



Case Study: Building Peer-Supported Learning in Prosthetics and Orthotics Apprenticeships

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BACKGROUND

A Prosthetics and Orthotics service in Leicestershire has developed an innovative peer-supported learning model for three apprentices at different stages of training. Learners gain experience across prosthetics and orthotics within a large multidisciplinary team, including prosthetists, orthotists, physiotherapy and technicians, with wider input from podiatrists and consultants. They attend the University of Derby alongside clinical practice.

The team initially saw multiple apprentices as an opportunity to build workforce capacity and shared learning. They quickly recognised that supporting several learners simultaneously also brought additional educational and pastoral demands.



THE CHALLENGE

The greatest challenge was not clinical learning itself, but supporting apprentices as both employees and degree learners while they developed self-directed learning, time management, professional behaviours, deadline management and university-level study skills.

Managing three learners at different stages also required careful planning to provide varied clinical experience while maintaining continuity of learning and patient care.

The team recognised that the additional support required had initially been underestimated. This became the catalyst for a more collaborative learning environment.



THE APPROACH

Rather than assigning each apprentice to a single educator, the service adopted a distributed supervision model. Apprentices regularly work with multiple clinicians across prosthetics, orthotics, paediatrics, diabetic foot clinics and community services. Most receive feedback from at least three different educators within a typical week.

- Case-based learning exercises where apprentices assess simulated patients, develop treatment plans and provide structured feedback to one another.
- Apprentice-led presentations on clinical topics, including subjects they personally identify as challenging.
- Group quizzes and knowledge checks to reinforce key concepts and identify gaps in understanding.
- Peer revision using flashcards, discussion groups and review of academic work.
- Practical rehearsal of assessment skills using fellow apprentices as simulated patients before working with service users.

These activities encourage active learning and allow apprentices to learn from one another's strengths, mistakes and experiences. Educators observed that seeing how peers approached clinical problems and presentations supported greater reflection and confidence.



THE OUTCOME

The peer-supported approach has created a strong learning community. Apprentices support one another academically and clinically, while educators share responsibility for supervision across a wider team.

Peer feedback, simulated assessments and collaborative presentations have encouraged active learning and critical reflection. Different year groups also create informal mentoring, with more experienced apprentices supporting newer learners through university study and clinical practice.



KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Peer-supported learning can be highly effective when combined with flexible supervision and a collaborative team culture.
- Distributed supervision gives learners access to diverse perspectives and specialist expertise. Supporting multiple apprentices requires significant investment and should not be viewed as an easy option.
- Peer feedback and shared learning strengthen engagement, confidence and reflective practice. Successful apprenticeship delivery requires adaptation, reflection and ongoing support for learners and educators.



CONCLUSION

By embracing peer learning and shared supervision, the service has created a sustainable model that supports learner development while fostering growth across the wider clinical team. The case study demonstrates how collaborative learning can strengthen professional networks, workforce capability and practice-based education.