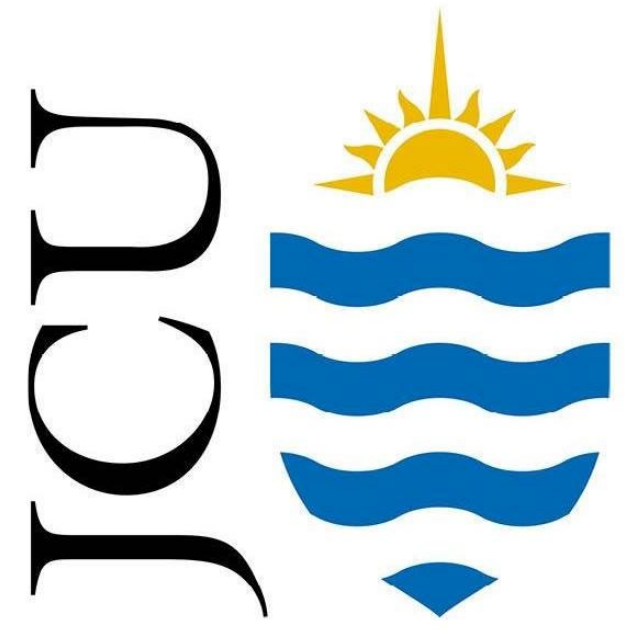


Consensus Challenges in Clinical Placement Evaluation: Insights from a Modified Delphi Study



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Introduction

Clinical placements are essential to health professional education, yet evaluating their quality remains inconsistent. Although tools exist to assess student learning and placement environments, many are discipline-specific, lack validation, or fail to address broader aspects such as workplace resilience and supervision quality. Building on a previous modified Delphi study that identified key areas of measurement (Simmons et al., 2025), this study explored expert consensus on the tools used to evaluate clinical placement performance within allied health contexts.

Methods

A modified Delphi approach was used to explore expert opinion on the effectiveness of existing clinical placement evaluation tools. In Round 2, experts from diverse allied health disciplines identified commonly used tools for 33 areas of measurement. These included student learning outcomes (e.g., communication, reasoning) and placement experience (e.g., supervision, feedback, inclusivity). In Round 3, experts rated each tool's effectiveness using a 5-point Likert scale. Consensus was defined as $\geq 75\%$ agreement with a rating of 4 or higher. Qualitative responses were analysed deductively, using predefined areas of measurement. This allowed insights and limitations to be explored in context with the tools identified for each domain.

Results

Experts achieved consensus on tools for 20 of 33 measurement areas. Tools for student learning outcomes reached higher consensus than those for placement experience. Supervisor observation, discipline-specific assessment tools (e.g., APP, COMPASS[®]), and reflective tasks were widely supported for evaluating communication, documentation, reasoning, and professionalism. Validated tools were preferred for self-efficacy and interprofessional practice (Figure 1).

In contrast, placement experience domains such as student trust, autonomy, coping, supervisor skills, and institutional support lacked clear consensus on measurement tools. While surveys and informal conversations were commonly used, experts questioned their reliability and emphasised the importance of real-time, contextual feedback. Areas such as supervisor satisfaction and university support of supervisors were best measured through structured feedback tools (Figure 2).

In qualitative responses, experts stressed that no single tool suffices and that blended, multi-method approaches were essential:

“Clinical competency is the summation of all the areas detailed above. To be considered clinically competent, the student must gather information, display clinical reasoning, show resilience and be reflective.” - Placement Supervisor 6

Real-time feedback and context-specific assessment were seen as more effective than end-of-placement surveys:

“Feedback surveys that occur DURING a placement... provide effective capture and capacity to address issues. But the standard student feedback approach after a placement doesn't give a lot to address this area well.” - Placement Coordinator 4

Experts were also highly aware of the limitations of student feedback:

“Student feedback surveys can be useful, but this is also loaded against the bias of the student's experience on the placement.” - Placement Coordinator 4

Finally, one of the most powerful themes that emerged was the importance of context:

“Inclusiveness is difficult to quantify and varies depending on the placement site's policies and culture.” - Placement Coordinator 1

References

Simmons, L., Barker, R., Barnett, F., & McGuckin, T. (2025). Evaluating clinical placement performance in allied health student-led healthcare services: A modified Delphi study. *Australian Journal of Clinical Education*, 14(1), 19–45. <https://doi.org/10.53300/001c.136339>



Figure 1. Tools achieving consensus aligned with Student Learning Outcomes



Figure 2. Tools achieving consensus aligned with Experience of Placement

Conclusions

The findings confirm that clinical placement evaluation requires a multi-method, context-sensitive approach. While student learning outcomes are relatively well-supported by existing tools, measuring placement experience, especially relational, emotional, and supervisory domains, remains inconsistent. These insights support the development of a flexible evaluation framework that balances standardisation with local adaptability and disciplinary relevance.