

# An evaluation of practice supervisor training for student paramedics

**Megan Jadzinski** (Corresponding Author), Senior University Practice Learning Adviser, Faculty of Health and Social Science, Bournemouth University; **Joanne Hirdle**, University Practice Learning Adviser, Faculty of Health and Social Science, Bournemouth University; Bournemouth, UK. **Email:** mjadzinski@bournemouth.ac.uk

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2017) outlines the roles and responsibilities of registrants in supporting learning in the workplace in its education and training standards. This is supported by Pearce et al (2022), who suggest that practitioners are responsible not only for patients but also for supporting students.

As part of healthcare education programmes, students are allocated to practice placements where a specific member of staff oversees their development, offers support, facilitates learning and assesses their proficiency (O'Keefe et al, 2016).

These individuals are often registered health professionals who are suitably prepared for this additional role; they are referred to as practice educators or supervisors (O'Keefe et al, 2016). It is recognised by the College of Paramedics (CoP, 2017) that a practice educator can be referred to as a mentor or supervisor. The term practice educator will be used for the purpose of this article.

The HCPC (2014; 2022) identifies that practice educators should have the knowledge, skills and experience to support students, and should also be a role model to others and promote their engagement in learning. This is supported by the CoP (2017), which recognises that registered professionals have a responsibility to create an effective learning environment when working in a practice educator role.

HCPC professionals are advised to attend training sessions to support their development in this area before taking on a formal practice educator role. Similarly, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2018a) requires assessors and supervisors (who have the same role as a practice educator) to be suitably prepared having embarked upon

## Abstract

**Background:** Registered health professionals have a responsibility to facilitate learning in the workplace and those who are supporting students should have the skills and knowledge to take on this role. Paramedics are now working in a variety of healthcare settings. Regulatory bodies recognise that students should have opportunities to develop their supervision skills before qualifying, so practice supervisor training was implemented into the final year curriculum at one university. **Aim:** To explore the value of incorporating practice supervisor training into the curriculum. **Methods:** Final-year student paramedics were provided with practice supervisor training as part of their degree. This training was delivered over three seminars before the students' final preregistration placement. Students were invited to provide anonymous feedback via an evaluation form. **Findings:** A significant number of students felt prepared to take on the practice supervisor role when qualified. **Conclusion:** Practice supervisor training, when delivered as part of the curriculum, is of benefit to students.

### Key words

- Practice supervisor
- Paramedic
- Health and Care Professions Council
- Education
- Student paramedic
- Leadership

Accepted for publication: 21 February 2023

relevant preparation, which is often achieved through specific training.

Preparation for the role can be delivered in a variety of formats, including online recorded sessions and face-to-face teaching, although there is no universal training for practice educators (CoP, 2017). Registrants will normally access training through their organisation's education team or their local higher education institution (HEI). Practice supervisor training is provided as a formal training programme to support the role of practice educator and will be referred to as such within the article.

Predominantly, paramedics work in the prehospital setting as part of an ambulance service after registration (CoP, 2019). However, paramedics, including newly qualified practitioners, are now seeking employment in other areas (Eaton et al, 2020). Eaton et al (2020) acknowledge that paramedics now have opportunities to work in a range of healthcare services, including primary care, emergency departments and minor injury settings. This allows for multidisciplinary teamwork and close working partnerships to be formed with other professionals, including other allied health professionals, such as occupational therapists, as well as doctors and nurses.

Practice education is an integral part of any healthcare programme, with regulatory bodies, including the HCPC (2017), recognising that practice-based learning is vital for students.

Historically, paramedics have completed supervisor or mentor training after qualification, which has enabled them to become practice educators. Previously, some HEIs incorporated information about mentoring into their level 6 leadership module to meet the HCPC requirements for course validation. However, in accordance with changes to the standards in other healthcare programmes such as the NMC's (2018a) and to ensure parity for all students, practice supervisor training was integrated into the 2021–2022 preregistration curricula for all healthcare students, including paramedics. All students complete this training before their last placement, which gives them the opportunity to implement their newly acquired knowledge and skills while still in a student and supernumerary capacity.

No literature specifically discusses the implementation of the practice supervisor training into the preregistration curriculum of any UK healthcare programme, including paramedic science. This is similar to Lane et al's (2016) findings, which showed that no primary research had been carried out into mentorship training or models within the paramedic profession, and that the HCPC adopted training models from the NMC.

