

Sheffield Hallam University

Peer Review & Enhancement of Academic Practice

Promoting enhancement through reflective critical
friendship



A Quick Guide

1. Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE) is owned by you to support the ongoing development of your academic practice. Informed by University, college and school/institute priorities, *you* decide what you will focus on.
2. PRE is an opportunity for you to review and reflect on your academic practice with the support of colleagues as critical friends, and for you to learn from supporting them in return.
3. PRE helps you to review the methods you use to teach in the environments you use in your practice to identify ways in which you can develop professionally and successfully apply what you learn to enhance your practice.
4. You are expected to engage in PRE in a way that is appropriate for your student-facing role and the nature of your engagement with students.
5. Within PRE, you are expected to include peer observation methods each year to help you review the ways you engage students as learners.
6. Peer observation, normally involving pairings, establishes a rich opportunity to critically reflect your practices as the basis for enhancement activities.
7. A brief summary of your PRE activities should be documented on the PRE form and shared with the school/institute PRE representative.
8. The outcomes of PRE should also be reported and discussed at appraisal each year when your aims for future PRE activity will also be recorded to ensure you have appropriate support and access to further development opportunities.

The rest of this handbook details how you can meet these objectives.

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Introduction

Peer Review & Enhancement is an integral part of professional academic life for all staff who teach or support student learning. It is a key component of a strategy to ensure all staff are continuously engaged in developing their professional practice in a culture of peer enhancement and recognition of teaching at Sheffield Hallam University.

The purpose of this guide is to provide staff with information about the principles and processes underpinning Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE).

Aims of Peer Review & Enhancement

PRE is a process through which individuals, with the support of colleagues, review and reflect on their academic practice, make plans for their professional development and carry these out.

PRE aims to:

- improve teaching and student learning through a supportive, personalised process of peer review and the enhancement of professional practice.
- promote and enhance the scholarship of learning and teaching through reflective practice.
- link appropriately with appraisal and professional development to create a coherent development and review cycle supported by personal scholarly activity time.

PRE aims to address the needs of individuals, teams, professional groups and inter-professional groups, the Institution and Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies. Its purpose is to promote, share and enable innovation in good teaching and to encourage staff to recognise and respond to changes affecting higher education as important contexts for professional development.

As such PRE needs to be integrated in academic practice and valued by all as a developmental process that draws and builds upon existing expertise, processes and documentation.

Expectations of Peer Review & Enhancement activities

The Peer Review & Enhancement process should:

- Involve **all** staff who have a student-facing role teaching or supporting student learning, including those in part-time roles.
- Relate primarily to the individual's professional development needs.
- Locate individual needs within the context of the University Strategy and related college, school/institute and course team priorities.
- Relate to **any** aspect of learning, teaching and assessment.
- Be based on a constructive dialogue amongst peers.
- Inform appraisal and ongoing development planning.
- Ultimately seek to develop consistent good practice amongst teaching teams.

- Be simple and efficient to operate, linking with existing processes where possible, i.e. module and course review, appraisal, professional recognition, other CPD activities, and curriculum design and approval.
- Lead to the dissemination of good practice.
- Contribute to claims for professional recognition, the need to evidence good standing as professional academics, and to progress academic careers.
- Be co-ordinated by key individuals in Colleges.

Principles of Peer Review & Enhancement

Six principles are central to successful Peer Review & Enhancement.

1. Peer Review & Enhancement is *owned* by the individual.

The individual chooses:

- **The focus of the review** – PRE primarily relates to the professional development needs of the individual who has the right to decide what aspect of their professional practice they wish to review within the context of the University Strategy and related College, School and Course team priorities.
- **The method of review** – the way in which the review will be undertaken is normally agreed by discussion with the supporting colleague(s) but will include an observation of practice.
- **The intended outcomes** – PRE enables the development of the individual’s practice. The aims and eventual outcomes are recorded as an integral part of the process. There is no requirement to record and report the *details* of peer review, but such details may be incorporated into the dissemination of the development activities at the discretion of the individual.
- **Development and dissemination** – PRE is expected to lead to the sharing of good practice with others not directly involved in the process and thereby encourage consistent good practice. The detail of what is shared, and how this is shared, is for individuals and peer groups to decide.

