Discipline of Occupational Therapy

Practice Education -

Struggling Student Pathway

Overview

This struggling student pathway has been designed as a suggested framework to use with students who are perceived to be struggling on placement. The pathway is intended to assist practice educators with their management of students who are struggling to achieve competency at any point during the placement.

It is intended that this pathway will be used in tandem with the standard teaching and learning supports provided to students and practice educators by the university-based Practice Education Team (PET).

Students and practice educators at clinical sites where a Practice Tutor (PT) is available will be supported by the PT to assist with the implementation of this pathway.

Students and practice educators at clinical sites where there is no PT available will be supported by either the Practice Education Co-ordinator (PEC) or the Regional Placement Facilitator (RPF) to assist with the implementation of this pathway.

Students and practice educators should also be reminded that in addition to the university-based PET there are other support services available to students throughout the course of the placement (e.g. College Tutor Service, Counselling Service, Disability Service and Health Service).
1. Identify & Validate

- Refer to competency based assessment form to identify specific area/s of concern
- Consider internal/external factors impacting on student's performance
- Consider if your own teaching/learning style could be impacting on student's performance
- Refer to "timelines and expectations" document (available here: https://medicine.tcd.ie/occupational-therapy/practice-education/) to ascertain expected level of performance
- Consider exploring alternative opinions via other OT colleagues and/or MDT members

2. Manage Concerns

- Complete a concerns management form (see appendices: Document 1, pgs 7-10) with student
- Liaise with the PET for support with this. The practice educator can request a visit from the university-based PET if he/she is unfamiliar with the form and/or requires additional support
- Re-iterate all support systems available to student at this point (e.g. university-based PET, College Tutor Service, Counselling Service, Disability Service and Health Service).

3. Implement Action Plan

- Implement action plan as agreed in concerns management form
- Provide prompt and direct feedback to the student on their progress on a consistent basis

4. Review Action Plan

- Identify the goals from the action plan that were achieved
- Identify the goals from the action plan that were not achieved
If all of the goals that were defined in the action plan (as per concerns management form) have been **achieved**, then this pathway is now **complete**.

If any of the goals that were defined in the action plan (as per concerns management form) have **not been achieved** the student is now at a higher risk of achieving an overall “**not competent**” grade. At this point the practice educator needs to consider whether the student has progressed from a **struggling** to **failing** student.

This is a very difficult decision making process. The practice educator should liaise closely with the university-based PET for support with this. The following is a list of useful strategies/resources that can assist the practice educator at this stage of the pathway:

- Revert back to the strategies used during the validation process in step 1 to seek clarity and reassurance. This will involve re-referring to the competency based assessment form; the “timelines and expectations” documentation; consulting with other colleagues etc.
- Review supervision records/other documentation to provide an overview of the student’s progress to date.
- Refer to the TCD Practice Education document “**Failing student – Indicators**” (see appendices: Document 2, pg 11). This document is intended to provide the practice educator with examples of circumstances/incidents which can often be associated with “not competent” outcomes. It is a basic reference point for all practice educators requiring further guidance and/or support in their decision making processes regarding students who are at risk of a “not competent” grade. While this may prove to be a useful resource to practice educators this resource should not be used in isolation. The university-based PET must be involved in the decision making process and there must be concrete and consistent evidence to support all concerns put forward by the practice educator.
Please refer to the extended pathway below for guidance on how to proceed if all of the goals that were defined in the action plan (as per concerns management form) are not achieved.

How to Communicate and manage a “not competent” grade

Informing the student of a not competent grade is extremely difficult and should be done in the most sensitive way possible. The practice educator must be well prepared for this discussion and he/she must be clear on the reasons for and evidence behind the “not competent” grade. A member of the PET should be present to support both the practice educator and the student. The environment in which this information is disclosed and discussed should be private and comfortable.

Both the student and the practice educator will be offered the opportunity to debrief with their Practice Tutor (PT) or Practice Education Co-ordinator (PEC) and/or Regional Placement Facilitator (RPF) after the placement is finished. These debriefing sessions are a useful way of reflecting on the practice education experience, identifying and acknowledging new learning achieved during the practice education experience, and planning for new learning required prior to and/or during future practice education experiences.
Cases of “not competent” outcomes whereby termination of placement is required

If there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that a student’s actions and/or decisions making whilst on placement is negatively impacting on the quality of client care and/or service delivery of the placement site a collaborative decision can be made by the placement site (appointed Occupational Therapy manager) and the head of discipline to terminate the student’s placement in advance of the placement finishing date. If a placement must be terminated on the above grounds, the student will receive a “not competent” grade in their final assessment. In most cases, the provision of this grade will be directly related to the student’s actions and/or decisions making which have warranted the placement termination.

