



Early career guidance framework for prosthetics and orthotics

A guide to preceptorships in prosthetics
and orthotics



Authors	03
Acknowledgements	03
Funding	03
Introduction	04
What is preceptorship?	05
Who is preceptorship for?	05
Core phases of early career support	06
1. Pre-preceptorship: Readiness for the workplace	06
What is pre-preceptorship and what value does it add?	06
What does the pre-preceptorship phase look like?	07
2. Preceptorship: Structured transition support	08
What should a preceptorship programme look like?	08
How can preceptorship programmes be evaluated?	08
3. Post-preceptorship: Ongoing mentorship and guidance	10
What are the benefits of mentorship in early career development?	10
What does effective mentorship look like?	11
How do mentorship and preceptorship differ?	11
Top tips for preceptorships	12
As a future preceptee at the very start of your career	12
As a preceptee during a preceptorship programme	12
As a preceptee during the preceptorship	13
Reflections of positive transition experiences	13
A warm welcome	13
Sustained support	14
Advice for employers and managers	14
Advice for new graduates	15
An employer's reflections on the benefits of preceptorship	16
Career profiles to inspire	17
Dawn Crofts, National Clinical Lead for Prosthetics, Blatchford	17
Laura Barr, Advanced Orthotic Practitioner, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde	18
Appendix 1: Incorporating the four pillars of practice	20
Appendix 2: Suggested practice observations	21
Additional resources	21

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Introduction

Welcome to the Prosthetics and Orthotics Early Career Guidance Framework, a comprehensive resource designed to help enhance the support made available to newly qualified practitioners as they navigate the transition from university to the workforce. The framework has been developed in response to the identified need to more effectively support preparedness among early career professionals, to help them build strong professional foundations and to go on to enjoy productive and fulfilling careers.

It is crucial that we invest in the development of a capable and resilient workforce to better meet the needs of patients and adapt to the evolving healthcare landscape. A recent workforce survey¹ highlighted the contemporary career expectations of students and newly qualified professionals, which underline the need for ongoing support to improve workforce retention in prosthetics and orthotics.

At the point of professional registration, all new graduates of Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) approved pre-registration programmes are deemed to meet the threshold requirements of the HCPC's Standards of Proficiency for Prosthetists / Orthotists.

However, a **preceptorship programme** is a necessary and valuable approach to supporting newly qualified prosthetists and orthotists who may face challenges transitioning from pre-registration education to clinical practice. Limited access to experienced colleagues, potential isolation in orthotics and the stress of relocating for work make preceptorship crucial. It goes beyond supervision, focusing on an individual's development in a new role, environment, and location. A robust preceptorship programme demonstrates an employer's commitment to career development, builds the confidence of newly qualified clinicians and promotes quality and innovation in a challenging clinical setting.

This guidance framework has been informed by the five Health and Care Professions Council (2023) Principles for Preceptorship and by the 20 standards set out in NHS England's (2023) Allied Health Professional (AHP) Preceptorship Standards and Framework.

It is intended to serve as a resource for:

- pre-registration learners approaching the end of their studies,
- newly qualified and early career practitioners,
- organisational, service, and departmental leaders,
- line managers, and
- preceptors.

1. Eddison, Healy, Leone, Jackson, Pluckrose, Chockalingam. Profile of the UK prosthetic and orthotic workforce and mapping of the workforce for the 21st Century. Available at ; https://issuu.com/staffordshire_university/docs/bapo_workforce_report_2023. Published 2023. Accessed January 25, 2024.

What is preceptorship?

Preceptorship is a period of structured support provided to healthcare professionals during key moments of career transition. Its purpose is to improve individuals' **confidence** as they move into new roles, allowing them to apply and develop their knowledge and skills to greatest effect within their scope of practice and achieve their potential.

Preceptorship is an important investment in individuals and their future careers. This is achieved through the provision of personalised programmes of uni- and multi-professional development opportunities and support from an experienced professional. At its most effective, preceptorship is tailored to meet each individual's needs. It takes account of their personal journey into their profession along with their individual experiences, strengths, and developmental needs. It instils the importance of continuing professional development and considers personal career goals.

As a supportive intervention, preceptorship brings benefits not only to an individual practitioner but also to their employing organisation. For example, offering preceptorship programmes can help to improve an organisation's ability to recruit and retain staff, and embed a culture of ongoing professional development and patient safety.

A **preceptee** is an individual accessing a period of preceptorship. A **preceptor** is an individual providing one-to-one support to someone undertaking preceptorship.

Who is preceptorship for?

Preceptorship programmes may be appropriate to a range of individuals going through **key career transitions**, based on their qualifications and professional circumstances. Specific groups include:

- 1. Recent graduates:** Preceptorship designed for recent graduates of prosthetics and orthotics programmes supports the transition from an educational environment to a clinical setting. It offers the opportunity to gain practical experience and further develop skills and confidence under the guidance of an experienced preceptor.
- 2. Internationally educated practitioners:** Preceptorship designed for internationally educated prosthetists and orthotists, who gained their qualifications outside the UK, enables them to become familiar with the UK healthcare system, standards, and clinical practices, ensuring they meet the necessary requirements to practice in the UK.
- 3. Returning to practice:** Individuals returning to the field of prosthetics and orthotics after a period of absence, such as a career break or maternity leave, can also benefit from preceptorship. In this instance, it provides opportunities to update knowledge, skills and confidence, bridging the gap between previous experience and current practice requirements.
- 4. Switching roles:** Preceptorship can be suitable for practitioners transitioning into a dual practice role in which they will be working in both orthotics and prosthetics. This allows them to expand their expertise and competencies in both areas, ensuring they can effectively deliver care and support to patients requiring either orthotic or prosthetic devices.