This article, therefore, seeks to bridge a gap in the literature and demonstrate how an existing training programme can be implemented into a paramedic preregistration curriculum.

### Aims

This article aims to demonstrate how practice supervisor training was incorporated into the final year of a paramedic academic programme.

### Methods

The addition of practice supervisor training into the students' curriculum and timetable was planned

12 months before implementation. This involved discussion with HEI programme leads, year 3 personal tutors and HEI practice leads. Views were also sought from local ambulance trusts and education leads, as newly qualified paramedics would now be prepared to support and supervise students in practice.

Students were required to attend three seminars that were delivered during the final year of their programme. The first two seminars were pre-prepared PowerPoint presentations, facilitated by the students' personal tutor. These preparation sessions were facilitated by a personal tutor, and students' knowledge and personal experiences were explored in groups. Peers shared information, and conversations focused on the practice educator role.

The third and final seminar was facilitated by university practice learning advisers. These are a team of registered professionals with a remit for supporting both students and practice partners during placements.

This final session was structured to allow students to reflect on and consolidate their learning. At the beginning of this seminar, students were asked to access the Mentimeter platform to answer the question: what is your understanding of the key roles of a practice supervisor or educator? This also allowed the facilitators to understand the level of knowledge and experiences in the class.

Students were given allocated time to complete the Mentimeter question, then a group discussion was held to encourage them to explore their answers. The Mentimeter software generates a word cloud of the terms in students' answers and, if a number of students give the same words, these are presented on the screen in a larger format.

Once the training had been completed, students were given a formal, personal certificate they could include on their CV and share with prospective employers.

The seminar learning outcomes included being able to: define the role of a practice supervisor or educator; reflect on strategies that support effective practice learning; identify opportunities to develop knowledge of the students' programme relevant to their area of practice; understand the importance of addressing concerns; and use a framework for feedback to support reliable assessment.

The content focused on a range of topics such as facilitation of learning, learning styles, raising concerns, placement models and support networks. During these sessions, students were asked to participate in a variety of activities, which involved group work, poster presentations, analysing video clips and class discussion. Students' views were explored using their personal practice learning

Please rate the training using the following scale	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very Good	Excellent
	<b>Preparation seminars 1 &amp; 2</b>				
	The content of the training materials				
The delivery of the sessions					
The opportunity to participate in group discussions					
<b>Seminar 3</b>					
The content of the training materials					
The delivery of the sessions					
The opportunity to participate in group discussions					
Following the training, how well prepared do you feel for taking on the role of a practice supervisor?					
	Very underprepared	Underprepared	Not sure	Well prepared	Very well prepared

If you have any comments regarding the course, (e.g. improvements, what you enjoyed, etc) please comment below:

.....

.....

.....

Your comments on this form will remain anonymous. We may use this feedback to support development and changes to future training at BU and also, within potential academic publications. Should you wish to opt out of this, please tick the box.

Figure 1. Practice supervisor training evaluation form

experiences to help them inform their role and responsibilities as a practice educator upon qualifying.

At the start of the sessions, students were informed by lecturers that their feedback may be used to review and develop future training at Bournemouth University as well as for academic publication. Students were invited to provide feedback at the end of the session via a paper evaluation form (Figure 1) and informed that any comments would remain anonymous. An option tick-box was included for those who did not give consent to their feedback being included; their views were taken into account for the development of future training but excluded from this article.

In line with the Bournemouth University (2022) research ethics code of practice, gathering feedback as part of course evaluation does not require ethical approval. Consideration of data gathering and handling was done in line with the university's data protection policy (Bournemouth University, 2023).

Twenty-seven evaluations were completed, with no students wanting their feedback excluded.

## Findings

All students were given the opportunity to give feedback about the preparation seminars.

Students were asked to provide a rating from very poor to excellent for the content of the training, the delivery of the sessions and the opportunity to participate in group discussions. Figure 2 shows how students rated the first two preparation seminars.