Should the above circumstances arise it is essential that the placement site liaise closely with the Discipline of Occupational Therapy. A formal notification will need to be put forward by the placement site (appointed Occupational Therapy manager) and this will need to be agreed by the Head of Discipline before the placement can be terminated.
**Key points regarding the management of struggling students**

1. **Case-by-Case:** Cases where a student is struggling are very often complex and sensitive and should be managed on a **case-by-case** basis using an individualised and holistic approach at all times.

2. **Early Communication:** Once initial concern/s regarding the student’s competency is raised the PET should be informed immediately. This contact should be maintained over the course of the placement with regular updates being provided by all parties involved.

3. **Consistent feedback:** Providing prompt and direct feedback to a struggling student on a consistent basis is extremely important for maximising insight/student learning. This feedback can be provided in an informal or formal manner. It is important to maximise the use of formal supervision sessions to discuss and address concerns. The PET recommends that TCD specific supervision forms are used in the case of struggling students. In such cases, it is important that the pre-supervision forms for both the student and the practice educator are also used (see appendices: Documents 3-5, pgs 12-16).

4. **Clarifying student’s understanding of feedback provided:** When providing important feedback to struggling students it is crucial that the practice educator clarifies that the student has accurately interpreted the feedback provided. You can do this by directly asking the student “what have you taken from the feedback I have given you?”

5. **Clear Documentation:** Students and practice educators are encouraged to document and co-sign all relevant discussions using the appropriate the TCD Practice Education documents. This includes supervision forms; concerns management form etc. - all of which are listed in the appendices section of this resource.

6. **Decision making:** Please remember that it is the practice educator’s decision whether or not the student is “competent” or “not competent”. The practice educator will be supported in this decision making process but the final decision must be made and signed off on by the student’s allocated practice educator.

7. **Meeting times:** If the practice educator is using this pathway with his/her student it is important that the times in which supervision and/or discussion regarding the student’s progress with this pathway is completed earlier rather than later in the working week. We would recommend that supervision and/or discussion with such students takes place midweek so that the student is allowed time to process the information received and to ask all relevant questions prior to the student breaking for the weekend.

*Note:* If the student reaches stage 5 of the struggling student pathway whereby the action plan on the concerns management form is being completed for a 2nd time the practice educator and student should be aware that the student is now at a high risk of failing. At stage 5, it is essential that the PET are heavily involvement in the management of this case to support both the student and the practice educator.
Discipline of Occupational Practice Education Team – Concerns Management Form

This form provides a record that a concern has been raised regarding the student’s competency and that the management of such concern/s has commenced. The aim of this form is to assist the student and the practice educator in identifying and understanding the concern/s which have been raised and formulating a comprehensive action plan to address such concern/s. Concerns raised in this form can be of any nature and utilisation of this form does not automatically imply that the student will receive a “not competent” grade. It is a simple, assistive tool which is used by the student and practice educator in collaboration to ensure that all concerns regarding the student’s competency are managed in the most appropriate and fairest way possible.

PART 1: SUMMARY OF CONCERNS (to be completed by practice educator and student):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency area in which the concern/s has been raised - please circle.</th>
<th>Specific components of competency area in which concern has been raised (as per assessment form) - please list.</th>
<th>Examples – please list concrete examples of behaviours/actions observed which support concern</th>
</tr>
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<td>Occupation</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Occupational Therapy process</td>
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<td>Professional behaviour</td>
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<td>Professional development</td>
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**PART 2: STUDENT**

POTENTIAL CAUSES of difficulties encountered?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

**PART 3: PRACTICE EDUCATOR**

POTENTIAL CAUSES of difficulties encountered:

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
### PART 3: ACTION PLAN (to be completed by practice educator and student)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern identified</th>
<th>Short term goal (SMART) – relating to concern</th>
<th>Strategies/resources identified to target goal</th>
<th>Review date</th>
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### PART 4: REVIEW
Both ______________________ (practice educator) and __________________ (student) agree that a review of all of the above will be completed on ________________ (date).

