# Supporting performance and assessing competence in practice

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# Aims of session

- Stimulate debate regarding approaches to competence based assessment and assessment of fitness for registration

- Consider best practice principles in student assessment.

# My student journey

- Practice learning and assessment is pivotal to the delivery of a competent health and social care workforce at the point of professional registration. However concerns have been widely expressed across a range of professions that assessment may be subjective, lack consistency, and that assessors fail or may be reticent to judge student performance as unsatisfactory. Equally there is evidence to suggest that cognitive aspects of acting as a practice assessor (understanding student's programme, keeping up to date, giving feedback & conducting assessment) underpin assessment difficulties experienced
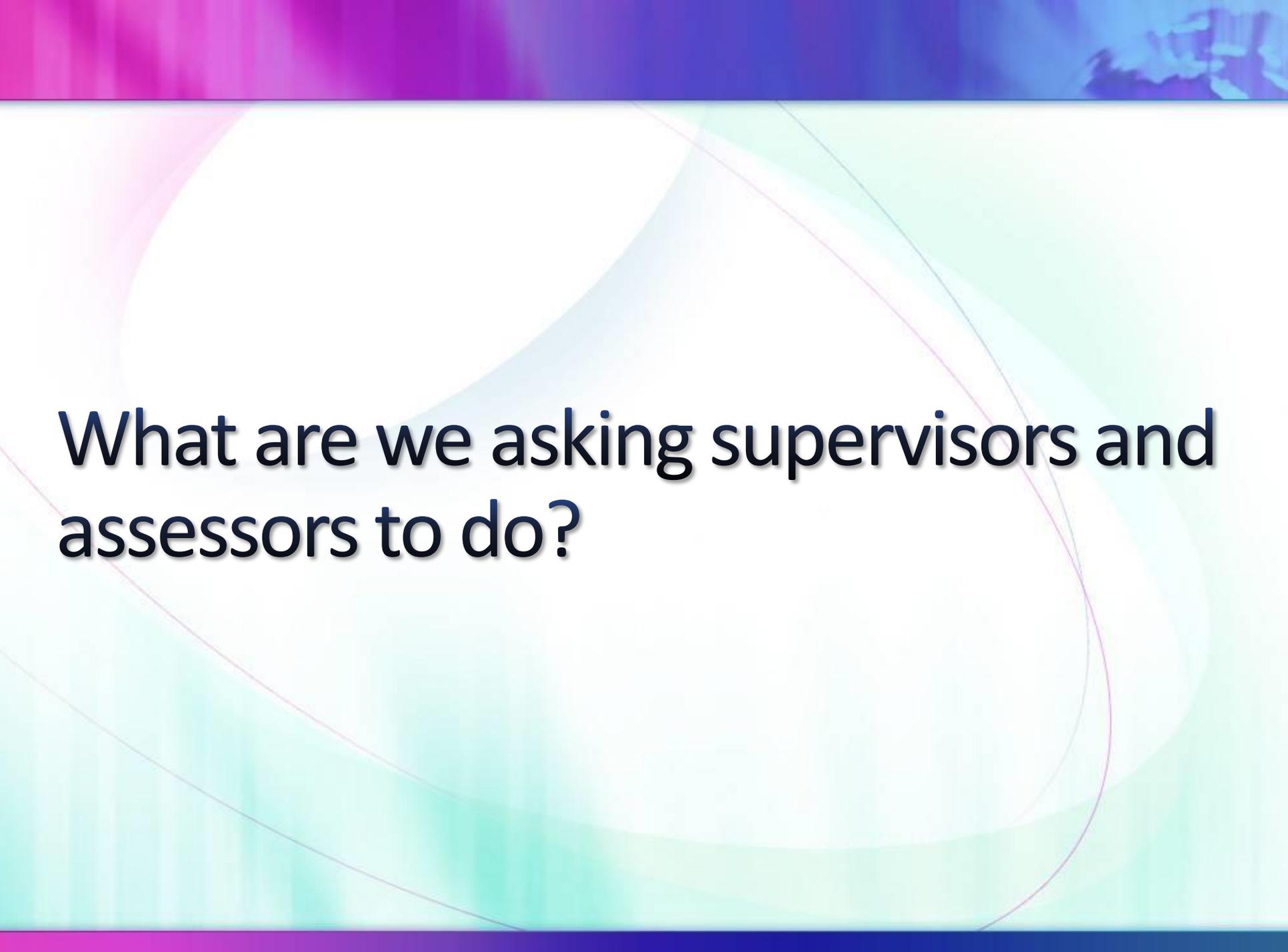
# What are we asking supervisors and assessors to do?

