

# Clinical educator tip sheet: Learning contracts and plans

Occupational Therapy Clinical  
Education Program

## What are clinical educator tip sheets?

The contribution of clinical educators to a student's learning and development while on placement is fundamental to the success of the placement and the overall outcomes for the student. This series of tip sheets aim to equip clinical educators with knowledge, information, processes and tools on key topics related to placement organisation and student learning.

## Why is this topic relevant?

Learning contracts and plans can be particularly useful for students and clinical educators on placement. Learning contracts can help to initiate the learning relationship between the clinical educator and the student by clarifying expectations and aspirations. The Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program's educational guiding principles promote active learners who construct new meanings in relation to what they already know (Best, Rose and Edwards 2005). Learning plans and contracts are a way of promoting active learners, enabling learners to be responsible and accountable for their own learning.

## What are learning contracts and plans?

**Learning contracts:** Clarify the expectations of the clinical educator and the student and provide a way of having an open conversation about these. A written document allows for expectations to be reviewed at regular intervals and for both parties to provide feedback to one another.

**Learning plans:** Identify the specific learning needs of the student and actions which might be taken in order for these to be addressed. Learning needs should relate to the domains on the Student Placement Evaluation Form [SPEF-R] (The University of Queensland, 2008), against which the ongoing and final evaluation is made.

## When should learning contracts and plans be completed?

- Guidelines for completing learning contracts are usually provided by the individual university and will be outlined in their manuals. As a general guideline for placements longer than 5 weeks, a draft is usually completed by the end of week 1 and finalised by the end of week 2
- Reviews are then completed in supervision and at half-way evaluations

## What actions might a student be responsible for in a learning contracts and plans?

- To be willing to make the most of learning opportunities on placement
- To reflect on their current learning needs in relation to the SPEF R domains
- To be willing to take action to address learning needs whilst on placement
- Establish a process with the clinical educator of ongoing review and evaluation of progress towards goals
- At the end of placement reflect on goal achievement and begin making goals for the next placement

## What actions might a clinical educator be responsible for in a learning contracts and plans?

- Be able to articulate the role of the occupational therapist in the practice area and help the student to refine their goals in relation to this.
- Discuss the student learning style to enable the student to identify how they may need to develop their personal skill set to meet the needs of the placement
- Help students to link the learning contract / plan with the SPEF-R domains and items
- Recommend learning resources to assist student to develop appropriate goals
- Provide timely, constructive feedback on the students progress towards their learning goals

## What is the Universities role regarding learning contracts and plans?

- Prepare students for the process of developing personal learning goals
- Provide examples of learning goals to clinical educators
- Support students and clinical educators as required

## How can learning goals be written?

There are many formats for writing learning goals. The following is an example a format where all goals should include:

- An **action** word (complete, assess, give, develop, present, manage, document, write, identify)
- The **item** (a report, an assessment, a literature review, a presentation, a case study)
- The **conditions** (using available resources, with clinical educator support)

- The **standard** (within the first 3 weeks of placement, at week 7 during the in-service time) (QOTFC 2016)

Examples of learning goals:

- To document one therapy sessions directly into the medical record without a draft by the end of week 4

## Further resources

Clinical Education Preparation and Support (CEPS) Program consists of a series of online modules with content relating to teaching and learning in clinical settings including: Module 3: [Preparations for your students](#)

## References

The above content has been adapted from:

Best D., Rose M. & Edwards H. (2005) Learning about Learning. In Rose M. & Best D. (Eds.), *Transforming Practice through Clinical Education, Professional Supervision and Mentoring* (121- 142). Sydney: Churchill Livingstone.

Occupational Therapy Practice Education Collaborative - Queensland (2007) [Clinical Educator's Resource Kit](#) Review the Student Learning Plan.

University of Queensland, (2008). Student Practice Evaluation Form-Revised Edition (SPEF-R). In *Student Practice Evaluation Form (SPEF)-Revised Edition Package*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland.

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