**SEN10D019**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Title:** | **Review of Guidelines for the Peer Observation of Teaching** |
| Version: | Final |
| Circulation: | The Senate – 23 February 2011 |
| Agenda: | SEN10A003 |
| Status: | Open |

1. The Peer Observation of Teaching Review was established by the Learning and Teaching Committee at its meeting on 30 June 2010 (Minute 121 refers).

2. The current guidelines for peer observation of teaching https://www.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.21659!guidelines_peer_observation_of_teaching.pdf have been in operation circa 2001, following a review by Ruth Goodall, the then Head of the Centre for Staff and Educational Development. As these are guidelines only, peer observation of teaching is not currently a mandatory requirement on Schools and it is consequently a matter for individual Heads of School to determine whether such observation should take place.

3. At our institutional audit by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in April, 2009, the auditors recommended that it would be desirable for the University to reappraise its current approach to peer observation of teaching, to establish consistent practice across the University. Below are extracts from the Institutional Audit Report on UEA April 2009.

'Recommendations for action:

The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. It would be **desirable** for the University to: reappraise the current approach to peer observation of teaching, to establish consistent practice across the University.'

Extract from body of report regarding teaching:

*'58 Peer review of teaching is part of the MA in Higher Education Practice modules taken by probationary staff. Guidelines for peer review are available online. It was evident that peer review of more established staff occurred in some schools but not in others. The audit team confirmed that whether peer review of all teaching staff took place was 'at the discretion of the Head of School'. Student evaluation of modules in annual monitoring was cited as a way in addition to, or instead of, formal peer review, by which the school directors could identify any training needs. The variability in practice has the potential to disadvantage some staff and for poor teaching to continue undetected and not redressed. It is therefore desirable that the University reappraise the current approach to peer observation of teaching, to establish consistent practice across the University.'*

4. In the light of the above and the increasing focus on the student experience of teaching, the Learning and Teaching Committee resolved that a review group should be established during 2010-11 to report back to LTC with its recommendations.

The terms of reference and memberships of the Review Group and of its Advisory Group are attached as Appendix A.

5. The Review Group was chaired by Professor David Evans, (MTH) and held three meetings (on 27 October2010, 1 December 2010, and 11 January 2011). In order to assist with its consideration of

peer observation of teaching the Group obtained information from Schools about current practice, and also consulted colleagues in a number of other institutions about their approach to peer observation of teaching. The Review Group also contacted members of the Advisory Group to ask for advice on a range of questions, including:

* whether peer observation of teaching should become mandatory;
* whether it should be purely formative;
* the frequency with which it should happen;
* the use that the Promotions Committees might want to make of peer observation of teaching;
* whether peer observation might be linked with staff appraisal.

Responses were taken into account when drafting the new Code of Practice (see Section 7 below).

6. Following the consultation and discussion process, the main recommendations of the Review Group accepted by the Learning and Teaching Committee are that:

* peer observation of teaching should become mandatory at UEA;
* the Guidelines should therefore become a Code of Practice;
* peer observation should remain formative;
* peer observation should take place a minimum of once every two years following completion
of any required period of probation;
* staff to whom the Code of Practice should apply should include: ATR and ATS staff (level 2 and above); PBL tutors; Associate tutors (at the discretion of the Head of School; staff seconded to the University, and whose role entails teaching. In addition, where an honorary postholder delivers an entire module, the Head of School concerned should normally make the teaching of that module subject to the Code of Practice;

* the focus should be on improvement and enhancement at an individual and also at a wider Level;

* there should be oral and written feedback following an observation which should be signed by observer and the member of staff observed;

* written feedback should preferably be made via one of four standard and increasingly structured forms;

* School Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality should 'sign-off' the forms with particular focus on development;

* dissemination and sharing of practice between Schools and Faculties should be regarded as an important activity (eg at learning and teaching days, School strategy/planning days);

* Faculty Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee should have an item on peer observation of teaching at least once per annum.