It is important to note that preceptorship may not be suitable for everyone. Its intended focus is **key moments of transition** within an individual's career. Those who have significant experience in the field, already possess required competencies, or have previously completed a preceptorship program may find alternative professional development opportunities or mentorship programmes more appropriate to meeting their needs. Consultation with preceptorship or learning and development coordinators will be helpful where uncertainty arises.

This document focuses specifically on preceptorship for, and related needs of, newly qualified and early career prosthetists and orthotists.

Core phases of early career support

There are three core phases to effective early-career support for prosthetists and orthotists:

1. the pre-preceptorship phase,
2. the preceptorship phase, and
3. the post-preceptorship phase.

Each phase fulfils a distinct purpose, and each is equally valuable in supporting new entrants to consolidate the key competencies, skills, and areas of knowledge essential for newly qualified professionals. Together, they focus on supporting prosthetists and orthotists to develop strong foundations across the four pillars of practice and enable newly qualified colleagues to succeed on their chosen paths.

1. Pre-preceptorship: Readiness for the workplace

As they embark on their new career, it is important that newly qualified prosthetists and orthotists, and those who are approaching qualification, develop some clear, initial career goals. Universities may provide a careers service to assist in drafting these goals. It is recommended that final year learners and recently qualified practitioners also refer to the British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists' (2024) *Career Development Framework for Prosthetists and Orthotists: Building Career Dividends* to gain a broader understanding of the various paths available in the field.

Securing a first job is a crucial step in determining the initial level of engagement practitioners will have with each of the **four pillars of practice** (clinical practice, leadership, facilitation of learning, and evidence, research, and development) and the capacity in which they will work. Evaluating how well individual job offers align with initial career goals is a first step towards fulfilling them.

It is highly recommended that newly qualified prosthetists and orthotists seek out roles offering a **one-year preceptorship programme**. As discussed earlier, these programmes support the building of clinical confidence and ease the transition into new careers, which provide the foundations for individuals to fulfil their professional ambitions.

“In the early days of my first job, I was introduced to the multidisciplinary team and experienced colleagues supported me through supervision and guidance to improve my skills.”

What is pre-preceptorship and what value does it add?

Pre-preceptorship refers to the initial phase of professional development that occurs before a formal preceptorship programme. It extends from the period leading up to completion of a pre-registration programme or apprenticeship and includes the initial phase of employment in a first qualified role before a preceptorship programme begins.

Pre-preceptorship aims to boost preparedness for commencing a formal preceptorship programme. By engaging in pre-preceptorship activities, pre-registration learners and newly qualified prosthetists and orthotists can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their preceptorship experience. It is important to note that pre-preceptorship complements preceptorship but does not replace it.

What does the pre-preceptorship phase look like?

The pre-preceptorship phase may include a range of unstructured learning and development opportunities proactively organised and managed by the future preceptee, with support and guidance as required. Examples of pre-preceptorship activities include:

- **Observational opportunities:** Use placement periods towards the end of pre-registration education to connect with placement educators and develop a comprehensive understanding of the work environment. As a new graduate, seek opportunities to volunteer or shadow senior colleagues in both private and NHS settings to gain further exposure to various clinical settings.
- **Networking and informational interviews:** Connect with professionals in the field through social media platforms or 'informational interviews'. Informational interviews are purposefully focused conversations that can assist in gaining insights into the profession and practice, and help build connections. Reach out to established practitioners, organisations, or professional bodies like the British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists (BAPO) to gain insight into the profession, discuss career pathways and understand the day-to-day responsibilities and challenges of practice.
- **Continuing professional development:** Engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) activities is an ongoing professional obligation to remain on the Health and Care Professions Council's register. During the period close to qualification, it can make valuable contributions during the pre-preceptorship phase. Pre-registration learners and new entrants to the profession can enrol in relevant courses, workshops, or webinars to deepen their knowledge and skills in prosthetics and orthotics. For example, these educational opportunities might focus on topics such as anatomy, biomechanics, assessment techniques, or current trends and advancements in the field.
- **Professional associations and conferences:** Become a member of BAPO to access professional resources, conferences, and networking events. Attend a range of conferences, workshops or 'Tea Time Talks' to learn from experts, stay updated with industry trends, and connect with professionals who can offer guidance and support.
- **Volunteering or internships:** Seek volunteer or internship opportunities in prosthetics and orthotics. Assist in clinical settings, participate in community outreach programmes, join BAPO committees or support research projects. Gain hands-on experience, build professional relationships, and apply knowledge in practice settings.

The pre-preceptorship phase may also include more structured approaches and programmes. When a newly qualified practitioner joins their employing organisation, the initial period typically involves:

- orientation to the healthcare organisation,
- learning about the composition of the team they will be joining and their individual roles,
- reviewing health and safety and operational guidelines for P&O practice within the organisation,
- introduction to the expectations, responsibilities, and requirements of a preceptorship programme, and
- discussing individual learning goals and objectives with the allocated preceptor.

This period may also involve activities such as practicing clinical skills, reviewing relevant literature and observing clinical procedures.

In England and Scotland, the pre-preceptorship period is supported by the "[Step to Work](#)" online module and "[Flying Start](#)" programme, respectively. These resources provide structured learning and development opportunities that aim to support preceptees to feel more confident and prepared when they begin their preceptorship programme. They provide guidance, support, and practical tools to help newly qualified practitioners reflect on their experiences and knowledge to help them in their new roles.