2. Peer Review & Enhancement fosters academic confidence

PRE first and foremost establishes enhancement activities in relation to the review of actual practice, and then within the context of other priorities. This holistic, balanced views means:

- **Development has a meaningful personal and professional context** – enhancement activities are primarily designed to improve aspects of a person’s actual practice, so raising the quality of practice and the confidence of all staff.
- **Review leads to enhancement** – peer review is always a positive experience because it is designed to lead to improved practice and to foster academic confidence. Review without integral opportunities for enhancement, and vice versa, are comparatively poor approaches to professional development.

3. Peer Review & Enhancement involves colleagues acting as “critical friends”

The role of peers is one of:

- **Support** – peers supporting colleagues should not attempt to direct, lead the review, assess or critique practice unless specifically asked to do so by the individual as part of the process.
- **Flexibility** – peers supporting colleagues are not asked to assess an individual’s practice but to support the individual in reviewing his/her practice and to work together to develop plans to enhance it.
- **Trust and confidentiality** – peers supporting colleagues have been invited to contribute to a colleagues’ professional development. This will often necessitate professional integrity and appreciative, supportive, trustful and confidential relationships being

formed, especially where a colleague has identified aspects of their practice that they perceive to need significant improvement.

- **Mutual benefit and joint enterprise** – PRE is a made-up reciprocal activity, each bringing mutual benefits and incorporating the open sharing of and reflection on practices.

4. Peer observation of teaching provides a rich and important context for Peer Review & Enhancement

Formal teaching occurs in diverse learning environments and should be observed by peers each year. The observation should be:

- **Incorporated into Peer Review & Enhancement** – peer observation is often a starting point informing a broader set of PRE activities which may involve other supporting colleagues.
- **Conducted by peers in pairs** - peer observation normally involves pairings. The observer-observee pairing will normally be determined and co-ordinated by a suitable team leader (the precise mechanism will be determined within the school/institute) to ensure optimal benefits from the experience.
- **A partnership** - the observation pairings should be based on partnership working and a mutually beneficial experience of development and reflection.
- **Engaged with according to the overarching principles of PRE** – peer observation activities, as part of PRE, are governed by the same principles (owned by the individual and supported by a critical friend).
- **Practice based** - the observation should be focused on the teaching and learning practice and should not review the content. As such, pairings can be between colleagues from different teaching teams.

5. Peer Review & Enhancement informs and is supported by annual appraisal

While Peer Review & Enhancement is owned by the individual and involves peers, it does not operate in isolation of other CPD, professional recognition, and curriculum development activities. Academic appraisal provides the opportunity around which development is co-ordinated and supported. The following should be discussed:

- **The outcomes of PRE** – while the specific details and recommendations should remain confidential to the individual, the outcomes of PRE should be discussed and recorded at appraisal to monitor engagement, identify areas of emerging expertise and consider options for disseminating outcomes and good practice.
- **The scope and requirements for ongoing PRE** – PRE is a continuous process, though its focus needs to be redefined each year. Appraisees should identify the general scope of forthcoming PRE activities and identify requirements for support.
- **Arrangements for peer observation** – managers will agree the conditions in which observation will happen and confirm the arrangements for the running of peer observations, i.e. pairings, timings, documentation.

6. Peer Review & Enhancement reflects the breadth of the academic teaching role, and the diverse environments used for academic practice

The professional academic has a multi-faceted role which is reflected in the UK Professional Standards Framework. Each of these areas of activity needs to be continually developed to reflect the diverse environments used by academics and their students:

- **(AoA1) The design and planning of learning activities and/or programmes of study** – effective teaching and support for learning takes account of the particular contexts of a course, its subject and participants.
- **(AoA2) Teach and/or support learning through appropriate approaches and environments** – the methods used to engage and support students as learners.
- **(AoA3) Assessing and giving feedback to learners** – the formative and summative used to chart and steer a learner’s progress through their course.
- **(AoA4) Support and guide learners**– effective teaching and support for learning takes places in many formal and informal environments, both physical and virtual. PRE activities, including peer observation, should particularly consider how the conditions for learning are established by the academic.
- **(AoA5) Enhance practice through own continuing professional development** – teaching is a complex and evolving profession requiring reflection on evidence and ongoing incremental development.