7. The Learning and Teaching Committee commends the new Code of Practice (attached as Appendix B) to Senate, for implementation with effect from 2011-12. Plans for implementation are under way.

**Review Group Terms of Reference**

1 To consider the effectiveness of the implementation and operation of the current guidelines in the light of the recommendation contained in the Institutional Audit Report by the Quality Assurance Agency of April, 2009.

2 To review the current guidelines for the peer observation of teaching having regard to the recommendation contained in the Institutional Audit Report , other relevant internal and external factors and the outcome of the consideration in 1 above.

3 On a regular basis, to take advice from and consult the advisory group (see below).

4 To consult more widely within and without the University as considered appropriate.

5 To make recommendations to the Learning and Teaching Committee on the future approach to peer observation of teaching including on the status of the guidelines (whether this should change from guidelines to policy); the content and the approach to implementation.

**Review Group Membership**

**Chair:** Professor David Evans (MTH)
**Members:** Dr Nalini Boodhoo (EDU)
Dr Richard Bowater (BIO)
Dr Sandra Gibson (MED)
Ms Rachel Handforth (Academic Officer, UUEAS)
Professor Sam Leinster (MED)
Mr Paul Levy (CSED)
Dr Nick Selby (AMS)
**Secretary:** Alison Rhodes (initially) (LTQO)
Julia Jones (LTQO)

**Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group to the Review Group**

1 To give advice to, to make suggestions about and to comment on proposals put forward by the Review Group of the Review of Peer Observation of Teaching.

2 To be consulted on a regular basis by the Review Group.

**Advisory Group Membership**

Dr Richard Harvey (Director of Admissions, Dean UEA London)
Ms Cecile Piper (Director of HR)
Ms Alison Rhodes (Head of LTQO)
Mr Richard Brawn (HE Academy Senior Adviser)
(Director of Taught Programmes;
MA HEP course team member; two mentors and two students).

**Learning and Teaching Committee**

**PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING   -   CODE OF PRACTICE**

**Introduction**

This Code of Practice sets out the procedure for peer observation of teaching, which is mandatory with effect from academic year 2011-12. It is intended for Schools, Heads of School, Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality and staff in roles which involve teaching.  Schools are free to determine the frequency and details of their own peer observation of teaching schemes, subject to the minimum requirements of this Code of Practice.

This Code of Practice applies to the following categories of staff:
- ATR
- ATS (level 2 and above)
- PBL tutors
- Associate tutors (at the discretion of the Head of School)
- Staff seconded to the University, and whose role entails teaching

In addition, where an honorary postholder delivers an entire module, the Head of School concerned should normally make the teaching of that module subject to this Code of Practice.

This Code of Practice does not apply to the following categories of staff:
- ATS level 1
- Honorary lecturers (except where an entire module is delivered by an individual honorary lecturer as outlined above)
- PG students

It is acknowledged that the categories of teaching staff listed above may not encompass every type of teaching status which may arise at UEA.  In the event that an individual in a teaching role does not reasonably fall into any of the listed categories then that individual and their line manager should reach mutual agreement on whether or not this Code of Practice applies to the individual concerned.

**The purpose and principles of peer observation**

Peer observation of teaching is a simple and very effective way to develop learning and teaching and improve and enhance students' learning experience.  There are good reasons for undertaking peer observation, in that it can be a source of new ideas as well as a means of affirming existing practice and learning from each other.  The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) also expects that a University that is appropriately managing academic standards and the quality of students' learning experiences will be undertaking some form of observation of teaching.  Those Schools / subject areas that can demonstrate that they have peer observation procedures in place are likely to be more able to

demonstrate to students, prospective students and other internal and external stakeholders that excellence in teaching is taken seriously and that there is equitable treatment of students in that observation of teaching procedures applies on an institutional basis.

