document discussions on the weekly supervision record.
- Encourage the student to use reflection as much as possible to allow them to assess their own performance – giving some focus to where things go well as well as those where performance has not been so good.
- Keep in touch with the student’s PAT at University to feedback on progress.
- If the student has not been able to retrieve their performance by the final evaluation then ensure that all verbal, and written comments are in line with the University grade descriptors so that the student is left with a clear picture of where their performance did not meet expected levels. If deemed appropriate, a member of the University programme team can also be present at this discussion.

**Receiving a fail grade on practice placement**

A student who fails a placement is permitted one attempt only to retrieve a failed practice placement module. Hours accrued during a failed practice placement do not count towards the minimum requirement of 1000 hours (COT 2014a). If the module is ultimately failed, and retrieval processes for the module have been exhausted then the student will be asked to withdraw from the named award. A student may also be denied the opportunity to retrieve the module if the failure originally occurred on grounds of professional unsuitability (COT, 2014a).

The Professional Practice Tutor offers an individual appointment to every student who has failed a placement, to discuss and prepare for the retrieval of a failed placement.