A selection of approaches to Peer Review & Enhancement

The following approaches, largely drawn from experience indicate different ways of organising PRE activities. The difficulty of keeping a good balance between personalised review and enhancement activities should be noted.

	<i>Approach 1</i>	<i>Approach 2</i>	<i>Approach 3</i>	<i>Approach 4</i>
<i>Who determined the topic (s)?</i>	Each individual	The whole school/institute chooses several topics. PRE groups select from this.	Professional lead or Academic Delivery Manager	Whole professional group or teaching team
<i>What informed the choice of topic?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student evaluations • Reflection on own practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interest • Current strategic and common drivers e.g. feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on external imperatives e.g. PSRB • Strategic development of portfolio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on need for development e.g. Profile Assessment • Personal interest within the topic
<i>Peer group size</i>	2	5-8	8-10	2-3
<i>Who determined the membership of the group?</i>	Self-selecting - individuals choose colleagues they feel they can work with.	Self-selecting - individuals select the topic they were most interested in.	Chosen by Professional Lead/ADMs to include experienced staff, new staff and ALs.	Self-selecting - individuals choose colleagues with same interest or within the same teaching team.
<i>How often group meets (time)</i>	About 3 times per semester	3 times per year	Time allocated at monthly School/institute meetings.	3/4 times per semester
<i>Duration</i>	New topic each semester	Academic year	Academic year	Academic year
<i>Links with other activities/processes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module evaluation • NSS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal • Mentoring of new staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External inspection • Appraisal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent course planning • Team teaching
<i>Main benefits of this approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The topic addresses a specific need. The activity can be tailored to resolve it • Based upon actual evidence from practice • Small trustful group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common foci develop strength across the school/institute group • Common foci encourage consistency in teaching methods and the student experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of professional standing in subject area • Credibility of the whole portfolio through recognition • Peer benchmarking through large group approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single common focus develops strength and consistencies across the Departmental group • Self-selecting small groups are likely to design activities that suit their dynamic and fit in with other commitments
<i>Main disadvantages of this approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initial focus can turn out to be too specific • Opportunities for sharing outcomes may be more limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific individual problems can fall outside the main focus. • Infrequent meetings can reduce interest and energy levels and impact • Individual commitment can be difficult to manage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on PSRB requirements can undermine the need to focus on the scholarship of teaching and learning • Reduced opportunities to develop innovative teaching and learning approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common focus negates the opportunity to formally address specific individual problems that fall outside of the focus. •

Example enhancement activities

	<i>Example 1</i>	<i>Example 2</i>	<i>Example 3</i>	<i>Example 4</i>	<i>Example 5</i>
<i>The topic</i>	Develop the use of tools within Microsoft Word to support feedback	Develop an online assessment	Develop employability within a module	General teaching skills and technique development using peer-observation	Develop student-facing laboratory support skills
<i>Group membership</i>	2 academics	3 academics and 1 technology enhanced learning assistant	3 academics	2 academics	3 technicians and 1 academic
<i>Need</i>	To return high quality feedback quickly.	To create a new online test where one had not existed before.	Address new industry benchmarks for embedding employability.	Enhance face-to-face teaching.	Develop the confidence of the technical team in supporting students use of laboratory equipment.
<i>Main context</i>	Further develop initial work fast feedback turnaround to address the challenge of large student numbers.	Development of a newly validated course.	Staff wanted to introduce a stronger employability focus to a module.	Development of a blended learning module.	New equipment in laboratory settings.
<i>What did the group do?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Met once to work on the use of Microsoft "Quick Parts" and reviewing tools Trialled using the tools when giving assessment feedback Met to discuss the results of the trial Disseminated to other colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Met on several occasions throughout semester 1 to devise test questions. In semester 2 the group met with the e-learning assistant to work on the technical aspects of the test The group reviewed the use of the test and identified areas for further development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group reviewed the module against the benchmarks Employability outcomes were identified, and LTA modifications made to the module to meet those outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two colleagues were paired and arranged to observe each other's teaching. They elected to do a repeat session so observed each other once per semester. Observation outcome was combined with discussion about links to blended activities on Blackboard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The technicians met with the academic to discuss objectives. Identified approaches to supporting students on equipment use
<i>Dissemination</i>	An introductory video was produced with IT Advisory. Instructions were written and made available on the Health & Wellbeing LTA intranet site.	A case study report which outlines the approach taken and provides tips and hints that others can use.	The group shared with the course teaching team and school/institute employability group.	Outcomes of observations used to inform appraisal discussions. Techniques used, developments made, and experiences were shared with the teaching team.	Technical team shared outcomes with team leader and with wider technical team colleagues