These more structured approaches to pre-preceptorship complement, rather than replace, high-quality preceptorship programmes. Providing a supportive pre-preceptorship learning environment, and allocating sufficient time to it, can help to improve the quality and effectiveness of the preceptorship experience.

2. Preceptorship: Structured transition support

The overarching aim of preceptorship is to provide a structured programme of professional support and development that enhances the confidence and competence of newly qualified prosthetists and orthotists as they embark on their careers (see Figure 1). The way organisations run preceptorship programmes will vary, reflecting the resources available to support them and the clinical setting in which they operate. However, it is recommended that preceptorship programmes are of twelve months' duration.

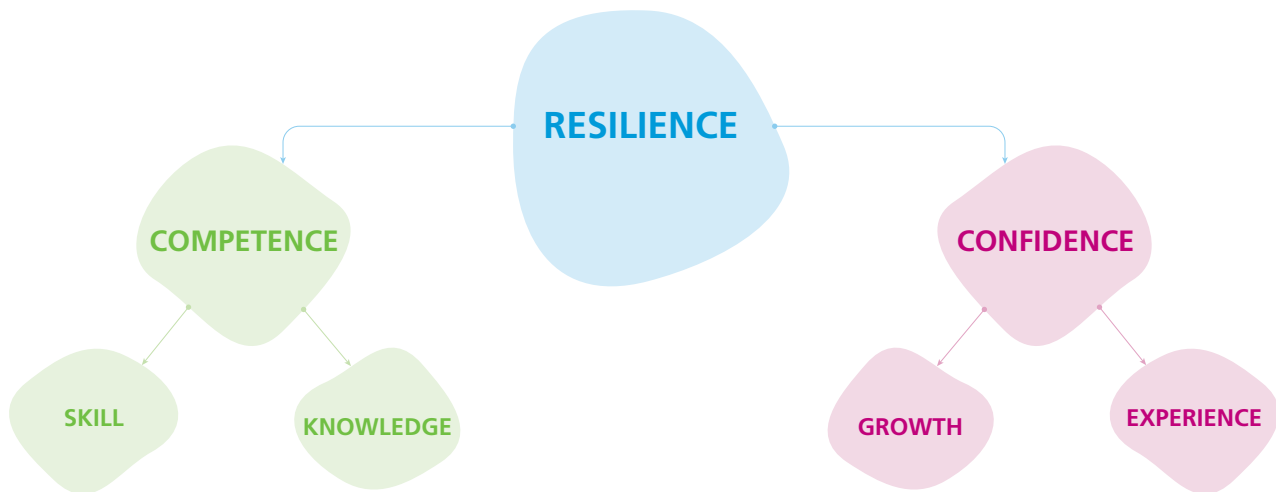


Figure 1: The overarching aim of preceptorship programmes.

What should a preceptorship programme look like?

There are five key principles guiding effective preceptorship programmes, regardless of the context in which they are offered:

1. **Partnership working:** Preceptorship should involve a partnership approach between preceptor and preceptee, with input from wider teams and external professional networks as appropriate. This includes regular communication and review of preceptees' progress and an emphasis on joint goal setting.
2. **Quality and oversight:** Preceptorship programmes should be of high quality and monitored, evaluated, and reviewed regularly. This involves identifying those who need access to preceptorship, supporting uni- and multi-professional learning and development, and integrating preceptorship with induction to the professional role where appropriate.
3. **Preceptee empowerment:** Preceptorship should be tailored to each individual preceptee, their role and their work environment. Preceptorship should empower preceptees to reflect on their strengths and areas for development, to identify and access the support needed to develop professional confidence, and to influence the duration and content of their preceptorship in partnership with their preceptor.
4. **Preceptor role:** Preceptors should have appropriate training, time, and support to understand and fulfil their role effectively. Preceptors should act as professional role models, facilitate multi-professional aspects of preceptorship where appropriate, support reflection, and share effective practice.
5. **Delivering preceptorship programmes:** Preceptorship programmes should be sufficiently flexible to support various types of transition, have a structured design, and incorporate profession-specific and multi-professional elements where necessary. Programmes should also align with other profession-specific and workforce development programmes.

To complement the five key principles, the following features of preceptorship programmes will further enhance their effectiveness and preceptees' experiences:

- **Four pillars of practice:** Incorporate consideration of all four pillars of practice (clinical practice, leadership, facilitation of learning, and evidence, research, and development) for each individual preceptee to ensure they are supported to become well-rounded practitioners (see Appendix 1 for illustrative examples of how).
- **Goal setting:** Establish clear individual goals to be achieved during the programme, based on recognition of the preceptee's strengths, evaluating their confidence levels and identifying areas in which they need support to develop.
- **Shadowing:** Encourage preceptees to shadow senior colleagues in, and potentially beyond, the clinic to learn how more experienced practitioners work with different patient groups.
- **Observed practice:** Incorporate supervised support and observed practice to help to ensure that preceptees are working according to best practice and evidence-based guidelines (see Appendix 2 for suggestions).
- **Continuous professional development:** Allocate protected time for CPD to allow preceptees to engage in additional training and development opportunities to further build their knowledge, skills, experience, and networks.
- **Monitoring progress:** Use a range of approaches to monitor and track progress to ensure preceptees are meeting their agreed learning goals and objectives. Examples include: supervision; observed practice; case discussions and reports; presentations to the team; preparation of departmental resources; feedback from colleagues; patients and their families / carers; self-assessment, including of confidence levels (e.g. on a five-point scale) regarding components of the [HCPC's Standards of Proficiency for Prosthetists / Orthotists](#).
- **Peer support:** Encourage peer support amongst newly qualified professionals, including those from different professional backgrounds and, where appropriate, those from different organisations.

