

4 pillars of practice approach to Practice-based Learning Orthotics NHSGG&C

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Introduction

NHSGG&C Orthotics provide assessment, delivery and advice for reduction in pain and increase to function for patients across 8 sites and support practice education delivery to BSc (Hons) Prosthetic & Orthotic students from the University of Strathclyde.

A change in approach to timetables for the January – May 2026 University of Strathclyde Orthotic cohort of students was undertaken with aim to increase evidence of pillars of practice within Practice-based Learning (PrBL).

By supporting students to evidence the 4 pillars of practice in placement they will be better prepared for their early careers.

Aim

The aim of the pilot was to:

- Evidence involvement of all 4 pillars of practice for one cohort of students
- Evaluate student confidence to evidence all 4 pillars of practice
- Evaluate staff confidence to support PrBL across all 4 pillars of practice
- Evaluate a link between evidence of the 4 pillars of practice and student independence in learning

Method

Three students were allocated their 18-week placement to NHSGGC for their undergraduate BSc Honours degree from the University of Strathclyde following the practice education allocation process of the University.

The students completed an anonymous survey link using the platform Microsoft Forms with three questions on the four pillars of practice and their placement (Fig. 1). Staff completed an anonymous survey link at baseline and in the middle of the placement (Fig.2). Students and staff as Practice Educators were supplied with a high-level timetable split into four blocks each relating to a clinical pillar.

Table 1: 4 pillars of practice approach to placement timetable

Block	Duration	Pillar	Key Activities	Deliverables
Block 1	4 weeks	Evidence and Research	Introduction of four pillars of practice included in the induction. Choose one condition or treatment option; confirm with lead Practice Educator (PE) by end of week one; guided by clinical load. An overview of literature is carried out. Use this evidence to prepare a presentation in Block 3.	300-word paragraph or infographic on information learned
Block 2	4 weeks	Leadership	Reflection piece on own learning in line with 8-week report; identify areas for development; identify gaps between current practices and need for improvement. Leadership of self; "what do I need to know? How will I get there" Identify Procedure Based Assessments (PBA) to work towards and suitable patients; confirm with lead PE	Reflection report
Block 3	4 weeks	Facilitation of Learning	Share information from Block 1 with peers in scheduled MS Teams meeting; provide What Went Well/Even Better If feedback as peers. Adjust presentation based on feedback; share information with staff at site meetings	Presentation and feedback summary
Block 4	18 weeks (6weeks consolidation)	Clinical	Consolidation of clinical activities	Demonstrated clinical competency PBAs complete or extension process initiated

Each pillar of practice had a task for students to complete which would support them to evidence the specified pillar of practice. This was introduced through a team meeting to the staff prior to placement with opportunity for questions and adaptations prior to the placement beginning. The students were made aware of the approach prior to placement and a further review was included at their placement induction.

Students were surveyed (Fig. 1) monthly and staff at baseline and mid placement (Fig. 2). At the time of writing the placements were ongoing.

1. I understand what the four pillars of practice are
2. My student placement should actively involve all four pillars of placement
3. I feel confident I can evidence my involvement with all four pillars of practice

Fig. 1 Questions from MS Forms Survey for students

Fig. 2 Questions from MS Forms Survey for staff

1. The current approach to student placements covers all four pillars of practice
2. Future student placements should actively integrate all four pillars of practice
3. The current placement structure encourages students' independent learning
4. I feel confident in supporting students across all four pillars of practice

Results

The students reported a change in their perception of the pillars of practice. Understanding of the four pillars (January) is consistently high, with a further positive shift in March.

Expectation that placements integrate all four pillars is very strong across all months, particularly January and March.

Confidence in evidencing involvement shows improvement by March, with no Neutral responses and more Strongly Agree. Questions 2 and 3 showed reduction in average scores in February before increasing to above baseline in March.

Student understanding of the four pillars of practice was consistently high across all placement cohorts, with 100% of January and February students agreeing, or strongly agreeing that they understood the four pillars. By March, there was an increase in the proportion of students who strongly agreed. Expectations that placements should actively integrate all four pillars were high in all students. Confidence in evidencing involvement across all four pillars improved over time, with no neutral responses in March and two-thirds of students strongly agreeing (Fig. 3).

Staff perceptions of PrBL in relation to the four pillars of practice showed clear positive movement from baseline to mid-placement. At baseline, responses across several questions were predominantly neutral, particularly in relation to whether the current placement structure encouraged independent learning and whether the current approach covered all four pillars of practice.

By mid-placement, there was a clear shift towards agreement across all four domains.

