

# Evaluating the Impact of Leadership Placements on AHP Students' Professional Development and Career Progression

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## Key findings

1. Students reported a positive experience of the leadership placement and would recommend it to future students.
2. The placement strengthened key skills including communication, organisation, leadership, and project management.
3. Peer collaboration was identified as a key component of the experience, supporting shared responsibility and strengthening communication.

## Background

The Royal Marsden Hospital's (RMH) Therapies Department has delivered leadership placements for physiotherapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) students since 2023, in response to placement expansion initiatives [1]. This model expands placement capacity whilst enabling students to develop leadership and project management competencies that may not be fully addressed within traditional clinical placements. The hybrid structure, integrating on-site and remote working, facilitates meaningful engagement in service-level projects. Following two years of implementation, we conducted a service evaluation to explore students' experience of undertaking a leadership placement, and how it influenced their transition into early career roles.

## Aim

To explore PT and OT students' experiences of completing a leadership placement at the RMH, and how it influenced their transition into their first professional roles.

## Objectives

- Explore students' experiences of the leadership placement.
- Examine its impact on professional development during subsequent placements.
- Assess its influence on career development, including securing a first Band 5 post.
- Identify transferable skills applied in later placements.
- Evaluate both the positive and negative impacts on students' professional journeys.

## Method

- A prospective single-site service evaluation was carried out.
- Seven people (PT: n=5; OT: n=2) who had previously completed a leadership-placement at the RMH were invited to participate via the university placement team and RMH Therapies Practice Educator.
- Data were collected via semi-structured online interviews.
- Data were transcribed and analysed using Braun & Clarke's thematic analysis.

## Results

Three students participated in the evaluation (Table 1). Thematic analysis generated four key themes (Table 2).

**Table 1 : Participant demographics (N=3)**

Characteristic	Category	n
Profession	Physiotherapy	3
Employment status at interview	Final-year student (placements completed; seeking Band 5 role)	1
	Band 4 practitioner (Band 5 secured)	2
Educator-to-learner ratio	1:1	1
	2:1	1
	4:2	1

**Table 2: Themes and Subthemes**

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Change in Perspective in Leadership Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of leadership placement</li> <li>• Pre &amp; Post placement perceptions</li> <li>• NHS roles and structure</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Transferable Skills Developed in the Leadership Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional practice</li> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Professional development</li> </ul>
Theme 3 : Content of the Leadership Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative working</li> <li>• Project management</li> <li>• Work environment</li> </ul>
Theme 4 : Future Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid placement model</li> <li>• Goal setting and assessment criteria</li> </ul>

## Supporting Quotes

"Being able to communicate within an MDT with consultants, with therapy leads... These are really good skills that you'll get in leadership."

"It changed my opinion on leadership entirely... you can lead your own learning, your workload, your values."

"It put me in a better position for organisational and leadership skills compared to peers who didn't have a leadership placement."

## Conclusion

Students valued the leadership placement and reported enhanced skills that were transferable to subsequent placements and early career roles. Notably, two of the three participants had secured Band 5 roles in a highly competitive job market. Although the small sample size limits generalisability and causation cannot be inferred, the interviews provided rich, in-depth insights into the perceived benefits of the model. Future research should include larger cohorts or multi-centre studies and examine alternative models, such as split clinical/leadership placements.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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1. Health Education England. (2020). Guide to Practice Based Learning (PBL) for Allied Health Professional (AHP) Students in Leadership.