Peer observation is one part of the process of evaluating learning and teaching. Other elements include student feedback, self-reflection, assessment via mechanisms such as the postgraduate taught programme in Higher Education Practice (HEP), which is a University requirement for all academic staff, and any requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).

It is important to be clear about the purposes of peer observation of teaching. It is **formative** – designed to develop and enhance the practice of both the observer and the observed, and its outcomes will not inform promotion procedures unless voluntarily used by the individual concerned, nor will they be used in relation to any disciplinary procedures.  However, issues may arise from peer observation which may require the intervention of the Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality and / or the Head of School.

The Head of School has ultimate responsibility for the peer observation process but in practice the School's Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality (or a designated nominee) may be the appropriate person to sign off on observations, decide what action may need to be taken in the light of the observation and in due course sign off again, confirming any action identified as necessary, had been taken. This includes action on areas for development which the peer observation process has identified as common to more than one individual.

**Characteristics and requirements of successful peer observation**

Many staff, under pressure in terms of time, student numbers and competing priorities, may not immediately be receptive to the benefits of peer observation. Teaching is often professionally isolated. It is seen as a personal activity and it is difficult to separate the person from the role. Even staff who team-teach may spend most of their time focussing on structure and content rather than process. Used constructively and imaginatively, however, there are benefits from peer observation, but to be really successful peer observation needs:

- to be part of a whole School / Sector commitment;

- senior staff who both support and participate in the process. The School Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality should keep an overview of the process;

- to be planned with an appropriate lead-in time. Planning for peer observation could be built into appraisal discussions if the appraisee so wishes;

- to have outcomes and a dissemination strategy (School / Sector / Faculty-wide meetings);

- to be regular – probationers must be peer-observed every year, moving to a **minimum** of once every two years after completion of the five-year probationary period;

- to be part of the University's wider strategy for developing learning and teaching as agreed by Senate and led by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

**All observation of learning and teaching should be based on the following principles:**

- that there are different ways of being an effective teacher;

- that teaching should be prepared with regard to the intended objectives / outcomes of a session, which itself should be prepared with regard to the intended objectives / outcomes of the module / course. In this respect, teaching is a planned activity;

- that teaching and learning styles should be capable of being explained and justified and be relevant to the session / module / course and to the intended objectives / outcomes;

- that a variety of teaching sessions should be observed over the course of an individual's career, ensuring different teaching formats are observed where applicable, eg for an individual teaching by a variety of lectures, seminars, lab work etc;

- that existing good practice should be recognised and encouraged as part of the process;

- that peer observation of learning and teaching should be 'light touch' and regarded as part of a process towards good teaching practice, which also involves evaluation by students, course review, etc;

- that it must take place regularly with respect to every teacher and should be 'signed off' by the School to the relevant Faculty, with an item on peer observation of teaching being included on each Faculty LTQC agenda once a year;
- that there should be evidence of wider inter-School / inter-Faculty dissemination for example at University Learning and Teaching days.

In this context peer observation is intended to:

o    provide information from an appropriate colleague (any ATR or ATS member of faculty is eligible to act as an observer) on **selected** aspects of teaching quality;

o    encourage discussion between colleagues in order to support the planning and implementation of enhancements in practice.

**Stages of the process**

**Step One**
- The staff member concerned agrees, in consultation with their Head of School / Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality / designated delegate, an appropriate colleague to be their peer observer. The observer could be a colleague from outside the staff member's subject area, School or even Faculty. The observer will usually be of similar role/ seniority to the staff member concerned.

- At this point, both the staff member and the peer observer should have access to (may be electronically) and read this Code of Practice so that they can follow the procedure.

- The staff member and peer observer should also agree on the format the written feedback will take. A variety of forms is appended (Appendix C) and Schools are strongly encouraged to use one or more of these.

- The staff member discusses with the observer which aspects of their teaching or their students' learning they would like to focus on and would particularly like to receive feedback on.