# Competence based assessment

- A form of self-regulatory credentialing to structure the demonstration and maintenance of competence.

- Emphasis on the ability to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to safe and effective patient care.

- 'Signing off' competencies a widely accepted part of any practice assessment in a range of health and social care education programmes.

# Decision making

Involves processes of judgement formation and cognitive reasoning:

- **Judgements** arise from an assessment, evaluation or belief about a situation based on the available information, which then informs the **decision;** a choice between alternatives leading to a course of action.

- Information, whether gathered consciously through cue acquisition & utilization or responded to subconsciously through an intuitive, heuristic grasp of a situation, is a key element of any decision taken.

- **Reasoning** strategies may be formal in nature, such as decision analysis or information processing, informal – adopting a heuristic or intuitive approach, or a combination of strategies – dual processing approach

How do supervisors and assessors fulfil their role?

# Judging students - formative

# Judging student competence



External World | CUES | Judge's Mind

Patient safety

Communication

Expectations of student as 'deliverer', 'nurse' 'learner'

Confidently working within limitations

Team member

Student development

Student is safe enough to pass

MENTOR CRITERION JUDGEMENT

MENTOR
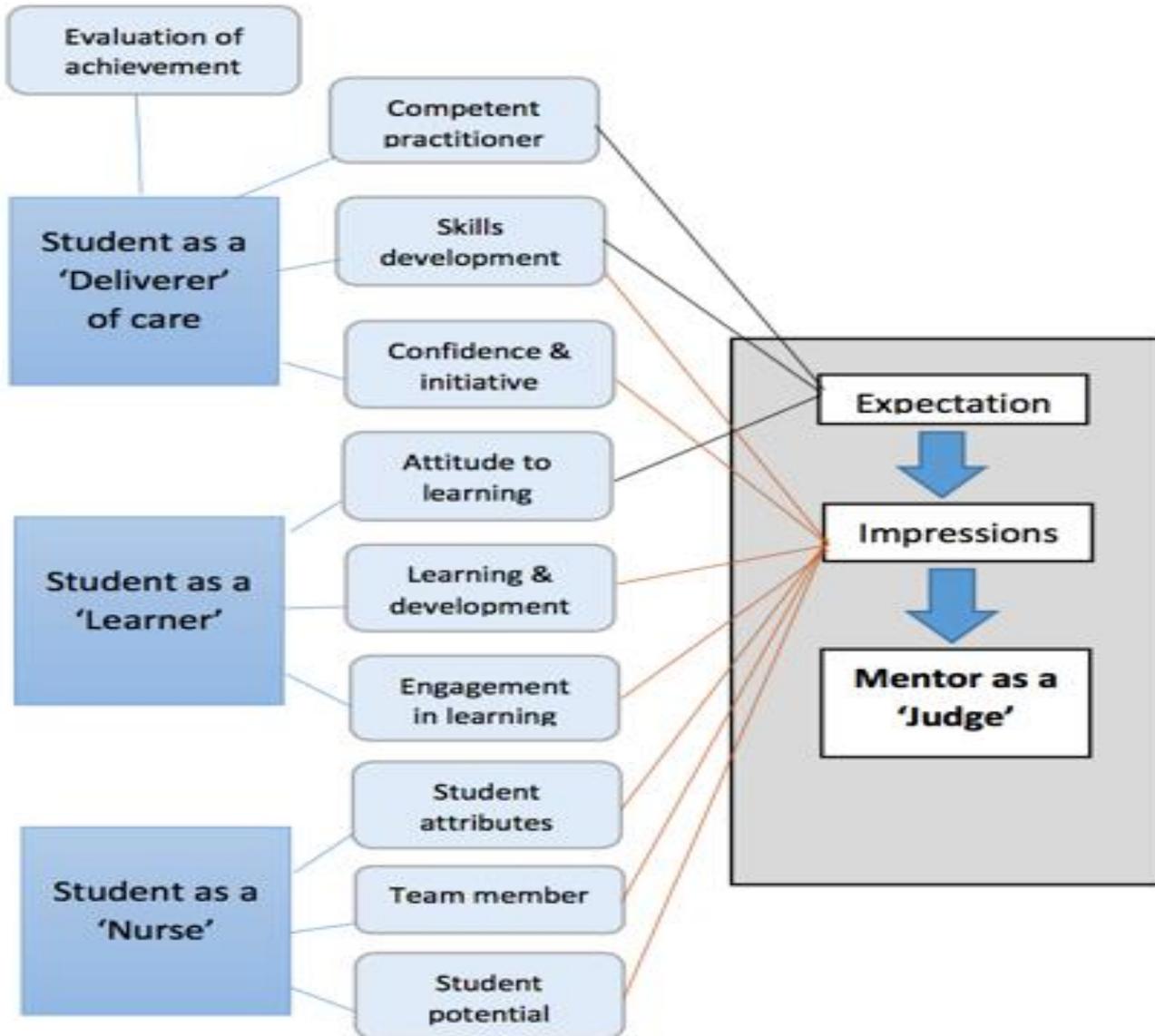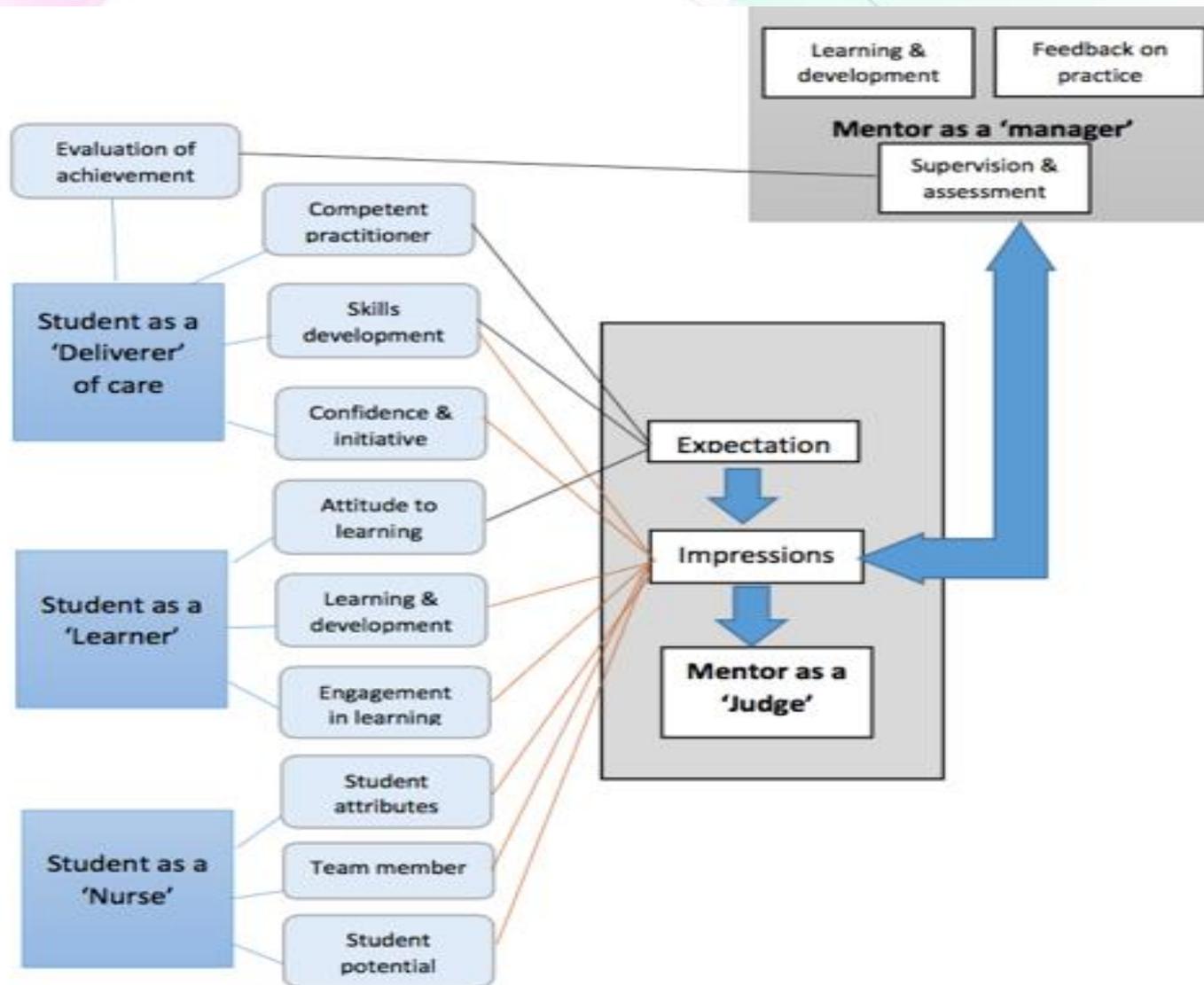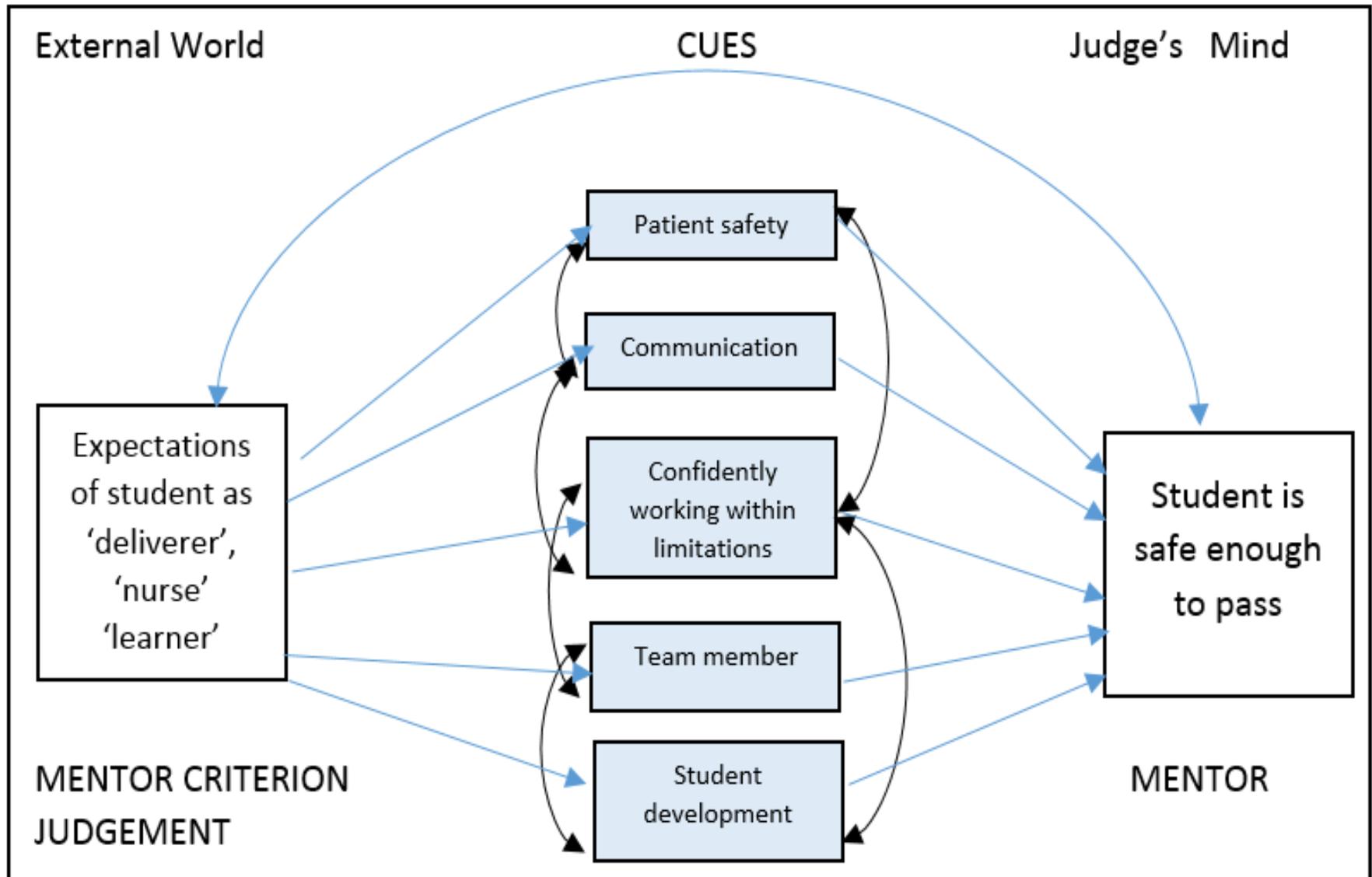
- What is being assessed…. Performance or competence?