	<i>Example 6</i>	<i>Example 7</i>	<i>Example 8</i>	<i>Example 9</i>
<i>The topic</i>	Development of coaching skills for student support and guidance	Development of teaching resources for equipment use	Support of post-graduate project supervision	Incorporation of online activities across the delivery of a course
<i>Group membership</i>	2 student support officers	1 technician, 1 technology enhanced learning assistant and 1 academic	Research team and course leader	A teaching team with support from a QESS staff member
<i>Need</i>	To further support students in their one-to-one meetings.	Students needed to develop their ability to use laboratory equipment.	Improve the teaching capability of a group of researchers involved in supervision of student projects.	To provide students with more direction to their learning outside of face-to-face contact time.
<i>Main context</i>	Student Support Officers being able to select their own approach to developing coaching skills.	The academic realised students required further training and experience with laboratory equipment.	Capacity to support student projects.	Capability of the teaching team to implement more active blended learning in all modules on a course.
<i>What did the group do?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student support officers researched coaching approaches and techniques • As a pair they trialled and role-played coaching conversations. • The pair met regularly to discuss progress and reflect on experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group met to determine the needs of the students and how best to meet those needs. • Instructional videos were produced so students could remind themselves of the techniques and procedures to follow with equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course leader for the MSc, who was also a research team member, set up regular meetings throughout the academic year. • Team members shared experiences and reflected on their interactions with students. • Other teaching-active colleagues contributed to occasional meetings to offer support and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching team identified a module for each staff member to target. • The QESS staff member came to a team meeting and discussed some of the ways in which the module leaders could incorporate changes • Module leaders then made changes with support from QESS staff
<i>Dissemination</i>	Outcomes were discussed at Student Support team meetings.	Video resources were shared with the wider teams for use with students.	A reflective report was compiled by the team and shared with other supervisors.	Presentation at the LTA conference.

Things to Consider

The following considerations are useful when planning your PRE activities, although the list is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.

Choosing the focus of your PRE

You should review student-facing observable dimensions of your practice. In addition, you may wish to develop and enhance other aspects of your academic practice.

Consider,

- Choosing something that students have commented on in module feedback
- Reflecting on the results of the National Student Survey
- Choosing aspects of your practice in which you lack confidence
- Choosing aspects of practice in which your peers have great strength or where they are using techniques that are new or different to you
- Choosing aspects of your team's practice to improve consistency for students
- Trying something new that you've always wanted to try out but need support with
- Linking your review to your school/institute's strategic priorities or school/institute PRE theme
- Developing some formative assessment and feedback methods so students can get more practice before completing assessment for credit
- Developing your practice to heighten learner interaction and confidence
- Developing your use of Blackboard beyond the minimum expectations to support student-led learning
- Developing a skill or technique that you can use in more than one module i.e. use of social media in learning and teaching, screencasting, audio feedback etc.

Choosing your peers

Consider,

- Working with someone who is new to your team and could provide a fresh perspective
- Working with someone who has a lot of experience in an area for which you would like some guidance
- Working as a module team to make a step-change in the way an aspect of the module is delivered
- Working across modules in a course to create a coherent student experience
- Working with someone outside of your immediate team
- Working with someone with specialist knowledge
- Working with your professional group on a particular theme

Creating your PRE plan

Have you agreed the time frame for your review? Consider,

- When a modification to existing provision would need to be requested
- When any observation activity is optimal to arrange
- When assessments are due to be submitted, and feedback returned

Managing evidence and managing dissemination

Consider,

- The options for sharing your PRE experience and the outputs you will generate. Will it help to manage evidence of change from the start?
- How colleagues in your subject area could benefit from your development experiences.

Being sensitive through review

The level of disclosure you are comfortable with about your work will depend on the agreed processes, topics and how well you know your colleagues. Ensure the process continues to feel supportive and productive to you and your colleagues. Monitor how the process is unfolding:

- Do you sense that all concerned are comfortable discussing the issues?
- Is there a good balance of support and challenge?
- Do you need to consider any modification to the plan?