Please note that if sufficient improvements have been made by the date specified above the student will revert back to standard teaching and learning supports. If sufficient improvements have not been made a meeting will be arranged with the Practice Educator Coordinator/Regional Placement Facilitator as promptly as possible to discuss further management of specific concerns.

Practice educator signature: ________________________________

Student signature: ________________________________
“Failing Students – Indicators”

This document is intended to provide the practice educator with examples of circumstances/incidents which can often be associated with “not competent” outcomes. It is a basic reference point for all practice educators requiring further guidance and/or support in their decision making process regarding students who are at risk of a “not competent” grade. The circumstances/incidents listed below are examples only. Should similar circumstance/incidents be apparent in the case of a struggling student this does not automatically imply that he/she should receive a “not competent” grade. Each case is highly individual and should be managed on a case-by-case basis with the ongoing support of the Practice Education Team (PET). The decision making regarding a “not competent” grade is highly complex and all support networks available to the practice educator should be utilised. While this may prove to be a useful resource to practice educators this resource should not be used in isolation and/or without concrete and consistent evidence to support your concerns.

The following are some examples of circumstances/incidents which can often be associated with “not competent” outcomes. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

- Consistent non-compliance with feedback provided by practice educator despite regular reinforcement and encouragement
- Consistent demonstration of lack of insight which impacts on student’s personal and professional development
- Recurrent feedback of a negative nature from other Occupational Therapy staff and/or members of the Multidisciplinary team regarding the student’s behaviour and/or actions in a professional context
- Student’s support requirements encroaching on PE’s clinical and personal commitments on a consistent basis.
- Constant supervision required during all patient contact despite expectations of enhanced performance according to the TCD “timelines and expectations” document. This level of supervision may be required due to well-founded concerns regarding:
  1. The student’s interactions with and/or handling of patients and/or
  2. The reliability of the student’s observational/evaluation skills
- The occurrence of one or more critical incidents (*see definition below) despite prompt and direct feedback following each incident

*Critical incident:
A critical incident is defined as “any action or decision that has an ethical, legal and/or safety implication for patients, staff or visitors to a service.
Student pre-supervision form:

The purpose of this form is to assist the student with preparing for his/her supervision session. Please note that the completion of this form mandatory. The OT student must complete an updated form each week and bring to his/her supervision session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What progress has been made with my learning objectives this week (as per learning contract)?</th>
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<tr>
<th>What do I think went well this week (strengths)?</th>
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<tr>
<th>What do I think did not go well this week? Why did this not go well? What could I have done differently?</th>
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<tr>
<th>What competency areas do I think require further attention/development? (as per competency areas on assessment form)</th>
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<tr>
<th>What resources could I use to address the above areas of need?</th>
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<tr>
<th>Extended learning/learning objectives for coming week?</th>
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Date of completion: ______________________________

Student signature: _______________________________
Practice educator pre-supervision form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What progress has been made with the students learning objectives this week (as per learning contract)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do I think went well this week (student’s strengths)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do I think did not go well this week?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What competency areas do I think require further attention/development? (as per competency areas on assessment form)</td>
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<tr>
<td>What resources could the student use to address the above areas of need?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended learning/learning objectives for coming week?</td>
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Date of completion: ____________________________________________

Practice educator signature: _________________________________
## Supervision Form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academic year:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placement site:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice educator name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of supervision:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice education week (example: week 3 of 11)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Resources required:

- □ Student pre-supervision form (mandatory)
- □ Practice educator pre-supervision form (if applicable)
- □ Student learning contract (mandatory)
- □ Other written work as specified (if applicable)

### Agenda:

**Concrete:**

- ✓ Discuss current caseload
- ✓ Review and discuss practice educator AND student pre-supervision forms (where applicable)
- ✓ Summarize gaps in knowledge/skill that require further attention/development
- ✓ Formulate new learning objectives for coming week

**Additional/other:**

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

**Summary of key points of discussion:**

**Caseload:**

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Progression with learning objectives:

Strengths identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency area/s requiring development/attention</th>
<th>Causes of current difficulties (knowledge/skills/attitude)</th>
<th>Actions to be undertaken to promote improvement (please state by whom)</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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</table>
Summary of specific learning objectives for coming week:

Practice educator signature: _____________________________

Student signature: _____________________________________

Date of next supervision/review date: _________________________

Last updated: May 2015. Please note that this pathway will be reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with student and practice educator feedback.