



COMMON PLACEMENT ASSESSMENT FORM (CAF) FOR PHYSIOTHERAPY STUDENTS: IRELAND

User Guide

Contents

Introduction	2
The Common Placement Assessment Form (CAF) Instrument	2
Layout of the Form.....	2
Part 1: Safe Practice and Professional Conduct.....	2
Part 2: Professional Practice	3
Types of Assessment.....	3
Formative Assessment	4
Application of Formative Assessment in CAF	5
Formative Self-Assessment by Student	6
Summative Assessment	6
Application of Summative Assessment in CAF	6
Expected Behaviours.....	7
Final Score of the CAF	9
Conclusion.....	10
References:	11

Introduction

This document is a user guide for the updated Common Placement Assessment Form (CAF) Ireland. The project to update the assessment tool has been grounded in stakeholder feedback through robust research methods (O'Connor et. al. 2018, 2019, 2020). It has involved a collaborative approach with the five Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Ireland who have all engaged with their clinical colleagues through placement feedback mechanisms.

This document will describe the instrument in more depth and give guidelines on how to score the tool.

The Common Placement Assessment Form (CAF)

The CAF is the second version of a standardised assessment developed for use in Irish entry-level physiotherapy programmes. The first iteration of the CAF was introduced in 2007. The primary advantage of a national form is that there is one consistent standard that all graduates from the Irish Pre-registration training programmes attest to. This standard is mapped to the Standards of Proficiency required by the national regulator, CORU. It means that practice educators/supervisors who have students from more than one physiotherapy programme, or who change employers, will not have to deal with multiple assessment forms.

The CAF is a performance-based assessment tool. Performance based assessment is the process of making a judgement about a student's performance against established criteria such as learning objectives or professional standards. Assessment of student performance during placement can involve the learner, the practice educator, and the university.

Performance based assessments are used as part of practice placements to:

- guide and motivate learning.
- provide a basis for feedback on student's strengths and areas of clinical practice requiring improvement.
- facilitate the development of strategies to improve performance.
- monitor and record the progress of individual students.
- monitor the overall success of a programme of study.
- identify distinguished achievers.
- maintain professional standards.
- facilitate reporting to accrediting bodies such as CORU.
- Indicate to practice educators, behaviours expected of students on placement.

Layout of the Form.

CAF has two parts to the assessment.

Part 1: Safe Practice and Professional Conduct

Part 1 is related to safe practice and professional conduct. If there are concerns about protecting the public due to the student's practice or conduct on site during placement, for example a critical incident, this mechanism allows for an immediate fail to be recorded

contemporaneously for the student, and the placement to be terminated. If there is concern about the student's practice and conduct, a warning can be issued to the student, providing feedback to the student so their performance and conduct can be improved.

A guideline is provided within the CAF as to the behaviours that contribute to safe practice and professional conduct. This list is not exhaustive. Assessors are advised to contact their university if a warning or fail in Part 1 is deemed necessary.

Part 2: Professional Practice

Part 2 Professional Practice comprises three **areas of practice**: *Assessment and Management, Professionalism and Documentation/Communication*. Each area of practice has several **learning outcomes** which indicate what the student should have achieved by the end of the placement. The number of learning outcomes in each area of practice is given in Table 1 Learning Outcomes

Area of Practice	Learning outcomes
1. Assessment and Management	10 Learning outcomes
2. Professionalism	6 Learning outcomes
3. Documentation/Communication	4 Learning outcomes

Table 1 Learning Outcomes

For each learning outcome, there are several expected **behaviours**, designed to help the assessor determine if the learning outcome has been achieved at a particular level. This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but aims to guide the assessor in assigning a mark. The learning outcomes remain consistent across level one and level two placements. However, the behaviours required to achieve learning outcomes do change.

Types of Assessment

Important types of clinical assessment are i) formative and ii) summative with feedback and reflection being the key components to achieving effective assessment.