Planning for improvement

Ensure action planning is not an afterthought – review *and* enhancement work together as peer-supported activities in PRE. Consider creating action statements that:

- Are in the form of SMART goals (specific, measurable, agreeable, realistic, time-bound) and that improve your academic practice
- Clarify and lead to future professional development.

Recording and Reporting PRE

- You should keep a record of your PRE for your own professional development (see page 21)
- You should complete the expanded summary of your review at the end of your PRE record
- You will discuss the outcomes of your PRE at appraisal and how you can access further appropriate development opportunities. The detail of the review is confidential to you, and it is up to you what you choose to disclose.

Thinking about dissemination

Academics know how clear goals often drive learning. Being clear about the way you will share your practice is useful for PRE too.

Here are some options to consider when designing your PRE activities and which will also contribute to your portfolio of evidence for professional recognition and remaining in good standing:

- **Subject team workshop** – particularly suited to sharing newly developed techniques with team members, developing consistent approaches and reflecting further on what you have learnt.
- **University Learning & Teaching Conferences, Forums and Exchanges** – such conferences usually offer a range of formats for sharing practice including posters, quick-fire ‘thunderstorm’ presentations and discussions, evidence rich papers, and workshops.
- **External seminar and conferences** – organisations such as the Higher Education Academy and professional bodies run seminars and conferences that look at innovation in teaching and learning. Often these are designed to share practice amongst peers in subject areas.
- **Briefing documents** – your college and the University value techniques that have been developed ‘in-house’. Your work can provide the basis of someone else’s PRE next year.
- **Case Studies** – the story of your development and innovation can inform, inspire, and encourage others. Think about how you will evaluate your activity from the start and consciously monitor your progress as you go – the successes and the challenges! RAISE has an international peer-reviewed journal (Student Engagement & Experience Journal) which accepts case studies.¹
- **Developing special interest groups** – College teaching and learning leaders can advise you about other options for sharing your practice internally and externally and are keen to find ways to support colleagues in establishing special interest groups to further develop and lead innovation.

¹ RAISE Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal. Online at: <https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/raise/index>

Peer Observation of Teaching

Peer-observation of teaching is expected to occur every year as part of Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE). All teaching staff with student-facing roles are expected to engage in peer observation activities as an integral part of professional academic life.

This paper introduces Peer Observation of Teaching, its benefits and how it is used in the context of Peer Review & Enhancement at Sheffield Hallam University.

Aims of Peer Observation of Teaching

The model of peer observation used at Sheffield Hallam is where teachers observe each other in a reciprocal process. The observation process should benefit both the observed and the observer. The focus of any observation of teaching should be constructive criticism within a supportive environment (Lomas and Nicholls 2005) and those being observed should be judged on mutually agreed outcomes - not on externally set criteria.

Peer Observation of Teaching should enable:

- discussion, sharing and mutual support between peers
- the advancement and development of good practice in teaching
- self-evaluation and reflection on teaching practice
- evaluation of the interaction of student and teacher
- feedback on teaching methods including new ideas or methods
- critical self-reflection

Benefits of Peer Observation

The benefits of peer observation are true for both the observed and the observer where both are required to be reflective and critical about their professional practice (Peel 2005). They include (Bell 2001):

- development of skills and ideas.
- improving teaching practice.
- developing confidence and congruence.
- developing collegiality.
- supporting an on-going approach to professional development.
- feedback on new ideas and innovations in practice.
- reassurance and support for new lecturers.
- revealing hidden behaviours that can be shared and discussed
- addressing known problems and offering support
- learning as an observer.
- an opportunity for experienced staff to receive feedback supporting their strategic approach to self-development
- putting teaching in the public domain and enabling discussions rather than seeing teaching as a closed and private activity.

Inviting someone from another teaching team to observe a session was incredibly enlightening and very helpful. The person observing was able to offer me new perspectives on my teaching delivery which built my confidence as well as enabling me to revisit some of my teaching practice. I had an idea to look at communication and we spoke about this and basically honed it down. It was very collaborative. They brought a wealth of their own experience which they generously shared during our discussion. I would definitely recommend this process to everyone.

