

# Embedding Digital Project-Based Placements: Driving AHP Workforce Readiness and Dispelling Myths

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## INTRODUCTION

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) is the national health board with the statutory responsibility for providing, co-ordinating, developing, funding, and advising on education, training, and workforce development for the NHS, and in partnership with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) for social care staff. NES operates nationally with a significant regional presence across Scotland.

Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) within NES have consistently delivered fully digital, peer-assisted learning (PAL) project placements, for students across Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Radiography, Physiotherapy, and Dietetics.

## A PRACTICAL APPROACH



Placements were supported through a structured team approach, including

- robust induction
- daily check-ins and check-outs,
- regular peer and individual supervision,
- informal coffee catch-ups to maintain wellbeing and engagement.
- masterclasses delivered on topics such as evidence-based practice, literature searching, QI, digital tools, and project management.
- students were actively involved in planning, and delivering local and national strategy driven projects
- attendance and presentation at stakeholder meetings internally and externally across health, social care, and education sectors.
- opportunities for interprofessional learning and student led journal clubs
- active use of social media, creatively sharing messages about AHP roles and project outcomes, enhancing visibility and impact.



## STUDENT OUTPUTS

### Importance of good induction



### Models and methods of placement delivery for students



### AHP Scot Blog



### Podcast



### Career Blogs



“Applied research and evidence-based practice alongside data analysis”

## TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Despite the clear benefits, misconceptions persist regarding the value of project-based placements compared to traditional face-to-face clinical experiences. Student feedback highlighted knowledge skills and behaviours developed during placement, complementing clinical learning rather than replacing it. There is evidence to support how a balanced approach to these placements within curricula leads to comprehensive student development across the four pillars of practice, that is applicable across health and social care.

“Improved communication, digital skills, and confidence working in a virtual environment”

“Strengthened my teamwork enhanced my organisation and time-management by managing multiple tasks and deadlines”

## TESTAMONIALS AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

“Due to this placement we got unique learning opportunities that others on our course might not have and learned so much that we will be able to take forward in practice.”

“Great for professional development”

“The supervision allowed us to be independent while feeling very supported at the same time. Could not ask for more”

“The AHP Practice education team were constantly arranging for us to meet other professionals and provided us with as much learning opportunities as possible.”



## CONCLUSION

Digital project-based PAL placements offer a robust, future-focused model that supports workforce readiness, enhances digital capability, and embeds the Four Pillars of Practice. They provide meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for modern healthcare environments while contributing to national priorities. Continuing to share outcomes, strategies, and lessons learned will encourage wider adoption of project-based models across professions, ensuring that education keeps pace with the demands of a connected, digitally enabled health and social care system.