- The staff member and peer observer agree which session is to be observed (lecture, seminar, workshop, laboratory practical, research supervision). One session per cycle should be observed, with a variety of sessions being included over time.

**Step Two**
- The period of observation should be approximately one hour on each occasion.

- The staff member and observer agree where the observer will sit during the session.

- At the session, the staff member should explain the presence of the observer to students.

### Step Three

- Feedback will take the form of a discussion between observer and staff member immediately after the observed session, followed by the observer's written feedback on the chosen form.

- All feedback should be completed as quickly as possible, with written feedback being completed and delivered preferably within the week.

- Comments on the feedback form should focus on 'points of good practice' and 'areas for development' rather than 'strengths and weaknesses'.

- Written feedback should be confidential to the observer, the staff member and his / her line manager.  It must not form part of any performance review or disciplinary procedure.

- The completed form is read and signed by both the staff member and the observer.

- The form is then sent to the staff member's Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality, who reads the completed form, enters their own comments and proposals for development for the staff member if applicable, and signs and dates the form.
- The original form is then held in the School with a copy sent to the staff member.

- It is intended that only two copies of the form be retained – one by the School and one by the staff member.

**The observed session**

The staff member and the peer observer should have a number of aspects and questions in mind when discussing and designing the process of observation and deciding what is to be the focus of the feedback. These could include:

**· Planning the session***:*

   How does the plan relate to previous sessions?
   Are there clear aims and objectives?
   What are the intended learning outcomes?
   How does the session fit in with the overall programme for the module / course?
   Are resources (IT, handouts, tasks) available at the appropriate points?

**· Introducing the session to the students:**

   Are the intended learning objectives clear?
   Is it clear to the students how this session fits with previous work?
   Does the introduction set the scene?
   Is there a clear overview for the session?

**· Delivering and developing the plans:**

   Is the communication of ideas relevant, clear and coherent?
   Is there an opportunity for students to clarify their understanding?

How is this handled?

**· What strategies are used to gain attention, to refocus at intervals and to ensure attention is maintained?**

Are the students engaged and motivated?
Are the teaching methods appropriate to the tasks in hand?
Are there opportunities for the students to solve problems, think, question and feed back?
What modes of delivery are used? Is more than one mode used?

**· Concluding the session**

Is the session drawn to a satisfactory conclusion (or an on-going series of conclusions)?
Is there a summary of the main ideas or a review of the point reached so far?
Does the staff member attempt to evaluate whether the intended learning outcomes have been met?
Does the conclusion look forward to the next session?

**· The observer's perspective**

What relevance did the experience have for the observer's own practice?
What might he/she do differently?

**· Environment**

What impact did the environment (size of room, numbers of students, heat, light, and time of day) have on the teacher and the observer and the students?

**Giving feedback**

Some points to bear in mind when giving feedback:

- It is generally expected that oral feedback / discussion will take place immediately after the observed session:

- the person observed should give their own evaluation first;

- when giving feedback, begin by focusing on the positive;

- Any critical comments should be constructive, clear and specific rather
- than general;

- focus should be on the learning and teaching issues raised, not on the person;

- feedback may include suggestions but should not include advice;

- remember there are lots of ways of being a good teacher;

**Dissemination**

If Schools are to make the most of peer observation they need to:

- ensure that good practice is shared through regular meetings or other fora within and across Schools and Faculties, for example at a staff development, School planning/strategy event or Learning and Teaching Day;

- discuss more general learning outcomes to aid the improvement and enhancement of students' experience of learning and teaching and the expertise of the staff member;

- identify and remedy common shortcomings, ensuring that action on commonly occurring areas for development is taken at group level, as well as at individual level;

- contribute to an item on peer observation of teaching being included on each Faculty LTQC agenda once per academic year;

**Dissemination should be a key part of the peer observation process.**

*Review Group on the peer observation of teaching*
*Date of issue: 11/01/2011*
*Approved by the Learning and Teaching Committee on:*