How to carry out Peer Observation of Teaching

There are several steps to a successful peer observation of teaching:

1. Selection of the activity to be observed
2. Selection of observer
3. Pre-observation discussion
4. The observation
5. Post-observation follow-up
6. Recording the observation

1. Selection of the activity to be observed

Student-facing teaching activities happen in a range of physical and virtual environments. Peer Observation of Teaching should happen in a formal teaching environment commonly associated with appropriate teaching methods in a disciplinary area. Two common examples of environments where Peer Observation of Teaching could take place are:

- face-to-face activities based in an on-campus classroom
- tutor-led online activities where students do not share the same physical space but interact with a tutor in a virtual space.

2. Selection of the observer

For a successful peer observation of teaching activity, the observer should be chosen carefully to ensure there is a collaborative and positive experience between colleagues who trust and respect each other (Siddiqui, Jonas-Dwyer and Carr 2007). Teaching observations often occur between colleagues within the same teaching team, but there are clear benefits to working with peers outside of teaching teams and using networks outside of direct school or college colleagues. The closeness of a teaching team, especially if they already have experience of seeing each other teach, can prevent the observation experience from being an authentic one.

Peer observation of teaching is a process that can be embraced by experienced and inexperienced teachers alike. Experienced lecturers can learn from new lecturers and vice versa. The process should allow the observed to question and analyse their teaching or support approach and the ongoing development of their practice (Fullerton 2003). In this way peer observation is mostly associated with the review phase of Peer Review & Enhancement, providing the basis for peer enhancement activities.

The pairings of colleagues will be co-ordinated, and in some cases determined, by a suitable team leader or school/institute leader; the precise process being decided within each school/institute or centre.

Trust is an important element for successful peer observation of teaching and trust can be built further as a result of the sharing that is inherent in peer observation of teaching (Shortland 2007). The observer must be chosen to ensure that trust between peers can facilitate a strong and beneficial exchange throughout the process.

Normally a single observer would be selected, but there may be circumstances where more than one observer might be appropriate. For example, a trio of peers may carry out a trio of observations where each colleague is observed by the other two colleagues at the same time.

Observation could also provide an opportunity for colleagues outside of teaching teams to learn more about the different subject disciplines that we work within. Fresh perspectives can bring forth fresh ideas.

The experience of a staff member, either in relation to the time they have been at Sheffield Hallam University or the time that they have been in an academic role, is not a factor in the success of their observation. However, staff who are new to the role and/or the institution may feel limited by their lack of experience and inhibited in how to give observation feedback to a more experienced colleague. New staff should value the fresh perspective that they offer to others. Many experienced colleagues will value and seek out feedback from those who are new to the organisation.

The observed and the observers should agree the model that suits their own objectives and agree the nature of their own peer observation outcomes. Expectations for both participants need to be carefully discussed in advance of making an agreement about observation. As stated earlier, the focus of any observation of teaching should be constructive criticism within a supportive environment (Lomas and Nicholls 2005).

3. Pre-Observation discussion

Once the observer or observers have been agreed they need to be provided with the necessary information to enable successful peer observation. This is usually best achieved with face-to-face discussion and the provision of relevant documentation (Fullerton 2003).

The discussion should cover:

- the location, date and time of the session and arrangement of a feedback session as soon after the observation as possible.
- the learning outcomes of the session and how it relates to the rest of the module and course.
- a summary of the planned teaching and learning activities.
- information about the student cohort.
- any potential issues or areas of concern.
- the way in which students will be informed about the observation.
- if the observer will need to speak to students (this is normally not necessary).
- if students will be asked to feedback on the session.
- the elements of specific feedback that the observed wishes to receive.
- whether the observed colleague would like feedback on any aspect of the session, or just on the elements of specific feedback.
- a review of the tips and advice for observation (see What to Observe on page following this section).

Documentation that should be provided:

- Module handbook or access to a Blackboard site that contains the module information.
- Any relevant handouts or other teaching materials.
- Assessment task information if the session relates to the assessment in any way.

An observation session should normally last no more than 1 hour. If the teaching session is longer than this, agree a suitable 1-hour time period where the observer should attend and how to avoid interruptions when the observer arrives or leaves within the session period.

