

Training practitioners without practice experience: can virtual learning offer an alternative?

AMPS | Research, Publications & Conferences; Teaching & Technologies Education Conference 2025 (Belgium, virtual); 19th November 2025

Dr Jill Stewart, University of Greenwich
Dr Aaron Lawson, Ulster University
with Dr Robert Eadie, Ulster University

j.l.stewart@greenwich.ac.uk
[@housing-jill.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/housing-jill.bsky.social)



1

Decline in traditional work placements supporting academic programmes developing skills and competencies for front-line practitioners in local authorities and similar settings

Effective new forms of learning are needed to best replicate 'real world' experience.

Focus here on niche area of housing inspection training for environmental health professionals in the UK, but the lessons arising from this have far greater applicability.



2

Challenges of such training go beyond the traditional f2f classroom

New opportunities from Covid 19 alongside loss of traditional work placements – long term, austerity

Need for synchronous and asynchronous learning and assessment

Rapid development of virtual learning but what about quality and replicability to 'real world' situations



3

Gaps in workforce are both chronic and acute (recruiting new and suitably trained staff, retaining existing and experienced staff)

Our parallel research also considers what the wider workforce gaps are and how these might be filled going forward

The challenges are multiple and complex: numbers of staff needed, quality of their training, its affordability to public sector training budgets, the manner in which it might be both offered and how the learning assessed and recognised



4

Development to date of 360 photospheres in supporting synchronous and asynchronous virtual learning to help support learning needs that require multiple, complex areas of knowledge, skills and application.

Ongoing challenges include access to funding, specialist input, time limited etc



5

Long journey still ahead in creating a viable resource capable of substantial impact and wider applicability in supporting the training needs of front-line environmental health practitioners, but lots of interest in this area and how it might work.



6

Capturing interest?

360 videos and photospheres which can showcase real-world environments in various environmental health-related contexts.

Currently little research on evaluating the potential for Environmental Health learning and practice using 360-technology, and we aim to evaluate the potential use of novel 360-technology for practice-based learning and training in Environmental Health from a practitioner perspective.

Ethical clearance.

Our online survey (shared October/November 2025, ongoing): "Evaluating the potential for Environmental Health Learning and Practice using 360-technology – a practitioner, student and academic perspective".

The survey - mixture of 25 open and closed type questions illustrated with-used online platform with this capability (ThingLink)



7

Illustrative survey questions

Do you have any experience of housing inspections in practice?

If yes or maybe, can you please tell us whether this was a university or short course provider that provided the training?

If practice-based training only, please can you tell us a little about how you were trained in inspection (and investigation) techniques? (e.g. In-person by another EHP) (Progress to Q6)

For all of above, did this link to training around housing deficiencies or links to health and safety? (Progress to Q7)

Have you ever come across 360 filming in environmental health work before?



8

Illustrative survey questions (examples only)

Have you had any practice experience in housing inspection before?

How do you think 360 filming might help you with practice experience in housing inspection?

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree or disagree that 360 filming improves practice-based inspections compared to traditional photographs and filming?

Please choose only one of the following: Strongly Agree - Please click on the 5 button; 4. Agree - Please click on the 4 button; 3. Undecided - Please click on the 3 button; 2. Disagree - Please click on the 2 button; 1. Strongly Disagree -

Have you had any other opportunities to 'replicate' practice-based housing inspections?



9



Figure 1. A 360 photosphere of the external entrance and garden to the house used for simulation walkthrough housing inspection.



10



Figure 2. A 360 photosphere of the internal main staircase of the house used for simulation walkthrough housing inspection.



11



Figure 3. A 360 photosphere of the internal of the upstairs bathroom of the house used for simulation walkthrough housing inspection. (Note the simulated damp and mould hazard around the window frame.)



12



Please look at these 360 images of a typical urban green space (... then consider the following questions - examples to follow in next slides):

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH

13

Sample/illustrative questions following photosphere examples:

Having looked at the 360 photospheres, what advantages and disadvantages might there be for you in terms of conducting a housing inspection?

Do you think that practice-based colleagues might find 360 scenarios useful for their learning and CPD?

How would you find it most helpful to access this 360 based training (yet to be developed) for the first time or as a refresher?

Do you think this should be freely available to local authority teams working in housing regulation and other areas of Environmental Health where applicable?