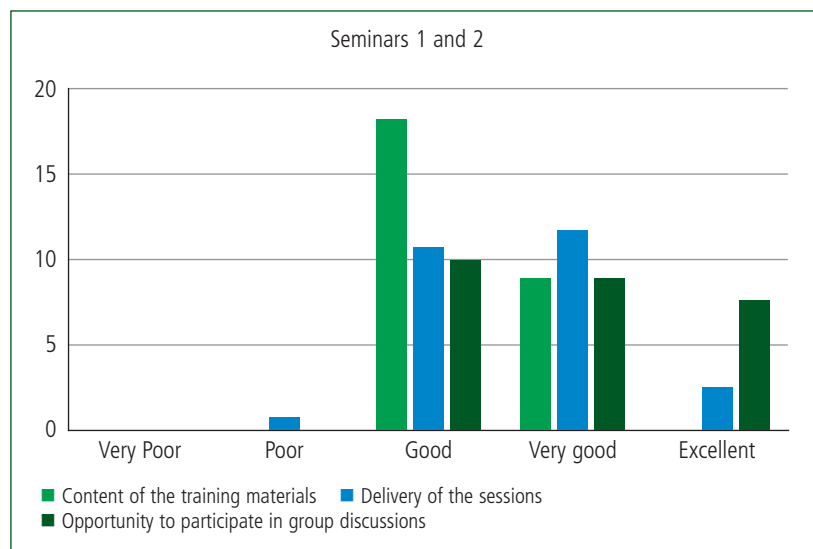


Figure 2. Seminars 1 and 2 evaluation

While one student said the training delivery was poor, the majority of students ( $n=26$ ) rated from good to excellent. The content of these two seminars was scored as either good ( $n=18$ ) or very good ( $n=9$ ), with all students ( $n=27$ ) recognising the value of the group discussions.

The final session, seminar 3, allowed students to reflect on and consolidate their learning. As can be seen in the Mentimeter word cloud in Figure 3, a number of students identified that mentoring and support were key roles of a practice supervisor or educator.

Students also described additional attributes that were important, such as the practice supervisor being approachable, knowledgeable, encouraging, observant and a significant role model.



Figure 3. Mentimeter word cloud of students' answers to: what is your understanding of the key roles as a practice supervisor or educator?