4. Carrying out the observation

The observer should arrive in good time to be able to place themselves unobtrusively in the room. The attendance of either a known or unknown member of staff as observer into a session can cause unease with students if they are not aware of the purpose of their visit. The observed tutor should explain that there is an observer present and that they are there to assist in the professional development of the tutor and not to assess the students. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to students that staff are engaged in continuing their professional development in learning, teaching and assessment.

The observer should not become involved in the session as this will change the nature of the session and limit their ability to provide feedback (Gosling 2000; Siddiqui 2007). In certain limited circumstances it may be appropriate for the observer to ask students about the work that they are doing.

Any planned discussion between the observer and the students must:

- be agreed at the pre-observation meeting.
- only occur if it is appropriate in assisting observation.
- not constitute involvement in the session.

If the observer plans to speak to the students, this must be explained by the tutor to the students at the start of the session.

The observer should bring the observation pro-forma with them to the session and should make brief notes during the session using the pro-forma. The observer should be clear about the specific feedback required by the observed tutor as agreed at the pre-observation discussion meeting. This will provide the basis of their follow-up and helps the observer to focus their observations. It is not normally necessary to provide feedback on every element of a teaching session. Most importantly, **feedback should always be about teaching** and not about the content of the session (Gosling 2000).

5. Post-observation follow-up

The post-observation meeting should take place as soon as possible and ideally immediately after the observation.

The role of the observer is to promote reflection from the observed on their practice. This is best achieved by encouraging dialogue. This is the most crucial aspect of peer observation of teaching: **only reflection and feedback lead to sustained improved teaching** (Siddiqui 2007). The importance of carefully agreeing the areas for feedback and the approach to observation prior to the observation taking place, therefore, is key to supporting the post-observation feedback.

The observer should begin the follow-up meeting by encouraging the observed tutor to reflect on their experience of the session. Once the observed has reflected on their experience, the observer should offer the positive points first and always end on a positive note.

The observer should not lead on advising any future action: the discussion and reflection will support the observed tutor in being able to identify their own action points. The observer can support the observed in how to address the action points that they have identified and can offer suggestions to achieve change.

The initial focus at the post-observation meeting must be all about the observed, as described. Only when action points have been identified and discussed can the focus of the conversation broaden.

The observer can now reflect on their own experience of the observation and what they can learn for their own teaching and learning practice. They should also reflect on their own provision of feedback and constructive criticism and their development as an observer (Siddiqui 2007). Making this part of the process ensures that a true shared approach is taken and ensures that the giving and receiving of feedback is less stressful (Fullerton 2003).

Depending on the development issues that may be identified as part of the observation it may be beneficial for both parties to arrange a future follow-up, either to just review the actions identified or to carry out a second observation where development actions can be tried by the observed tutor with the support of the original observer. It may be necessary to seek advice and support from other staff; the observed person should lead on this and seek the advice they feel is appropriate to support meeting their action points. Staff responsible for teaching and learning in schools or senior leaders responsible for teaching and learning in your college could be approached for support.

The detail of the observation, pre-observation meeting, the observation itself and the post-observation follow-up meeting is confidential to both parties. The peer observation of teaching is most successful when built upon a strong relationship of trust and honesty (Shortland 2007).

6. Making a record of the observation

Usually, the record of the observation will be done using the pro-forma (see Appendix 1: Observation of Teaching Pro-Forma). The observed individual then reflects on the observation process as a whole and reports the outcomes using the PRE. This documentation, recording generalised outcomes, is then shared with school/institute/area PRE lead.

The observed and observer, in some circumstances, may find it helpful to record the session using audio or video recordings.

For example, this can help both parties to review and reflect on:

- class-based practice.
- teaching and interactivity in labs, simulations, workshops and other teaching situations in which the role of the observed is to facilitate learner activity.
- teaching in virtual learning environments (where videos are made using screencast software).
- where teaching cannot be observed in person for logistical reasons.

The use of video and audio for capturing a live observation for later review requires the agreement of both parties, and any students or other participants involved. This can be done

using a release form (<http://lcdatastore.shu.ac.uk/ReleaseForm2012.pdf>). Such recordings should be managed by the observed and will not normally be used beyond the peer observation activity. Students will also need to be informed in advance to give them a chance to raise any objections. It can be appropriate to record (e.g. by screencasting) observations of online interaction, but again the permissions of all those involved should be sought.

