

Practice Based Learning Case Study: Virtual Simulated Placements

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Below is a case study from Coventry University which details how they used Virtual Simulated Placements as part of their approach to practice based learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even before COVID-19, finding placements for health students had been difficult; there are increasing numbers of students but not increasing number of placements.

At Coventry University we have trialled and evaluated alternatives to face-to-face placements. We use Virtual Simulated Placement (VSP), and this is being used for a wide range of disciplines including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, dietetics, paramedicine, operating department practice and radiography.

In simplistic terms, VSP is browser-based and students can access it from their laptop, desktop, telephone or specialist headset if they have one, and it puts them in an environment that they would expect to see in their placement. Our students get equity of access, they can see a range of patients, environments, situations and experiences based on their learning outcomes. It includes patient interactions as well as team working to develop a range of skills.

Adopting this approach has allowed students to continue achieving their learning outcomes. There will always be the need for face-to-face learning and assessment, but VSP is used as an additional learning resource.

Evidence shows learning in a virtual space has much better outcomes in terms of confidence, and students can revisit situations more than once and reflect on their experiences.

There has been a massive increase of research within the area of simulation, alongside a huge growth in its use, everyone has begun to see how useful it is for health education. We have also been able to work very closely with regulatory bodies including the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and HEE. HEE has been incredibly supportive, and we have all worked together perhaps in a way that we haven't worked before. The health system has really come together to create solutions for the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

What are you going to hang onto?

The pandemic hasn't changed the way we view and develop placements, it has just accelerated the progress we would have made if the pandemic had not occurred. I think the increase in the use of simulation would have happened in around five to ten years, but due to the pandemic, it has been brought forward. Going forward, we will hang on to the use of a wide range of technologies to help support placements with our students.

How do you think these new approaches have impacted learning and student experience?

We have been using VSPs for a while now and have been evaluating them and conducting research as we go along. As a result, we know how this is impacting students in terms of increasing student engagement, satisfaction and confidence compared to face-to-face placements. This has been born out of the wider research that is taking place globally, and we are seeing a snowball-effect of evidence coming out which highlights that simulation has a positive effect on student outcomes.

What do you wish you'd known before you embarked on this work?

At Coventry, we have been fortunate as we have been an early implementer of simulation. It would have been great if I was able to have someone to approach for support around technology enhanced learning. I now spend quite a lot of my time supporting other people.

If you could give one piece of advice to a trust/educator/student considering Practice Learning what would it be?

See what has already been done and reach out to someone who has experience with this; I am sure they will be happy to share their learning with you. It may also be useful to get in contact with HEE as they can connect you with others who may be able to support you.

Are there any resources you want to direct people to?

Below are some starter-level resources for producing Virtual Simulated Placement environments recommended by the team at Coventry University.

- A standard WordPress site or other framework to host the Virtual Simulated Placements.
- To produce 360-degree images use sites such as Kuula [7].
- Photoshop is useful for editing environments.

- 3D Vista [8] is good for editing and placing hotspots in 360-degree video
- Camtasia is useful for video editing.

If you would like more information about Virtual Simulated Placements, please do contact Dr Natasha Taylor via email: Natasha.taylor@coventry.ac.uk [9] or ac4961@coventry.ac.uk [10]

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Links

- [1] <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work>
- [2] <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/>
- [4] <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/news-blogs-events>
- [5] <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/about>
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- [7] <https://kuula.co/>
- [8] <https://www.3dvista.com/>
- [9] <mailto:Natasha.taylor@coventry.ac.uk>
- [10] <mailto:ac4961@coventry.ac.uk>