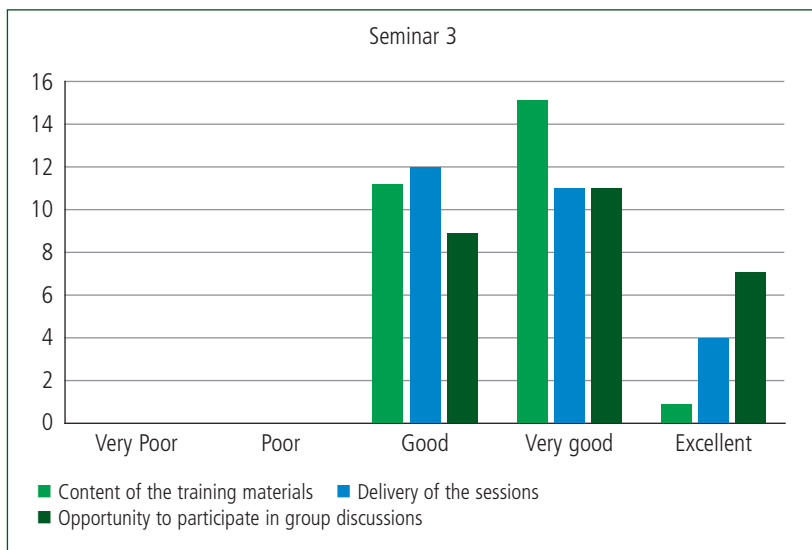


Figure 4. Seminar 3 evaluation

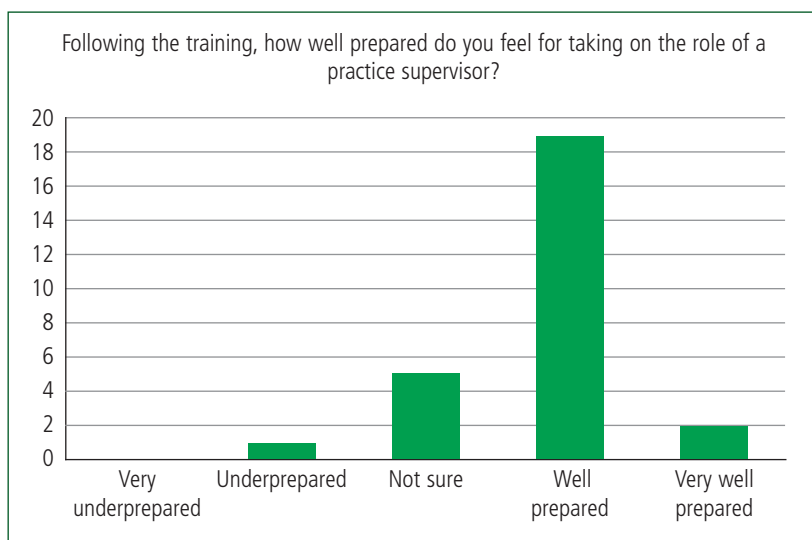


Figure 5. How well prepared do you feel for taking on the role of a practice supervisor or educator evaluation?

The NMC (2018a; 208b) states that the role of a practice supervisor or educator includes supporting and facilitating student learning, with the registrant being knowledgeable about their responsibilities. This correlates with the suggestions that the students made in the sessions. These findings are endorsed by Vasset et al (2021), who recognised that a significant role of educators is supporting students to apply their theory in the practice setting, thereby helping to close the theory:practice gap. The CoP (2017) identifies a key component of educators' role is to aid in bridging this gap by recognising the importance of their being supportive in identifying and promoting valuable learning opportunities.

Students at the end of seminar 3 were, again, provided with the opportunity to comment and evaluate how they found the content, delivery and opportunity for group discussions for this particular session (Figure 4).

The students (n=27) considered that the content, session delivery and opportunity for group discussions were within the good, very good or excellent categories.

After they had completed the training, students were finally asked to identify how prepared they felt to take on the role of a practice supervisor or educator. This was a central question to ascertain the paramedics' readiness as educators. The CoP (2017) acknowledges that the HCPC does not stipulate the training required or its time frame to take on this role, making this question even more valuable.

Most students (n=19) felt well prepared to take on this role (Figure 5). A small proportion (n=5) said they were still not sure, with one student feeling underprepared. No students said they felt very underprepared.

The student paramedics said it was beneficial to have this training before they qualified and before their final placement so they could practise newly acquired knowledge and skills while having supernumerary status.

As part of the evaluation, students were offered a further opportunity to provide comments on the training, which 14 students completed. The comments were reviewed, and included both positive feedback and areas for improvement. Overall, the comments identified what was helpful about this training and the value of having the knowledge and skills included in their degree programme:

*'Very informative, setting up good foundational knowledge for mentoring once qualified'*

*'Very engaging and interactive session'*

*'Really good to have formal supervisor training as part of the degree'*

Others provided feedback on how the training could be improved in the future:

*'A booklet following the training would be good to refer back to in the future'*

*'Would be helpful to have a printout of the key points'*

*'To ask more questions via Mentimeter'*

After reflection on the training sessions and with student feedback taken into consideration, changes have been made for the next academic year. This includes additional use of the Mentimeter platform to support answering questions and to encourage feedback through group discussions. A resource summarising the training has been developed to support students take on this role once qualified.

Overall, the feedback from students showed that the practice supervisor training was beneficial for final-year students. Students identified that the content, delivery and group work of the seminars were effective and that they were able to identify the key roles of a practice supervisor or educator.

## Limitations

There are limitations in this study, which include that the evaluations are based on one cohort of students ( $n=27$ ) so findings are restricted and not representative of a larger population. However, the outcomes from this evaluation do demonstrate consistencies within the feedback and therefore support the validity of these findings. To compare findings from this evaluation, it would be useful to compare these findings with an evaluation of this training programme by other professional groups.

Nonetheless, overall evaluations suggest that students recognised the value in receiving practice supervisor training as part of their final year. Feedback collected identified that most students felt prepared to take on an educator role when qualified. It could be argued that there is value in providing this training to final-year student paramedics.

## Conclusion

Currently, there is no standard approach to meeting HCPC requirements for implementing leadership and supervision skills in the curriculum, or training for the practice educator role.

