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Background

Veterinary students in the UK are required to spend at least 26 weeks during their five year degree programme engaged in external clinical work placements (EMS) to ensure attainment of required competencies. By final year, students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning by setting learning objectives, negotiating goals and identifying opportunities in the workplace with their placement provider.

Study objectives

A logbook was designed to help final year veterinary students to structure and negotiate their own learning during a two week work placement at a PDSA PetAid Hospital.

The purposes of the logbook were to:

- encourage students to be more self-directed in setting their learning objectives;
- enable the supervisor to establish a base-line competence from which to structure training activities;
- facilitate alignment of student-supervisor expectations.

Work carried out

Stage 1

Students completed pre- and post-questionnaires in relation to their:

- ability to be self-directed at the start and end of the placement;
- progress in relation to a competencies checklist;
- expectations and experiences of the logbook.

Stage 2

Following completion of the placement, students were asked to rate their supervisor's time invested in – and attitude towards – the logbook.

Summary of results

Table 1. Students' confidence to be self-directed at the start and end of their placement. Students recorded a significant positive shift in relation to their ability to set objectives for their placement, to negotiate goals with the supervisor, and to set an action plan to achieve objectives for their placement.

		Min	Median	Max	P value
Setting learning goals/objectives for EMS	Start	1	4	6	<0.001
	End	2	5	6	
Negotiating goals with EMS provider in relation to what is realistic	Start	1	3	6	<0.001
	End	2	4	6	
Identifying opportunities in EMS placements to develop competencies	Start	1	4	6	0.001
	End	2	5	6	
Setting an action plan to achieve learning goals/objectives for EMS	Start	1	3.5	6	<0.001
	End	2	4	6	

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree

Table 3. Students' expectations and experiences of the logbook.

On average, student expectations and experiences were positive. However, student perceptions of the logbook in helping the supervisor take a clearly defined role in structuring their learning, and in facilitating alignment of student-supervisor expectations, became significantly less positive.

		Min	Median	Max	P value
The logbook will help me to structure my learning	Start	1	4	6	0.108
	End	1	4	6	
The skills listed are appropriate competencies to target	Start	4	5	6	0.898
	End	2	5	6	
The logbook will encourage my PDSA supervisor to take a clearly defined role in structuring my learning	Start	2	5	6	0.007
	End	1	4	6	
The logbook will facilitate alignment (agreement) of employer and student expectations	Start	3	5	6	0.004
	End	1	4	6	

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Slightly Disagree; 4 = Slightly Agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly Agree

Table 2. Students' confidence with core competencies at the start and end of their placement. Students recorded a statistically significant positive shift in confidence level in relation to performing 48/48 core competencies.

Examples of clinical skills		Min	Median	Max	P value
Use of ophthalmoscope	Start	1	3	4	<0.001
	End	2	4	5	
Use of auroscope	Start	1	3	5	<0.001
	End	2	4	5	
Abdominal palpation	Start	2	3	5	<0.001
	End	2	4	5	

1 = I have no awareness of the skill; 2 = I have some awareness and training but do not use the skill in practice; 3 = I use this skill but I need some further development; 4 = I perform the skill to the standard required of an undergraduate student; 5 = I perform the skill to the standard required of a day one graduate

Table 4. Students' level of satisfaction with their supervisors.

Students perceived that their supervisor's time available for - and attitude towards - the logbook were 'ok' on average, however, some supervisors scored less well.

	Min	Median	Max
Supervisor's time available to complete logbook (i.e. learning agreement and placement reviews)	1	3	5
Supervisor's attitude towards logbook	2	3.5	5
Overall satisfaction with supervisor on this placement	3	4	5

1 = Very poor; 2 = Poor; 3 = Ok; 4 = Good; 5 = Very good

Table 5. Relationship between students' perceptions of the logbook and their supervisor's time and attitude. Supervisors' time and attitude were positively correlated with students' perceptions of the logbook value.

	Supervisor's time	Supervisor's attitude
The logbook encouraged my supervisor to take a clearly defined role in structuring my learning	0.360**	0.362*
The logbook facilitated alignment (agreement) of employer and student expectations	0.357**	0.364**

* Correlation significant at the 0.05 level; ** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Conclusion

On average, students perceived themselves to have become more self-directed during their placement and indicated improvement in all competencies; however, there was evidence that some students still lacked confidence in both areas. Although the logbook appears to be successful in helping the students to structure their own learning, they did not perceive that the logbook helped the supervisor to take a role in structuring their learning or in aligning student-supervisor expectations. On further investigation, this appears to be the result of supervisors' time invested in – and general attitude towards – the logbook.

Take-home message: Supervisor support of a logbook is crucial to its success in encouraging students to be more self-directed.

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