"As a recent graduate myself, I would advise organisations and managers to avoid overloading new graduates with responsibilities and workload. Allow them time to build their confidence and gain experience so they can go on to deliver the best clinical care for patients."

How can preceptorship programmes be evaluated?

Evaluating the success or impact of preceptorship programmes may involve considering the following indicators:

- **Competence and proficiency:** By the end of their preceptorship programme, preceptees should demonstrate a high level of competence and proficiency in performing clinical tasks, assessments, and interventions relevant to prosthetics and orthotics. They should be able to work independently with minimal supervision.
- **Confidence and autonomy:** By the end of the programme, preceptees should exhibit confidence in their abilities and decision-making, showing the capability to manage cases and make informed judgments. They should have gained the necessary skills and knowledge to practice autonomously within their scope of practice.
- **Professional growth and development:** Preceptee should demonstrate significant growth in their professional skills, knowledge, and clinical reasoning abilities over the course of the programme. They should be actively engaged in reflective practice, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing strategies for continuous learning and development.
- **Effective communication and collaboration:** The programme should support preceptees to develop strong communication and collaboration skills that enable them to effectively interact with patients, colleagues, and other healthcare professionals. They should demonstrate the ability to actively participate in multidisciplinary team discussions and contribute to patient-centred care.

- **Patient outcomes and satisfaction:** A successful preceptorship is also reflected in positive patient outcomes and satisfaction. By the end of the programme, preceptee should be consistently providing quality care, resulting in improved patient outcomes and positive feedback from patients and their families.
- **Adaptability and resilience:** By the end of the programme, preceptee should demonstrate adaptability and resilience in managing challenges and uncertainties encountered in the clinical setting. They should have developed effective coping strategies and be able to maintain professionalism in demanding situations.
- **Commitment to continued professional development:** A successful preceptorship fosters a commitment to lifelong learning. Preceptees should demonstrate enthusiasm for ongoing professional development, engaging in relevant developmental activities and seeking opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills.

These indicators collectively signify a successful preceptorship programme that has supported preceptees to effectively transition from a novice to a competent and confident practitioner in the field of prosthetics and orthotics.

“My advice is always to be engaged in active learning to improve your skills ...
Remain calm and positive about the ups and downs in the early days.
With commitment and work, you can achieve the goals you have for your career.
That’s up to you.”

3. Post-Preceptorship: Ongoing mentorship and guidance

Support for early career prosthetists and orthotists does not end with the completion of a preceptorship programme. Alongside other CPD activities, mentorship is a valuable tool enabling ongoing individual personal and professional development. Mentorship is a dynamic, supportive relationship between two people intended to develop the mentee within their current role or for the future. By pairing a more experienced professional with a less experienced one, mentorship can provide guidance, feedback, and support to help individuals develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed as their career journey unfolds.

What are the benefits of mentorship in early career development?

There are several key benefits to mentorship for early career development, including:

- **Enhanced learning:** Mentees can learn from the experience and expertise of their mentors, gaining valuable insights into the profession and developing new skills and knowledge.
- **Professional networking:** Mentors can help mentees build their professional networks, introducing them to other professionals and providing opportunities for career development and advancement.
- **Personal growth:** Mentees can benefit from the emotional and psychological support of their mentors, building their confidence and resilience, and developing the skills they need to navigate the challenges of their careers.

What does effective mentorship look like?

There are some key elements to consider to ensure that mentorship is effective in supporting early career development. They include:

1. **Clear goals and expectations:** Both mentors and mentees should have clear goals and expectations for the mentoring relationship, including what the mentee hopes to gain from the relationship and what the mentor is willing and able to provide.
2. **Regular communication:** Mentorship requires regular communication between mentors and mentees, including ongoing support and reciprocal feedback. This communication should be structured, with agreement about how often, and in what format, it will occur.
3. **Trust and respect:** Mentorship relationships should be built on a foundation of trust and respect, with mentors and mentees committed to open and honest communication and a willingness to learn from each other.
4. **Flexibility:** Mentorship relationships should be flexible, allowing for changes in goals, priorities, and circumstances over time. Both mentors and mentees should be willing to adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

How do mentorship and preceptorship differ?

It is useful to note that while preceptorship and mentorship share some similarities, they are different in their approach and focus.

Preceptorship typically focuses on achieving specific learning goals and objectives within a defined timeframe, with preceptors providing guidance, monitoring progress towards agreed goals and objectives, and offering constructive feedback.

Mentorship, on the other hand, is a more informal and ongoing process of personal and professional development. It may be less structured and less focused on achieving specific learning outcomes, instead providing a broader range of support to help individuals develop their skills, knowledge, and confidence over time. Mentors may provide guidance on career development, offer advice on workplace challenges and act as a sounding board for ideas and concerns.

BAPO offers mentorship through a dedicated platform open to members. This is a useful tool for all prosthetists and orthotists who wish to expand their network, seek guidance, and engage in career self-management.



Top tips for preceptorships

As a future preceptee at the very start of your career:

- 1. Goal setting:** Establish clear and achievable goals to guide your professional development and ensure a structured approach to your early career.
- 2. Seek mentorship:** Seek a mentor who can provide guidance, feedback, and support as you navigate the challenges of your early career. A mentor can help you develop the skills and knowledge you need to succeed and expand your professional network.
- 3. Continuous learning:** Commit to continuous learning and professional development, whether through formal training or educational programmes, online courses or other resources and opportunities. This will help you stay up to date with industry trends, developments, and best practice.
- 4. Build relationships:** Build positive working relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and other professionals in your field. These relationships can help you learn from others, expand your professional network, and develop your career.
- 5. Effective communication:** Develop effective communication skills, including active listening, clear and concise writing, and confident public speaking. These skills will help you build relationships, collaborate with others, and develop your career.
- 6. Self-reflection:** Engage in self-reflection to identify your strengths and areas for improvement. This can help you set goals, focus on professional development, and grow your career.