The most consistent and strongly positive responses at both time points related to the importance of integrating all four pillars into future student placements, with the proportion of staff selecting "strongly agree" increasing further at mid-placement.

Staff confidence in supporting students across all four pillars also improved over time, with no respondents expressing disagreement at mid-placement and an increased proportion reporting strong agreement. Overall, these findings suggest that increased focus on the four pillars within the placement model is associated with improved staff confidence, greater perceived support for student independence, and stronger alignment with the pillars of practice framework (Fig. 4).

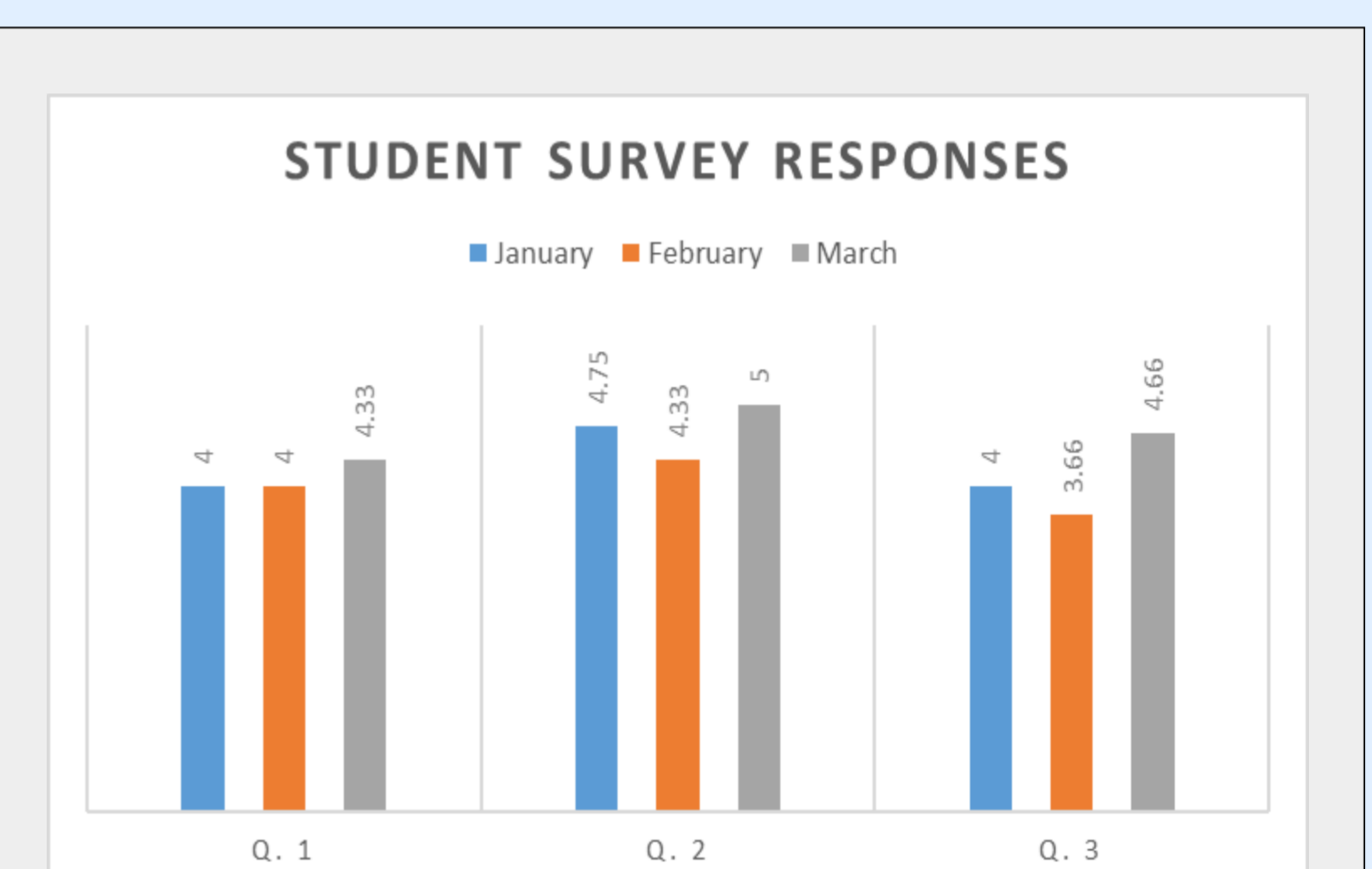


Figure 3: Results from student MS Forms survey at baseline (January), February and March 2026 for each of the three questions posed