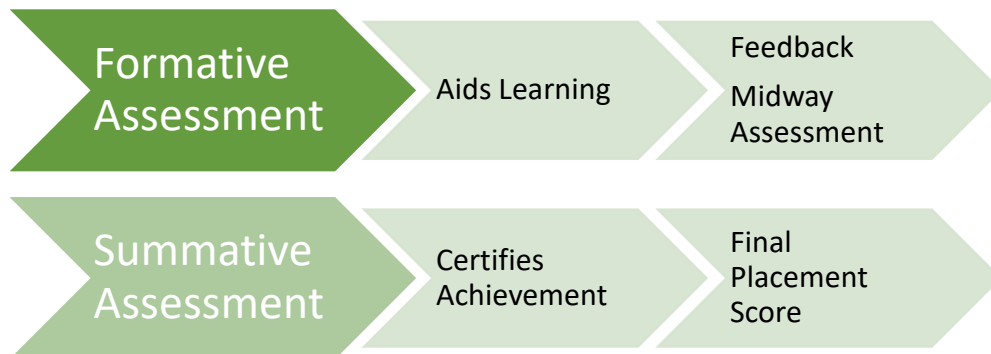


Figure 1 Types of Assessment

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment in clinical education is designed to help students understand how they are progressing. It is provided during a clinical placement but does not count toward the final grade or mark.

The purpose of formative assessment is to improve student learning by providing information on strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by performance on placement. It should be accompanied by strategies that facilitate improvement.

Although formative assessment may be relatively informal compared to summative assessment, its importance in guiding performance towards target skills and behaviours should be emphasised to the student.

Formative assessment creates an opportunity for the educator and student to review the student's progress in a non-threatening way. This allows the student to gain a clear picture of how they are progressing and identifies what more they need to do to achieve the learning objectives and improve their performance.

Clinicians have reported that the examples of desirable behaviours listed are helpful in assisting them to articulate the skills or attitudes that require attention. These sample behaviours are particularly useful for students when providing formative feedback during the placement and outlining aspects of practice requiring improvement. The indicators also guide students on the behaviours that can be worked towards during clinical placements.

TOP TIP: When giving formative feedback a useful question to ask yourself is:
 “What specific things would I like to see the student do in order to give them a better rating?”
 For example: I would like to see the student’s chart entries made using specific headings with brief comments under each heading.

Application of Formative Assessment in CAF

The “midway assessment” is usually completed at the midway point of placement. Assessment should be based on the student’s performance during the first half of the placement. The assessor is required to assign an **overall performance descriptor** to each of the three areas of practice (Assessment and Management, Professionalism, Documentation and Communication). Performance descriptors are the word(s) highlighted in ‘**Bold**’ in Table 2 and are used to describe performance at midway.

It is **not necessary** to rate each learning outcome individually, rather the student is given an indication of their overall performance in each area of practice. If the assessor feels that there are deficits in one or more learning outcomes, that deems the student below the minimally acceptable standard of practice, they must be rated as **inadequate** in that section.

Score	Performance descriptor
≥90%	Outstanding level of performance
70% to 89%	Excellent level of performance
60% to 69%	Very good level of performance
50% to 59%	Adequate to Good level of performance
≤49%	Inadequate level of performance. The minimum acceptable standard has not been achieved

Table 2 Performance Standards

The assessor must provide written feedback to clearly indicate to the student their level of performance in relation to behaviours expected and observed. The assessor can use learning outcomes and placement learning objectives to structure feedback, highlighting those that require further improvement.