As a preceptee during a preceptorship programme:

- 7. Take ownership of your learning:** As a preceptee (and as a professional), it is important to take responsibility for your own learning. This means actively seeking out opportunities to learn and asking for feedback.
- 8. Be open to feedback:** Feedback is essential to the learning process. Be open to receiving constructive feedback from your preceptor and others and use it to build and improve your skills and knowledge.
- 9. Communicate clearly:** Effective communication is key to a successful preceptorship programme. Be clear about your learning goals and needs and communicate any concerns or issues to your preceptor in a timely manner.
- 10. Ask questions:** Don't be afraid to ask questions if you are unsure about something. Your preceptor is there to help you learn and grow and asking questions can help clarify your understanding and deepen your knowledge.
- 11. Actively engage:** Take an active role in your development by participating fully in learning activities, such as shadowing, observed practice, and case discussions.
- 12. Reflect on your learning:** Take time to reflect on your learning and identify areas for improvement. This can help to identify your strengths and areas for development and identify a plan for ongoing professional growth.
- 13. Seek additional learning opportunities:** Preceptorship is just the beginning of your professional development journey. Seek out additional learning opportunities, such as conferences, workshops, and online courses to enhance your skills and knowledge.

As a preceptor during the preceptorship:

14. **Develop a positive and supportive relationship with the preceptee:** Establish a good rapport with the preceptee by being approachable, actively listening, and demonstrating empathy.
15. **Provide clear guidance and expectations:** Clearly communicate your expectations for the preceptorship programme, including the agreed learning goals, objectives and how progress will be monitored. Ensure the preceptee understands the expectations and has the resources and support they need to meet them.
16. **Tailor the learning experience:** Customise the learning experience to the preceptee's individual learning needs and goals. This includes providing opportunities for hands-on learning, shadowing, and observed practice.
17. **Offer regular feedback and support:** Provide regular constructive feedback on the preceptee's progress, strengths, and areas for improvement. Offer support and guidance to help the preceptee address any challenges they may encounter.
18. **Encourage critical thinking and problem-solving:** Encourage the preceptee to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills by challenging them to apply their knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios.
19. **Foster a culture of continuous learning:** Encourage the preceptee to engage in continuous learning and professional development, including attending conferences, workshops and other training and learning opportunities.
20. **Be a positive role model:** Model professional behaviour and ethics, demonstrating good communication skills, teamwork, and leadership.

Reflections on positive transition experiences

There is no single 'correct' way to navigate the early years of careers in prosthetics and orthotics. However, it is an important phase that can have a marked influence on how an individual's career unfolds. Time spent actively planning and shaping the support and guidance offered, and sought, is never wasted. The following insights, shared by colleagues who have experienced positive transitions into their first qualified roles, clearly align with the principles and features of effective preceptorship programmes. Reflecting on a series of topic questions, they identify what made a difference to them and what they would advise others:

A warm welcome

Eilidh Geddes, Junior Orthotist, Peacocks Medical Group

*Induction week, my first week in my new role, was spent filling out forms, **meeting colleagues** from different departments, and **spending time in the factory** where I was able to see different manufacturing processes. During that first week, I attended an organised **meal out with the orthotics team**. Having the chance to also meet the team in an informal setting helped me start to get to know them as people, not just in their employed role, which in turn helped me to start building a good working relationship with them.*

*I was **assigned a supervisor and mentor** who I would check in with during regular face-to-face meetings, or quick catch-up phone calls if I had a specific question that I needed an answer to quickly. During the first 3-6 months I was given plenty of **opportunities to shadow** in clinics lead by other orthotists, and to undertake **clinics that ran in parallel with other orthotists on site**.*

Georgia Dayes, Orthotist, Steeper Group

*I was given **time to get to know the team but also the sites I was working at, shadowing initially to understand where places were within each hospital site.***

*I was **allowed time to complete my preceptorship booklet** and was given **regular 1:1s with my preceptor** which included the chance to query anything I wasn't sure of. I was **able to ask every single member of the team for help** if I needed to.*

*I was **given additional time in appointments** to ensure I **built up my confidence** in assessing and prescribing first, **before working on speed.***

Sustained support

Eilidh Geddes, Junior Orthotist, Peacocks Medical Group

*The **regular catch-ups and meetings** with my supervisor and mentor continued and allowed us to **check on my progress**, and how I was settling into the team. **We developed a really positive working relationship** and I felt able to bring any concerns or queries to my supervisor and mentor without any concerns about how they would be received.*

*I continued to be given **opportunities to shadow** in clinics, including those that I was **particularly interested** in seeing and learning about, such as the paediatric and diabetic clinics. This helped me to **expand my understanding of the services and specialities** we offer, and to **begin identifying my own areas of professional interest.***

Georgia Dayes, Orthotist, Steeper Group

*I am still provided with **admin time every other week** to complete any outstanding tasks or CPD I want to fulfil as I **continue developing as a clinician.***

*We continually **share experiences as a team**, giving suggestions to each other regarding prescription. There are always presentations I haven't seen so I **ask colleagues and vice versa.***

*Now that I've built up my speed, my appointment slot times have decreased. However, **should I require additional time** for certain patients, I **am able to ask** for this as long as it is justified.*

Advice for employers and managers

Eilidh Geddes, Junior Orthotist, Peacocks Medical Group

*I would really recommend that the employers and line managers of new graduates set aside **regular meeting times** for them. Ideally, they would be at least monthly in the first instance, but that might lengthen a little as an individual settles in and finds their feet. The focus of the meetings should be on **agreeing goals and specific tasks** for the new clinician to focus on. These meetings should provide **constructive feedback** which highlights **strengths, evidence of progress, and areas to improve on**, signposting or otherwise **identifying resources that might assist** in these areas and encouraging or **facilitating shadowing** in clinics or joint appointments.*

Georgia Dayes, Orthotist, Steeper Group

Don't rush building the foundation of basics and understanding why each component would be prescribed (footwear/insoles / AFOs). **Not being confident in the fundamentals will cause further issues down the line** when graduates are left to their own devices.