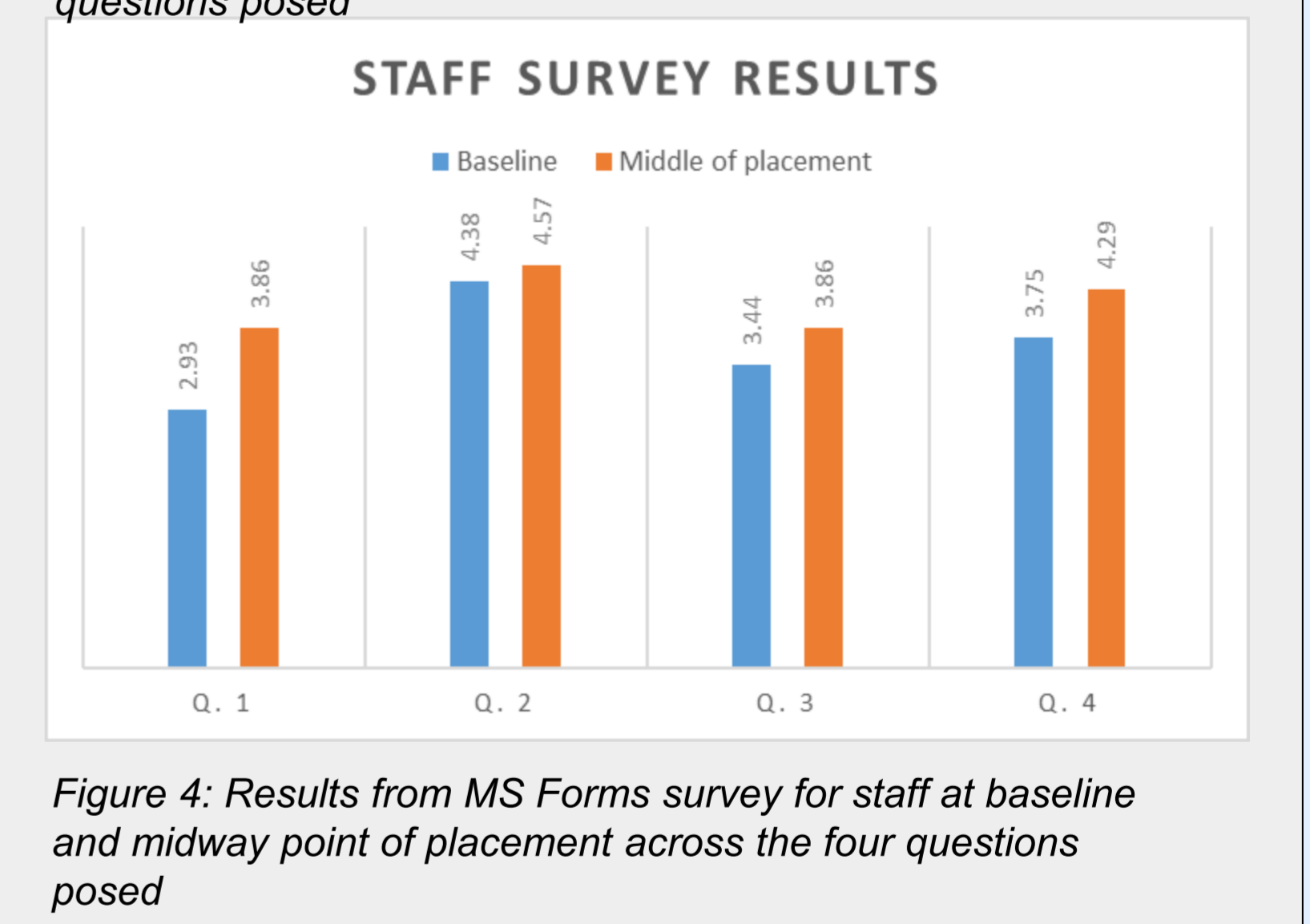


Figure 4: Results from MS Forms survey for staff at baseline and midway point of placement across the four questions posed

Conclusion

Limitations: The review was limited to the first half of one placement with one single student cohort. These findings are based on small cohort sizes and percentages should therefore be interpreted with caution. Results reflect student self-reported perceptions at a single time point and may be influenced by placement context and timing.

Despite these limitations, consistent trends across cohorts suggest increasing confidence and strong alignment with expectations that placements should integrate all four pillars of practice. There was no comparison group without case study input and 9 staff were lost to follow up, limiting analysis.

Future Areas of Work: To be carried out over larger scale and repeated across further student cohorts.

Acknowledgements

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