

AUSTRALIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY COUNCIL CLINICAL EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION FAQ'S

1. How many clinical education hours must a student complete within their physiotherapy program?

Criterion ST7 states, "The quality and quantity of clinical education is sufficient to produce a graduate capable to practise across the lifespan, with diverse consumer populations and in a range of environments."

The Council does not dictate the number of hours, it assesses the clinical education model in the context of the whole curriculum and whether it achieves the program objectives. Currently accredited graduate entry Masters and Undergraduate programs provide a range of clinical learning hours between 750 – 1368 hours. However, there is no specified minimum number of clinical education hours that a student must complete during their entry-level program. The education provider should focus on both the quality and quantity of the clinical education for all students.

2. Who can supervise a physiotherapy student during a clinical education?

Criterion PS4 states, "Students receive effective and appropriate supervision by suitably qualified and registered physiotherapists and/or other relevant personnel during clinical education."

The education provider needs to ensure students are supervised by appropriate personnel. This criterion does not specify the amount of time, nor the designation of the professionals supervising the student during clinical education. Rather, supervision may be provided by a physiotherapist and/or other relevant personnel depending on the goal of the clinical education activity. The education provider needs to evaluate the supervision for both quality and quantity to ensure that the public is receiving safe and effective care from students. The amount of supervision provided by a physiotherapist and/or other relevant personnel should be based on the nature and expected learning outcomes of the clinical education experience.

Examples include:

- For a student allocated a clinical education experience in a rural/remote centre without a physiotherapist, it would be reasonable for the student to be under the direct supervision of a nurse practitioner with access to a physiotherapist who will guide and assess their performance by collaborating remotely.
- If the focus of clinical education is to develop interprofessional and collaborative practice skills through the delivery of services in conjunction with other health professional students in aged care, then it would be reasonable to expect that an interprofessional team undertakes supervision.
- Students that are undertaking a work health and safety education experience in a corporate setting may be supervised by HR managers.

- Research based education experiences may involve students being supervised by a research officer with the knowledge and expertise to help students achieve the relevant unit learning outcomes.

3. Who can assess a physiotherapy student on clinical education?

Criterion AS6 states, “Assessment is conducted by appropriate personnel including by suitably qualified physiotherapists for the assessment of physiotherapy-specific competencies.”

Students undertaking clinical education experiences that involve the assessment of physiotherapy-specific competencies must be assessed by a suitably qualified physiotherapist. Other clinical education experiences that assess non-physiotherapy-specific competencies may be assessed by other appropriate personnel.

There is no suggestion in this criterion that the physiotherapist responsible for assessment must supervise the student directly at all times. It is reasonable to expect that, where a student’s learning is facilitated by other professionals, those individuals would be consulted by the physiotherapist conducting the assessment of physiotherapy-specific competencies as outlined in the Physiotherapy Practice Thresholds. It is also reasonable to assume that other professionals supervising the student have a degree of understanding and training in teaching and learning strategies such as feedback provision.

There is no specification that the assessing physiotherapist needs to be qualified for a specific length of time (e.g., 2-3 years post-graduation). The level of experience required to assess a student’s competence will depend on the scope and nature of the clinical education experience.

4. What types of clinical education must a physiotherapy student complete during their degree?

Criterion ST7 states, “The quality and quantity of clinical education is sufficient to produce a graduate capable to practise across the lifespan, with diverse consumer populations and in a range of environments.”

The Council encourages education providers to summarise the nature of clinical education that students experience when attending a specific setting. Clinical education experiences for each individual student must be of sufficient diversity to ensure that students have experience with consumers across the life span and in a range of contexts, environments and settings. The Council will assess students’ clinical education to ensure that each student has a well-rounded experience. There is no indication in the wording of this criterion to suggest that students must complete a cardiothoracic, neurological and musculoskeletal clinical education experience. Rather, each individual student must complete clinical education experiences across the range of acute, community and rehabilitation settings.

5. What constitutes a valid clinical education experience (eg. tele-health, simulated placement etc)?

A clinical education experience is valid when it is intentionally designed, supervised and assessed by appropriate personnel, and integrated into the curriculum to support the development of entry-level physiotherapy competencies. It must provide meaningful opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in a range of clinical environments and be assessed to ensure readiness for professional practice.

The Council will recognise simulated education experiences as a valid experience. This is supported by research in the field demonstrating that a simulated education experience can provide effective training in core skills.

A tele-health clinical education experience is also a valid experience for the student. If one clinical education experience was in tele-health, there would be an expectation that the remaining experiences involved the delivery of consumer services in-person, unless there were extenuating circumstances (eg. pandemic/natural disaster).

The Council welcomes conversation and collaboration to develop new models for clinical education experiences. If you have any questions or would like to discuss a new innovative approach to clinical education, please feel free to contact the Council via accreditation@physiocouncil.com.au or 03 7018 1497.

6. Can a student undertake other activities outside physiotherapy service provision during a clinical education experience?

The development of learning activities during a clinical education experience should be agreed in partnership with the placement provider. Rather than being an adjunct to the clinical education experience, placement providers/supervisors should be encouraged to include students in all aspects of the clinical service. For example, students should be able to participate in activities including staff meetings, away days, ward rounds, strategic planning sessions, writing reports, service provision planning, referrals, marketing, etc.

Criterion ST5 states, “Students learn with, about, and from other health professionals, throughout the curriculum to ensure graduates are capable of interprofessional collaborative practice.”

Students are encouraged to undertake a range of interprofessional collaborative activities during their clinical education experience to meet the learning outcomes of their course. These activities may include observation of another health professional service, project or service-learning activities, service development, resource development, health promotion and outreach activities.

Please contact the Council if you have any questions regarding accreditation and/or clinical education.

Email: Accreditation@physiocouncil.com.au

Phone: 03 7018 1497

References:

Accreditation Standard for Entry Level Physiotherapy Practitioner Programs August/September 2025

Physiotherapy practice thresholds in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand 2023