Remember, some graduates won't have been in the orthotic clinical setting for 6+months because their most recent placement was in prosthetics, and vice versa.

Give graduates time to build up the speed of their appointments. Everyone is different and I'm sure you would rather the graduate have **an additional 10 minutes** in appointments to begin with **rather than be picking up mistakes** regularly as they felt rushed.

Please give graduates dedicated CPD and admin time. This extra time will allow the graduates **to consolidate everything they've learnt** in the week and **discover what they want to further explore.**

Advice for new graduates

Eilidh Geddes, Junior Orthotist, Peacocks Medical Group

Don't be afraid to ask for what you need. Ask for shadowing opportunities. Suggest joint clinic appointments. If the factory is on-site or nearby, ask to visit to spend time with technicians, discuss manufacturing processes or common queries. You know where your areas of uncertainty lie or where you lack confidence so, to a large extent, you know what will help you. If you are not sure, **ask what learning or developmental opportunities those you work with would recommend.** **You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.**

Georgia Dayes, Orthotist, Steeper Group

ASK! There are no 'silly' questions. If it clarifies something you are unsure of, it's a great question.

If a colleague has interesting cases in their clinic, **don't be afraid to ask for a shadowing opportunity.** They may be working in areas or with client groups that you would like to learn more about.

Ensure you **request dedicated CPD time** and **explore EVERYTHING.** Who knows what element of the profession you enjoy? You don't know unless you try.

These reflections highlight how much there is to be gained from positive experiences of transitions - for individuals, services, and the people accessing them. As Eilidh and Georgia indicate, new and early career prosthetists and orthotists have a role in proactively asking for the support they need. Equally, **service leaders and managers are strongly encouraged to find out about Allied Health Professions (AHP) Preceptorship programmes run by the Trusts in which they are employed.** Ask for details from the Chief AHP or Trust lead. They can help signpost to, or enrol preceptees on, these programmes. These multi-disciplinary learning environments provide a network of fellow AHPs and healthcare workers, opportunities to learn about different services provided by the organisation, insights into challenges experienced by other professions, and the chance to form a supportive friendship group for those new to a location.

An employer's reflections on the benefits of preceptorship

Alasdair Gilbertson, of the Steeper Group, developed a local preceptorship programme in 2020. He was motivated to do so after witnessing some difficult transitions experienced by new entrants to the prosthetics and orthotics profession. Many lacked support, felt overwhelmed by their initial clinical workload, and experienced a “sink or swim” transition from education to the clinical environment. From his perspective, lack of support is one of the contributing factors in early departures from the profession, with negative consequences for all concerned: the individuals themselves, the organisations they join, people accessing services, and the profession.

Steeper's preceptorship programme is structured but flexible and tailored to each graduate's needs. It enables these novice clinicians to develop the knowledge and skills acquired during pre-registration education, build firm foundations for practice, and go on to provide high standards of care. Alasdair considers the commitment a worthy investment from multiple perspectives.

Preceptorship is a three-way partnership providing the best possible start to new staff, benefitting the preceptee, preceptor, and employer.

The benefits for preceptees have been considered in detail throughout the Framework, so Alasdair has focused his reflections on what preceptors and employing organisations stand to gain.

His experience is that introducing a preceptorship programme provides developmental opportunities for preceptors as well as preceptees. He emphasises that preceptors need to be appropriately trained and allocated sufficient time to fulfil their roles, and highlights the opportunities they have to develop supervision, mentorship, and appraisal skills as a result. There is potential for preceptors to value and enjoy their role in developing the clinicians of the future, add another dimension to their work and even increase their job satisfaction.

What's in it for employers? In Alasdair's view:

- Highly trained staff equipped to deliver high quality clinical care
- Reciprocal learning across the team
- Staff satisfaction and cohesion
- Reduced staff sickness, absence, and attrition
- Buoyant candidate pools for vacancies at, and beyond, entry level

Alasdair notes that new entrants to the prosthetics and orthotics profession who engage actively with their preceptorship programme will get the most out of it.

And the more newly qualified and early career prosthetists and orthotists benefit from preceptorship and early career support, the more their employing organisation, service users, and the profession will benefit in return.

Career profiles to inspire

One of the most inspiring aspects of early career years is finding examples of individuals who have navigated similar paths and achieved great success in their chosen fields. Not only do they offer insights into the different types of career opportunities available, but they provide a reminder that, if others have been able to create interesting and fulfilling career for themselves, you can too.

Dawn Crofts, National Clinical Lead for Prosthetics, Blatchford



Dawn's journey into the world of prosthetics and orthotics began when she stumbled upon the pages of a university course brochure. As she delved deeper into the healthcare industry, the role of prosthetists and orthotists caught her attention, igniting a spark within her. She studied for a degree in Prosthetics and Orthotics at the University of Salford.