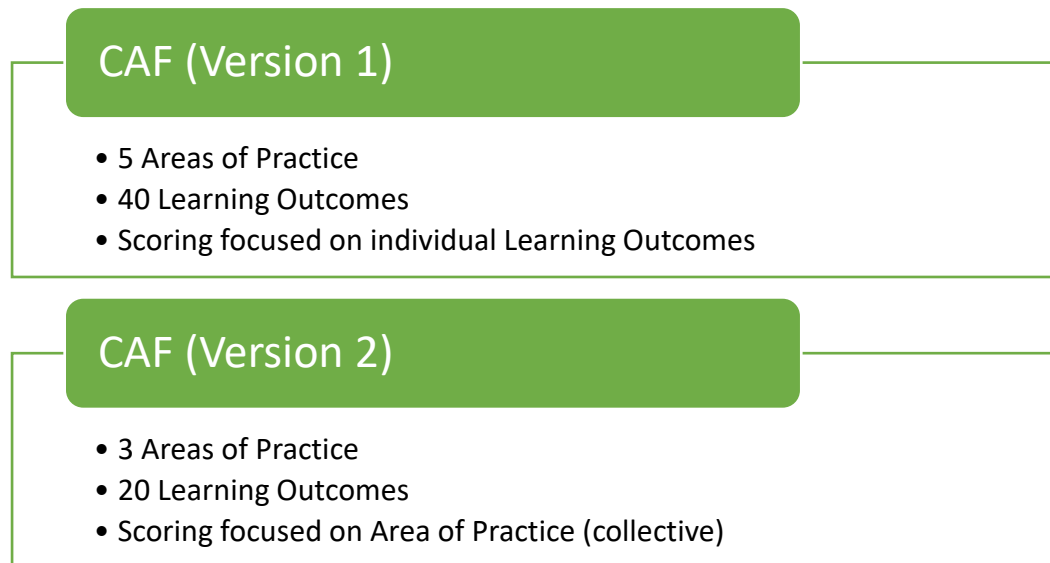


Figure 2 Differences between CAF (v1) and CAF (v2)

Formative Self-Assessment by Student

Unless students develop the capacity to make judgments about their own learning, they cannot be effective learners now or in the future. Active student involvement in understanding assessment processes and contributing to them is essential. Learning outcomes 1 & 2 in the professionalism section are focused on the student’s involvement in their own learning.

To foster active involvement, students are encouraged to ‘self-assess’ using the CAF and discuss discrepancies or similarities when self-assessment is compared to the assessment of the practice educator. Observation of differences provides opportunities for discussion and guides agreement regarding expectations and strategies for achieving this.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment focuses on the ‘whole’ of the student’s performance, that is, the extent to which each area of practice has been met overall for the placement. Summative assessment provides the student with a grade for the placement that contributes to their academic record. Summative assessment usually takes place towards the end of the placement. When finalising a student’s clinical assessment, assessors may draw on the experience of colleagues who have also supervised or supported the student.

Application of Summative Assessment in CAF

Students are assigned a score which should be based on the student’s performance for the latter half of the placement.

Assessors are required to assign an overall score/100 to each of the three areas of practice (Assessment and Management, Professionalism, Documentation and Communication).

It is **not necessary** to score each learning outcome individually. Performance standards are provided to the assessors in the CAF with recommended grades for each area of practice.

Assessors are required to provide written feedback to clearly indicate to the student their level of performance in relation to behaviours expected and observed.

Expected Behaviours

Examples of desirable performance are provided for each of the 20 Learning Outcomes in the CAF. These are not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive and they **are not** meant to be graded individually. They serve several purposes, the most important of which is to provide examples of the language that educators might use in helping students to shape performance targets.

The CAF aims to avoid specifying behaviours that could not reasonably be assessed through observation. In addition, the instrument avoids elusive concepts and has moved away from using language such as “efficiently” or “comprehensively” as these are beyond the minimal level expected of an entry level physiotherapist.

TOP TIP: Students, especially early in clinical placements, are not comfortable in being constantly monitored and assessed. Like all of us, they find this process emotionally challenging and are justifiably anxious. Attention to accurate analysis of learning needs using performance indicators serves to direct their focus away from their anxieties and onto desirable clinical behaviours. Performance indicators provide concrete stepping-stones that can help the educator articulate their desire for student success and diffuse the distraction of fear of failure.

Performance standards - Scoring options for midway and final assessment

Performance Standards

Score	Performance descriptor
≥90%	Outstanding level of performance
70% to 89%	Excellent level of performance
60% to 69%	Very good level of performance
50% to 59%	Adequate to Good level of performance
≤49%	Inadequate level of performance. The minimum acceptable standard has not been achieved

Scores of less than 50% (Inadequate)

Not achieving the minimum acceptable standard of performance.

- Infrequently/rarely demonstrates learning outcomes
- Not yet adequate in some of the learning deemed by the assessor to be essential in that practice area
- A student may demonstrate the behaviours *infrequently or rarely*. If this occurs the assessor must look at all the learning outcomes in that section and judge whether the student has met the threshold to pass that section.