# Performance vs Competence

- 'The actual behaviour and actions done in the real-life context' (While 1994)

- 'Performance is what is directly observable, whereas competence is not directly observable, rather it is inferred from performance' (Gonzi et al 1993)

- 'The ability to act in the real world whatever the conditions, through the successful integration of theory and practice' (Milligan 1998)

- 'an overarching set of knowledge, skills & attitudes required to practice safely and effectively without direct supervision' (NMC 2010)

- What is the purpose of feedback?

# Feedback: making learning happen

- Feedback should help learners to *make sense* of what they have done.
- Feedback should help learners to **clarify and take ownership of the *need* to learn** as defined by the evidence of achievement of the intended learning outcomes defining their studies.
- Feedback ideally should **enhance learners' *want* to learn** by increasing their self-esteem and confidence whenever possible, and by helping them to believe that they can indeed achieve the intended learning outcomes *and* demonstrate this in ways where they will be duly credited for this achievement.

# Cont........

- Feedback should **motivate learners to move forward into their next episodes of *learning by doing*** and focus their efforts more sharply towards bringing the experience from their past work to bear on making their next work better.

- Feedback gained while *explaining*, *coaching* and even *teaching* fellow-learners can **add enormously to learners' mastery of what they have learned, and increase their confidence** as they work towards communicating their knowledge in formal assessments.

- **Involving learners** in *assessing – making informed judgements* can open up to them a great deal of further feedback on how their learning is progressing, and how well they are becoming able to provide evidence of their achievement in each of the forms which will make up their overall assessment.

However, a longstanding discourse exists identifying difficulties experienced by mentors in providing feedback, as well as inconsistencies or failures by mentors to provide feedback identifying deficiencies or supporting processes to fail a student (Finch 2009, Duffy 2013).

- What do we learn about student performance and development?
- How does feedback inform future student placement assessment?
- How does feedback help students improve?
- How does feedback support the assessment decision made?

'W' has been spoken to by senior sister as it had been noted by MDT members that 'W' may not be enjoying her placement. She can appear unenthusiastic at times. She ensures me this is not the case and is just her personal life'. 'W' has agreed to aim to be more positive throughout rest of placement and to take opportunities as they arise.'

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- 'I have felt reassured knowing that she has been caring for my patients whilst on the unit, knowing that she has the ability to assess patient's needs and the knowledge to question anything that she is not sure of.'

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- 'Q' has done very well during her placement. This is a very busy acute setting and she has coped very well indeed. There has been a clear improvement in her confidence and initiative over the last few weeks, which has reflected positively in the care she gives. She has been able to dress a variety of wounds, using aseptic technique and has informed the nurse of any concerns regarding changes to the wound. 'Q' has prioritised care well, and has become confident in doing full observations and NEWS scores.'

Other sources of difficulty in assessing competence?