Initially uncertain about which path to pursue, Dawn found herself torn between becoming a prosthetist or an orthotist. It wasn't until her final placement that her decision solidified. The prospect of building lifelong rapport with patients and being a part of their significant milestones brought her immense satisfaction, leading her to embrace the world of prosthetics wholeheartedly.

Life after university marked the beginning of Dawn's early career. She was fortunate to join a close-knit and dynamic team at Blatchford that provided unwavering support during her formative years. She seized the opportunity for graduate training and support within Blatchford as well. This further propelled her growth, enabling her to refine her skills and broaden her knowledge. Dawn's dedication to her patients shone through as she grasped the level of care required for her role. Determined to offer her patients the best possible experience, she cultivated resilience and bolstered her confidence with every new opportunity that came her way.

The initial months presented Dawn with a varied workload, exposing her to a wide range of amputations and diverse patient demographics. She swiftly adapted and embraced the chance to learn. With each passing day, she honed her expertise and evolved into an exemplary clinician.

Recognising Dawn's exceptional abilities and leadership potential, she was appointed as a department head, responsible for overseeing a multidisciplinary team. Her role expanded beyond direct patient care as she began guiding and mentoring junior colleagues, ensuring the highest standards of practice were maintained within the department.

After nine years in management, Dawn sought her next developmental opportunity and applied for a position in private practice. Despite being the most experienced prosthetist in the clinic, she found herself feeling like a new graduate, eager to absorb knowledge. Her learning journey included delving into cutting-edge technologies such as microprocessor knees, multi-grip hands, high-definition silicone, targeted muscle reinnervation (TMR), and osseointegration. The role also required her to develop proficiency in writing expert witness reports, involving interactions with solicitors and barristers and presenting evidence in court. This transition marked a new chapter in Dawn's career, during which she embraced both the technical advancements in her field and the legal aspects of her role.

Today, as the National Clinical Lead for Prosthetics at Blatchford, Dawn is not only a respected figure within the field but also a source of inspiration for aspiring prosthetists and orthotists. Her career journey from a graduate prosthetist to private practitioner then to National Clinical Lead exemplifies the possibilities that await those who are passionate, committed, and continuously strive for personal and professional growth.

In conclusion, Dawn offers valuable advice to newly qualified or new graduate prosthetists embarking on their career journey. She emphasises the importance of never stopping the pursuit of knowledge and continuously asking questions. As Dawn aptly puts it,

“Keep asking, keep asking questions. You're not going to know everything when you get that university degree certificate. That is just your starting point.”

She encourages aspiring prosthetists to embrace a mindset of curiosity and never be afraid to seek clarification and guidance. Furthermore, Dawn underscores the significance of finding joy in one's work and making a difference. She advises,

“Enjoy what you do. Enjoy making a difference.”

Additionally, Dawn emphasises the importance of fostering connections and collaboration among prosthetists. She recounts her involvement in creating a comprehensive list at Blatchford that facilitates connectivity among all prosthetists, enabling them to reach out to each other for expert advice in specific areas. This initiative has proven instrumental in allowing prosthetists to share knowledge and seek guidance, thereby enhancing their expertise in various facets of prosthetics.

In summary, adopting a mindset of continuous learning and finding fulfilment in their work are key elements that will support newly qualified prosthetists to establish a successful and rewarding career in prosthetics. Dawn's insights offer valuable guidance for those new to the field, encouraging them to maintain a curious approach and to seek enjoyment in their professional journey.

Laura Barr, Advanced Orthotic Practitioner, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde

Laura was initially drawn to a career in orthotics due to the unique mix of healthcare and engineering that this profession offers. She studied for her BSc (Hons) Prosthetics and Orthotics at the University of Strathclyde, and although she enjoyed aspects of both disciplines, the dynamic and varied clinical environment of orthotics ultimately led her to focus her career in orthotic practice.



She spent the first several years of her career working in various areas of orthotic general practice. This included treating a huge range of patients; from those with neurological, diabetic, and musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions, in the primary care hospital setting and home visits, to working in multidisciplinary teams alongside a mix of other healthcare professionals. Gaining a well-rounded understanding not just of orthotic practice, but the wider scope of health care and medical practice, allowed Laura to identify that her primary interest lay in MSK and orthopaedics.

With that in mind, Laura took the initiative to undertake further formal education in the form of a Master's Degree and further post-graduate certificate at Glasgow Caledonian University and embraced the opportunity to participate in, and learn from, the various clinical opportunities that came her way. During this period Laura was starting to focus on a wider scope of clinical practice beyond that of the 'traditional' orthotics role. Her studies and involvement in orthopaedic clinics, surgical theatres and multidisciplinary clinics meant that she was well-placed to apply for an Extended Scope Practitioner (ESP) role in orthopaedics when it became available in her organisation.

Initially, the ESP position was only open to podiatrists and physiotherapists. However, recognising Laura's existing qualifications, clinical skills and potential, and based on the identified skill-set required for the role, the orthopaedics team extended eligibility to orthotists as well. Upon securing that position, Laura undertook further training, gaining recognised qualifications in image interpretation, therapeutic injections, and basic surgical skills, equipping her with knowledge and skills essential to the orthopaedic role.

Gaining this role was a significant turning point in Laura's career, and for the first time she found herself working within a new team, providing a service that did not directly involve orthotic treatment. This ESP position sat within the Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Service, involving assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning for patients who would otherwise have been assessed by the orthopaedic consultant. This offered a challenging new environment, collaborating with other health care teams such as radiology, pharmacy, and surgical teams in order to plan the most appropriate treatment for the patients in her care.

