



As Heads of the Occupational Therapy programmes at AUT and Otago Polytechnic, our sincere thanks to the many practitioners who have expressed interest and concern regarding the potential disruption to final year occupational therapy student placements, and the occupational therapy workforce pipeline, given the unprecedented events of 2020. Our sincere thanks also to the OTBNZ, and in particular Andrew Charnock, who has offered sound guidance and advice over the past few months. As the profession might expect, both schools are committed to ensuring that our 2020 graduates meet the Competencies for Registration and Continuing Practice (OTBNZ, 2015). However, the challenge for the schools, and the profession, this year is undoubtedly the '1000 hours' of fieldwork requirement for WFOT accredited education programmes to ensure graduates are eligible for registration. While the WFOT has suggested flexibility around the 1000 hours requirement (see correspondence [dated](#)), the complexity and uncertainty of the remainder of the year means that there will undoubtedly be a need for additional placements, and additional fieldwork educators, both this year and into next.

At AUT, final year students have recently completed placement hours in modified P2 placements with Healthline, Essential Healthcare Services, and Simulation. These placements provided students the opportunity to advance their confidence and competence in occupational therapy practice, particularly around occupation-based practice, collaboration and communication, reasoning and decision making, and equity and cultural responsiveness. The placement hours were supervised by staff from the Department team, and students completed a series of reflective activities linked to the National Fieldwork Assessment and the OTBNZ Competencies. Over the placement period, students engaged in modified P2 placements developed specific skills in (for example) recognising occupational issues relating to the impact of a pandemic; prioritising level of need and responding appropriately; developing occupation-based interventions in role-emerging contexts, and recognising when their assistance was enabling occupation for individuals, groups and communities; responding to people in distress using therapeutic communication skills including validation, normalisation, empathy trust and rapport building skills; developing and implementing their own self care plans for working in a high stress environments; reflecting on their work constructively in the context of OTBNZ competencies and improving their professional practice; recognising and analysing the types of clinical reasoning they were using in their practice; responding professionally when communicating their needs to management, collaborating effectively with supervisors, team members and clients for the most effective outcome; and recognising the impact of a pandemic

on Maori and vulnerable groups and what adaptations and strategies they could implement within government restrictions that might contribute to more equitable outcomes. The students are now back 'in-class' completing the Semester One papers, and any outstanding fieldwork hours (via simulation or longitudinal placements), and (all going well) will be ready to commence their P3 placements on 14 September 2020.

At Otago Polytechnic, we have made a number of changes to our fieldwork placements for 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 environment. The main driving consideration for our changes was based on the potential for fluctuation in the national alert levels, uncertainty as to when the country may move down alert levels, thus impacting on students ability to travel nationally and our commitment to ensure our final year students have an opportunity to engage in their final placement. We needed to make the decision to change our fieldwork placements early, while the country was in the process of moving down alert levels, to allow our providers time to better assess their situation. Below is an overview of our changes:

Fieldwork 1: For 2020 our year 1 students have not progressed to placement situated in practice areas around New Zealand. We have developed a simulated fieldwork placement, which has allowed our year 1 students to stay where they were for lockdown. We would like to acknowledge and thank all the therapists who have supported us to make the simulation fieldwork placement a success.

Fieldwork 3: For 2020 our second year students are not progressing to placement and this fieldwork has been deferred to the beginning of 2021 (February – April). Due to priority being given to final year students the school has decided this fieldwork will shift to enable our providers to offer our final year students placement opportunities. The year 2 students will instead complete two of their year 3 academic courses, which, we believe, will be beneficial for their fieldwork in early 2021.

Fieldwork 4: Due to prioritising final year student placement opportunities and wanting to ensure providers were in a position to offer placements, Fieldwork 4 has been shifted to later in the second semester in the hope our students will be allowed to travel to the range of placement opportunities they may engage in. This is an eight week placement which begins on Monday 28th September 2020. We are mindful these students will contribute to our future occupational therapy workforce in 2021 and do hope those organisations who are able to offer placements can do so. Our fieldwork team is happy to work with staff to problem solve solutions if organisations are unsure how a student on placement, in your organisation, may look during these uncertain times. Please do contact the school if you have any questions.

So, how can YOU help?

- This might be a great time to make a placement offer. If you are working in an organisation who already offers placements (to either school), let your local CCPL, professional leader or manager know that you would like to make an offer. If you are working outside one of these organisations, please reach out directly to either school:
 - AUT: Kylee Sterling, OT Practicum Leader, kylee.sterling@aut.ac.nz or 021577548

- Otago Polytechnic: Narinder Verma, Fieldwork Team Leader,
OTFieldwork@op.ac.nz or 021 735 236
- If you can't offer a placement, could you perhaps offer long-arm supervision for a student, or a small group of students, undertaking role-emerging or simulation placements? Supervision can be undertaken via a web-based conferencing system such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams and would be a weekly commitment, which may also include providing feedback on students' written work. Please reach out to either school to make an offer.
- Do you have a project (such as moving your business online) or piece of work (such as a review of the evidence for a new intervention you'd like to trial) that you REALLY want completed, which would be ideal for a student to complete? Send through an email to either school that outlines the parameters of the project - anything (within reason) will be considered!
- Could you or your organisation consider taking a student from each of the schools, over the final placement from September to November?

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