# Benefit of the doubt?

*'The first year you might give them the benefit of the doubt. Whereas with third years, it is their third year and sometimes if people haven't told them what is expected of them, they get to their third year and all of a sudden it is 'this person is going to be qualified soon and they are just not up to scratch'. But yet in their first year you think all right then, we'll give them the benefit of the doubt and see how they develop you know, in their next placement.'*

# Practice assessor not supported by university

- "So I went and had a meeting at the university after things had broken down to discuss it, they did not, they were only interested in what he [the student] had to say. And in fact when they sent a report, I wasn't prepared to sign the report they had sent because it didn't stress or recalled any of the concerns I had raised."

- "...we had such different, such difference of opinion that I really questioned my own judgment because I thought actually, this is somebody who has, you know, twenty years experience of teaching, he's seen lots of students and I seem to be the only one who think there's a problem, he doesn't seem to think there is a problem with this student, he seems to think she is quite capable, intelligent and able to pass so I really questioned myself".

# Differences of opinion within the team?

'One of the other team members she is quite 'fluffy',.....' ooooh don't worry, it will be fine', and I know at the end of this young lady's placement, when I said 'no, I'm not happy to sign your book off, I'm really sorry but I'm going to have to fail you'. The student said 'that's fine, I'm finishing'. When the student had gone home to her parents, they said 'no you must finish', she came back and made sure that she came back on the week that I was on holiday, so that she could work with my 'fluffy' counterpart. Who was very supportive in the 'don't worry, we will get you through this, we will pass you'. So I had to say, 'well you can't pass her' so that caused a little bit of discussion within the team, a little bit of conflict.'

# Confidence of the practice assessor?

'Certainly with a student who has failed placement or a student who I don't feel is performing very well, I think, 'am I making the wrong decision?' I don't want to make the wrong decision so I do ask other members of the team. Well I do anyway, even students who are very good. You know 'what do you think of the student?' And they say 'oh yes, she is really good.' And I think 'that's good, I have made the right decision.' But somebody like this student who has failed placement, it is really important.... And I got really good feedback about her.'

'It's only that I am older now that I feel that I can raise concerns and fail someone. Whether it's that I don't know, but not everyone feels that they've got the experience or confidence to do it. I probably feel that I wouldn't have done it in the past.'

# Failure as an assessor?

"...I should have been more clearer all the way through that I have more concerns about her than I was...I felt that she would only come back and say well {name of practice assessor] never, I never know I was...and I would think that she would have some recourse to say that and so I felt I hadn't supervised her enough. I know that wasn't entirely my lookout but I hadn't done my job how it was meant to have been done".

"So I think for someone to fail, there has to be failure on both, most of the time, there was to be failure on both parts. I mean that puts a lot for responsibility on the practice teacher but you have to somehow justify that you have done as much as you can...I would say probably 90% of the time if the students fails, there's something wrong with the practice teacher".

# Leniency in assessment ?

'I don't think I can assess someone fully, particularly final placement students until mid-interview, to see how their confidence levels are doing, because if you look at our new starters they take 12 weeks to gain even an ounce of confidence in looking after patients. And I do think sometimes you know in the four-week placement you don't get to know the student fully. You can sometimes make a snap judgement on someone and say 'yes they are going to do okay'. And I don't see how you can fail them almost. You have got to give them those four weeks almost to build up their confidence, and then they are off. So you can't say that this person is failing, because it might just be the fact that they are completely overwhelmed by the environment. You can't say 'this student is rubbish and shouldn't be a nurse', it's not fair at all. So you end up passing someone when you don't know that person fully.'

# Takeaway messages:

**Feedback should:**

- Provide specific detail about student performance and development

- Inform future student placement assessment

- Help students to improve

- Justify and support the assessment decision made

**Decision making requires:**

- An up to date and confident assessor

- Who is supported by their team and the student's programme

- And who is provided with clear competence standards, applicable to the practice setting and programme level to guide and justify judgements and the final decision.

Extracts taken from :
Burden S.E. (2014)
*'Fit for Registration'. Mentor judgements and decision making regarding student competence in practice. A mixed methods study.* Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Huddersfield. [online] Available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/23853/