Once settled into her ESP role, Laura began to work in collaboration with her professional lead and other allied health professionals (AHPs) in her Health Board to engage with the advanced practice agenda for AHPs, which was gathering momentum. Aligned with Scottish government guidance on transforming roles within the NHS, AHP advanced practice frameworks were being developed. They were designed to standardise the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and education levels required by advanced practitioners, in much the same way as had previously been done for nursing, where these roles emerged years earlier. In the UK, working at an advanced practice level requires clinicians to meet measurable and defined levels of practice within each of the four pillars of practice: clinical practice, facilitation of learning, leadership, and research and development.

Continuing her trajectory as a front-runner in seizing emerging career opportunities, Laura and her professional lead redesigned her ESP job description to align with the requirements for advanced practice. As a result, it expanded beyond a solely clinical focus to include all four pillars of practice. Now an Advanced Orthotic Practitioner, working in a dual role between orthopaedics and orthotics, Laura was able to develop a significant depth of knowledge in a specialist area and support the orthotic treatment of complex patients who might otherwise have been referred to other specialities. She's trained in areas beyond the usual scope of orthotics practice, which helps reduce outpatient waiting times, treatment times, and appointment numbers, reducing pressure elsewhere in the healthcare system.

It hasn't all been smooth sailing. Carving out her own path required commitment, resilience, and tenacity in the absence of precedents to follow. There was some hesitation from professions unfamiliar with working with orthotists in advanced practice roles, and a lot of work to develop Patient Group Directions for injection therapies, for example. However, the result is a flexible and varied role that provides Laura's "perfect balance" between clinical and non-clinical duties and offers her freedom to manage her own time and pursue her own areas of development and interest.

Laura's advice to new graduates setting out on their careers is,

"Gain a breadth of experience working in different areas of orthotics before deciding in which area (if any!) you wish to specialise, and don't be afraid to change your mind and try new things if the opportunity arises.

Orthotists have a lot to offer in many different areas of health care, many of which may not have been done before, but don't be afraid to take the leap for something you feel passionately about."

In summary, Laura's career journey highlights that there's no need to feel constrained by established career pathways and approaches to practice. You can be a trailblazer. If you can see a way to enhance the outcomes and experiences of service users, or the way services are delivered, collaborate with others, and strive to achieve it. It won't be the easiest path to take, but it will be fulfilling and make even more of a difference to those accessing services.

Appendix 1: Incorporating the four pillars of practice

Incorporating the Four Pillars of Practice into P&O Preceptorships

Clinical (and Technical) Practice	Facilitation of Learning	Leadership and management	Evidence, Research and Development
<p>Clinical and technical competence: Engage in critical reflection on personal contributions to the delivery of safe and person-centred care.</p>	Engage proactively in professional development activities. Role model commitment to career-long learning and developing excellence in practice.	Demonstrate a proactive approach to professional and personal development and the emergence of effective self-leadership.	Demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based practice.
<p>Policy: Demonstrate awareness of local entitlement policies and prescription protocols for prostheses and orthoses.</p>	Identify and engage with opportunities to support the development and learning of others.	Critically reflect on personal behaviours and actions and how they influence collaborative work with colleagues.	Undertake systematic information searches and critical appraisals to answer practice-based questions.
<p>Products: Outline the typical range and features of prosthetic / orthotic devices and components available from the service. Develop awareness of supply chain and stock availability considerations, including ordering processes and requirements and lead-in times.</p>	Demonstrate adaptable approaches to educate patients and their carers/families regarding processes of assessment, fitting, and adjustment of prosthetic/orthotic devices, and their ongoing safe use.	Apply understanding that leadership can occur at any level, not solely in relation to job titles.	Develop awareness of, and engage with, local evidence-based resources and learning opportunities. Actively participate in journal clubs.
<p>Personnel: Apply understanding of good multidisciplinary team (MDT) working in own practice. Develop positive working relationships; participate constructively in MDT activities, including management of complex cases and technologies.</p>	Foster interprofessional collaboration and learning opportunities, recognising and promoting the benefits of working with and learning from those from different disciplines.		Prepare and present case studies exemplifying best prosthetic/orthotic practice.
<p>Provision of services: Demonstrate awareness of the geographic and special populations served by the service.</p>			Understand mechanisms for engaging services users in service evaluation and development.

Appendix 2: Suggested practice observations

Suggested areas of focus for practice observations*

Prosthetics

Transfemoral casting, prescription, fitting, and modification

Transtibial casting, prescription, fitting and modification

Transfemoral patient alignment

Transtibial patient alignment

3D scanning of limbs

Upper limb casting, prescription, fitting, and modification

Adult patient assessment

Paediatric patient assessment

Patient review

Orthotics

Fitting of a range of orthoses

Patient assessment and prescription – foot and ankle

Patient assessment and prescription – knee and hip

Patient assessment and prescription - spinal

3D scanning for Ankle-foot orthoses, spinal braces, and cranial orthoses

Patient assessment and prescription – Upper limb

Patient casting, measurement, and modification

Footwear measurement and prescription

Patient review

* These are suggested generic areas of focus that should be tailored to individual service and organisational needs.

Additional resources

- [Health and Care Professions Council \(2023\) Principles of Preceptorship.](#)
- [NHS England National Allied Health Professionals Preceptorship and Foundation Support Programme.](#)
- [NHS England \(2023\) Allied Health Professional \(AHP\) Preceptorship Standards and Framework.](#)
- [NHS England AHP Preceptorship and Foundation Support Learning Hub.](#)
- [NHS England's AHP Preceptorship Toolkit which offers a range of templates, role descriptors and other resources.](#)
- [NHS England's Growth-based Career Planning approach](#)
- [NHS England's Step to Work programme](#)
- [NHS Education for Scotland's Flying Start programme](#)