Further advice on what constitutes a passing student is available in the table below (A Passing student)

Score of 50-59% (Adequate to Good)

Achieving the **minimum acceptable entry level** standard of performance (Passing standard)

- Demonstrates adequate to good attainment of **most learning outcomes**.
- When reflecting on the student's performance overall, an adequate to good student may be good at some things and not so good at others.
- The student is able to manage a variety of patients with relatively uncomplicated needs, such that the patient/client's major problems are identified, major goals established, and treatment is completed safely and effectively within a reasonable time frame. While achieving this, the student is aware of their limitations and where to seek assistance.

Scores of 60-69 (Very good)

Achieving a **very good** standard of performance

- Demonstrates most learning outcomes to a very good standard.
- The student is able to manage a variety of patients with such that the patient/client's problems are identified, major goals established, and treatment is completed safely and effectively within a reasonable time frame. While achieving this, the student is aware of their limitations and where to seek assistance.

Scores of 70-89 (Excellent)

Achieving an **excellent standard of performance**

- Demonstrating most learning outcomes to an excellent standard.
- This score reflects that the student is exhibiting a level of excellence with respect to a given practice area.
- A student does not have to demonstrate all learning outcomes for a practice area to achieve a score in this band. However, this band affords the opportunity for students who are consistently excellent to score in the higher range.

- The student will be demonstrating most behaviours for the item well above minimum level of competence.

Scores of 90-100% (Outstanding)

This score is **reserved for any student** who exhibits **all learning outcomes** at an **outstanding level**. This grading should be used when a student excels in the performance of the learning outcomes.

Final Score of the CAF

For the final assessment, a score below 50% represents a Fail. If an **area of practice** of the CAF is failed, it is important to highlight to the student which of the **learning outcomes** contributed to the grading process.

Each of the three areas of practice of part 2 must be passed to pass the overall placement. There is **no compensation** between areas of practice, if one area of practice is failed then the overall placement is failed.

If it is anticipated that a student will not achieve the required standard to pass part 2 of the CAF, this should be identified as soon as possible to the student and to the Practice Education Coordinator. The practice education team will assist you to identify strategies to manage the student's underperformance.

Midway Assessment	Final Assessment
Complete at the midway point of placement. Rating should be based on the student's performance during the first half of the placement.	Complete at the end of the placement. Scoring should be based on the student's performance for the latter half of the placement.
Assign an overall performance descriptor to each of the three areas of practice. It is not necessary to rate each learning outcome individually.	Assign an overall score/100 to each of the three areas of practice. It is not necessary to score each learning outcome individually.
Provide written feedback to clearly indicate to the student their level of performance in relation to behaviours expected and observed. Use learning outcomes and placement learning objectives to structure feedback, highlighting those that require further improvement.	Provide written feedback to clearly indicate to the student their level of performance in relation to behaviours expected and observed.

Table 3 Summary of Scoring Procedures at Midway and Final Assessment using the CAF

Conclusion

CAF (version 2) is an update on the performance-based assessment tool for Physiotherapy students in Ireland, grounded on stakeholder feedback. This guide provides an outline to help assessors use the form. Major differences between the CAF (Version 1) and CAF (version 2) are highlighted and further advice on the application of performance indicators is provided.

References:

Coote, S., Alpine, L., Cassidy, C., Loughnane, M., McMahon, S., Meldrum, D., O'Connor, A., & O'Mahoney, M. (2007). The development and evaluation of a common assessment form for physiotherapy practice education in Ireland. (Version 1)
<https://hdl.handle.net/10779/rcsi.10799213.v1> ([[]])

O'Connor A, Krucien N, Cantillon P, Parker M, McCurtin A. (2020) Investigating physiotherapy stakeholders' preferences for the development of performance-based assessment in practice education. *Physiotherapy*. 2020 Sep;108:46-54. doi: 10.1016/j.physio.2020.04.003. Epub 2020 May 1. PMID: 32711227.

O'Connor A, Cantillon P, McGarr O & McCurtin A, (2018) Navigating the system: Physiotherapy student perceptions of performance-based assessment, *Medical Teacher*, 40:9, 928-933, DOI: [10.1080/0142159X.2017.1416071](https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2017.1416071)

O'Connor A, Cantillon P, Parker M, McCurtin A, (2019) Juggling roles and generating solutions; practice-based educators' perceptions of performance-based assessment of physiotherapy students, *Physiotherapy*,105:4 446-452,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physio.2018.11.008>