The observation and its written, video or audio recording is always confidential between the observed and observer unless the observed wishes to share it and has the explicit permission of those involved to use the recording more widely.

The observed staff member can use the record and their reflection of the observation to inform their appraisal and development needs.

What to Observe

Taken from Fullerton (2003 p229).

The features to be observed will vary according to the type of session and for the discipline concerned. For a typical lecture session, observers will note:

- the appropriateness and achievement of objectives/learning outcomes.
- communication of objectives to learners and links to prior knowledge.
- structure of the session, e.g. an introduction, organisation into sections and a summary.
- delivery – including pace, audibility, visibility.
- communication with students – including signposting, interaction, questioning and activities.
- the engagement of students in the learning process.

For most types of small group teaching activities, such as tutorials and seminars, an observer might note the:

- relationship of the session to the articulated objectives/learning outcomes.
- interaction of students with the tutor and each other.
- facilitation skills of the tutor, including engaging students, managing the group activity, questioning, listening, responding, prompting of critical and analytical thinking.
- involvement of all members of the group.
- encouragement of students.
- use of the teaching space.
- quality of formative feedback to students.
- provision for summing up and consolidating what has been learnt.
- ways in which students are helped to become aware of their own learning.

Prompt questions for the observer to use depending on the type of feedback requested by the observer (taken from Gosling, 2000).

Introduction

- Were the objectives of the session made clear to the class?
- Were the anticipated learning outcomes for the session identified?
- Did the class begin on time?
- Was the structure of the session clear?

Planning and Organisation

- Did the tutor relate the session to previous sessions and set it in the overall context of the module?
- Did s/he set out the structure of the session at the start?
- Did the session appear to be well-planned and organised?

Methods/Approach

- Were the methods/approach taken suitable to achieve the learning objectives set?
- What other alternative approaches could have been taken?

Delivery and Pace:

- Did the pace and delivery seem appropriate for the students present?
- Were any aspects, in your view, dealt with too briefly/with too much elaboration?
- Did the session seem rushed/too drawn out?

Content

- Where you feel qualified to make comment, did the content seem accurate, up to date?
- Were examples given?
- Was the session pitched at the appropriate level for the students present?
- Did the content match the needs of the students?

Student Participation

- Were students invited to participate?
- How was participation managed?
- Did it appear to be carefully planned?
- Did participation enable the tutor to check the students' understanding of the material/approach?

Use of Learning Resources

- Were visual aids used?
- Were they professionally produced and free from error?
- Were they clearly produced and was the text in a suitable font size?
- Were other resources used, e.g. slides, video?
- Did the students get hand-outs?
- Were they well-produced?
- Did the resources contribute to the session or detract from it?

Use of Accommodation

- Was the accommodation suitable for the session?
- Were the seating arrangements appropriate?
- Did there appear to be any Health and Safety issues?

Overall style and ambience

- Did the tutor appear confident in delivery?
- Did s/he convey enthusiasm?
- Was s/he clear and audible?
- Did the session seem to "go well"?
- Was there good rapport with the students?
- Were students attentive/bored?

- Did they seem to "engage with the session"?
- Did the tutor have good presentation skills?
- Was there good eye contact with students?
- Did the tutor seem sensitive to the "mood" of the students?

Guidelines for giving and receiving feedback.

Adapted from Fullerton (2003 p232-233).

Giving feedback

- the observed should reflect first
- the observer should then begin with feedback on the positive aspects of the observation, start by talking about something that was really good to build confidence
- focus on the behaviour that can be changed and not the person by using specific examples
- focus feedback on the agreed outcomes from the pre-observation meeting
- only provide the amount of feedback that the observed can make use of at that time
- make constructive and make positive suggestions
- use questions to guide discussion and enable reflection by the observed
- the observer should finish on a positive from the session

Receiving feedback

- ensure that the type of feedback is agreed in advanced
- be ready to accept honest feedback and constructive criticism
- be ready to be self-reflective
- attempt to find solutions to address less effective practice
- ask for examples and ideas for other ways of doing things
- develop your own action plan from the feedback received

Prompt Questions

- How did you feel about that?
- What effect did you feel it had when you said that?
- How do you think you could have involved the students more in that?
- What were you trying to achieve at that particular point?
- How did you know that they achieved their objective?
- How can you address that?

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