This evaluation is unique as it has reviewed whether the implementation of a practice supervisor training programme into the final year curriculum for paramedic students has been effective in preparing them for educator roles. It is noted that there is no available literature that specifically discusses the implementation of practice supervisor training and therefore this work aids in closing this identified gap.

## Key points

- Practice supervisors can be any registered health professional
- Registered clinicians need a clear understanding of how to support students in their clinical setting
- Students should be provided with the opportunity to complete training that will support them in their qualified role, including in supervisory and mentoring roles
- Supporting learners is a key requirement for all health professionals

Comments provided by the students suggested that, overall, the content and delivery of the training were effective, with some students identifying some key points to consider when reviewing the training for future year groups. These suggestions included a booklet to be taken away with key points that can be referred to and to use the online software more when facilitating the sessions.

Student paramedics recognised that it was beneficial to have this training before their final placement and qualification so they were able to practise their new knowledge and skills while having supernumerary status.

The evaluations reflect that there is value in student paramedics receiving practice supervisor training as part of the final year of their preregistration programme. It is recognised that this training would benefit a newly qualified clinician as they develop their experience of supporting learning within the practice setting.

As the study was small, a larger scale pilot and evaluations of this training for student paramedics across several HEIs would be beneficial. This topic may also lend itself to a study comparing newly qualified paramedics who had received this training with those who had not.

It is hoped that further HEIs will pilot similar training programmes for paramedic students, thus providing a further body of evidence and increase the number of practice educators in paramedic settings. **JPP**

## CPD Reflection Questions

- What is the role of the practice supervisor or educator?
- How can paramedics who take on this role support practice education?
- How does implementing practice supervisor training into the final-year curriculum support the future workforce?



*Conflict of interest: None.*

**References**

Bournemouth University. Research ethics code of practice: policy and procedure. 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/3rj3bm8c> (accessed 27 February 2022)

Bournemouth University. Data protection and privacy. 2023. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8r9bfv> (accessed 27 February 2022)

College of Paramedics. Practice educator guidance handbook. Bridgewater: College of Paramedics; 2017.

College of Paramedics. Become a paramedic. 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/2p96843r> (accessed 27 February 2022)

Eaton G, Wong G, Williams V, Roberts N, Mahtani KR. Contribution of paramedics in primary and urgent care: a systematic review. *Br J Gen Pract.* 2020;70(695):e421–e426. <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp20X709877>

Health and Care Professions Council. Standards of proficiency for paramedics. 2014. <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-of-proficiency/paramedics/> (accessed 28 February 2023)

Health and Care Professions Council. Standards of education and training. 2017. <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/standards/standards-relevant-to-education-and-training/set/> (accessed 28 February 2023)

Health and Care Professions Council. HCPC updates standards of proficiency. 2022. <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/news-and-events/news/2022/sop-revisions-aug-2022/> (accessed 28 February 2023)

Nursing and Midwifery Council. Realising professionalism: standards for education and training. Part 2: standards for student supervision and assessment. 2018a. <https://tinyurl.com/mrcphbbs> (accessed 28 February 2023)

Nursing and Midwifery Council. What do practice supervisors do? 2018b. <https://tinyurl.com/45jh3psj> (accessed 28 February 2023)

Lane M, Rouse J, Dockling RE. Mentorship within the paramedic profession: a practice educators' perspective. *Br Paramed J.* 2016;1(1)2–8. <https://doi.org/10.29045/14784726.2016.05.1.1.2>

O'Keefe M, Wade V, McAllister S, Stupans I, Burgess T. Improving management of student clinical placements: insights from activity theory. *BMC Med Educ.* 2016;16(1):219. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-016-0747-5>

Pearce R, Topping A, Willis C. Enhancing healthcare students' clinical placement experiences. *Nurs Stand.* 2022. <https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.2022.e11887>

Vasset F, Molnes SI, Helberget L, Teige BC, Frilund M. A qualitative study of supervisors' experiences with nursing students in practice, a new guidance model. *Nurse Educ Today.* 2021;107:105111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2021.105111>

# Call for CPD Papers

The Journal of Paramedic Practice is seeking articles in various topic areas across the four pillars of paramedic practice for its Continuing and Professional Development platform. Contact the editor to contribute articles in paramedic research, clinical practice, education and leadership management.

[jpp@markallengroup.com](mailto:jpp@markallengroup.com)