Do you have any other thoughts or concerns about reliance on 360 filming only as a learning tool for those not able to access practice-based training?

Do you have any 360-scenario examples that you have developed or used for professional 'virtual' house inspection etc. – existing, or as for example as development of Covid-19 restrictions?

Do you have any thoughts on how we can build in experiential learning when this is not a requirement of accredited degrees?



14

Early results and our initial thoughts

Very early days in starting to scrutinise the data, but the following comments provide some initial insight:



15

Of the participants who did have experience with conducting housing inspections (36.67%), most had done this through their University training (37.5%), facilitated in-person by an EHP.

The majority of participants had not come across 360 filming in EH work before (93.3%)



16

When asked about how 360 filming might help with practice experience in housing inspection; the qualitative feedback can be broadly summarised under the following key points:

- Allows for a retrospective review of a property (in more detail meaning that things aren't missed) (P1 P4 P10 P14 P19 P20 P21)
- Allows for remote inspections (P7 P9 P18 P22 P29)
- Can do the inspection more quickly/greater time efficiency (P12 P13 P30)
- Helps build confidence for the Inspector (P11 P15)



17

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed that 360 filming improves practice based inspections compared to traditional photographs and filming, most participants agreed or strongly agreed that it did (89.3%)



18

Some further qualitative feedback related to the perceived advantages of using 360 photospheres for housing inspection revealed:

- It 'saves time' (P2 P6 P8 P9 P16 P26)
- You can revisit an inspection at any time without the need for a physical revisit (P4 P14 P16 P20 P22 P23)
- It allows for more time to be spent to see things in more detail/develops better observation skills and hazard-spotting (P11 P12 P13 P19)



19

Some further qualitative feedback related to the perceived disadvantages of using 360 photospheres for housing inspection revealed:

- 360 photospheres may not be clear resulting in a lack of detail/inability to inspect closely (P1 P4 P7 P8 P9 P10 P11 P12 P13 P14 P15 P16 P20 P21)
- There is the potential for IT/technical errors to occur (P16 P22 P23 P25)
- Only shows the property at the time the photosphere was taken (i.e. may not be up-to-date) (P18 P19)
- Doesn't reveal certain issues e.g. noise/smell (P26)



20

Regarding overall learning, most participants (92.9%) felt that 360 scenarios like this would be helpful for the learning for new practice-based colleagues

Regarding CPD training, most participants (44.4%) felt that 360 scenarios like this would be helpful for CPD training for new practice-based colleagues. Some (37.0%) said it 'maybe' would.



21

Most participants (86.7%) felt that the use of 360 for housing inspection should be freely available to local authority teams working in housing regulation and other areas of Environmental Health where applicable

Regarding access to 360-based training for housing inspection, most of the qualitative feedback revealed that 'online' would be the preferred choice (P2 P3 P10 P15 P16 P17 P18 P20 P21 P23 P25) followed using a mobile application ('app') (P9 P19 P20 P23 P24)



22

Most participants also reported qualitatively that the use of 360 could be applied in other EH contexts such as:

- Health & Safety Inspections (P1 P6 P7 P11 P12 P13 P14 P22 P23 P26)
- Food Hygiene Inspections (P1 P5 P6 P7 P11 P14 P15 P18),
- and for other purposes such as Environmental Protection (P5) or for use in Planning Applications (P13)



23

References

Stewart, J., Cole, L., Ravindran, S. and Jeavons, C. (2025) **Recruiting, training and development needs of UK local authority private rented housing sector regulatory teams: looking beyond traditional environmental health degree routes**, *Housing and Society*
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08882746.2025.2573593>.

Lawson, A, Stewart, J, Turner, E, Passmore, P, Costley, C (2024), **Re-thinking housing inspection and regulation: using 360 technology as a new approach in environmental health practice training**. *Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching*, pp. 101-117 ISSN: 2044-0081 (Print), (doi: <https://doi.org/10.21100/compass.v17i1.1503>).

Stewart, J. and Jeavons, C. (2023) **Regulating the privately rented sector: what can universities offer to support local authority workforce development?** *Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 16 (2), pp. 42-46. ISSN 2044-0081 doi.org/10.21100/compass.v16i2.1447

24

Thanks for listening!

Any questions?

Dr Jill Stewart

j.l.stewart@greenwich.ac.uk

[@housing-jill.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/housing-jill.bsky.social)

