An Overview of Peer Observation of Teaching in Wales

September 2023

Contents

Introduction

As part of the 2022-23 Grant letter, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) commissioned the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to undertake an enhancement project examining current practice in peer observation of teaching in Wales. This project was to include publication of a report covering practice in the regulated and funded providers and how this compares to practice across the UK, together with a webinar to disseminate the project outcomes.

A questionnaire was distributed to all 11 relevant providers, which consisted of nine HEIs and two FEIs and responses were received from all. Respondents were individuals with responsibility for teaching and learning/academic development at a senior level within the providers. Providers were then asked to participate in a short semi-structured interview, to discuss their peer observation scheme in more detail. Nine responded and 30-minute interviews were held with these nine providers, namely eight HEIs and one FEI. In some instances, scheme handbooks were available in the public domain.

Desk-based research was undertaken in relation to practice across other parts of the UK, and processes in 25 HEIs - varying in size, structure and type - were surveyed. The selection was random, and research focused on handbooks and other resources from these providers, available in the public domain.

An oral presentation on progress in relation to the project was given to the Wales Quality Network on 7 March 2023, and a webinar to disseminate the key findings on 27 June 2023. Three providers gave presentations on aspects of their schemes as part of the webinar.

Analysis of survey results

The sub-sections below are linked to the survey questions and include some reflections from the interviews. Reference to practice across the UK is also considered under the individual headings.

Provider involvement in peer observation

Seven of the regulated and funded providers in Wales stated that they had a peer observation scheme (henceforth, 'scheme' within the main text). The remaining four chose 'other' as their response and provided further detail.

Does your institution have a peer observation process/scheme?

Yes 7 (63.6%)
No 0
Other 4 (36.4%)
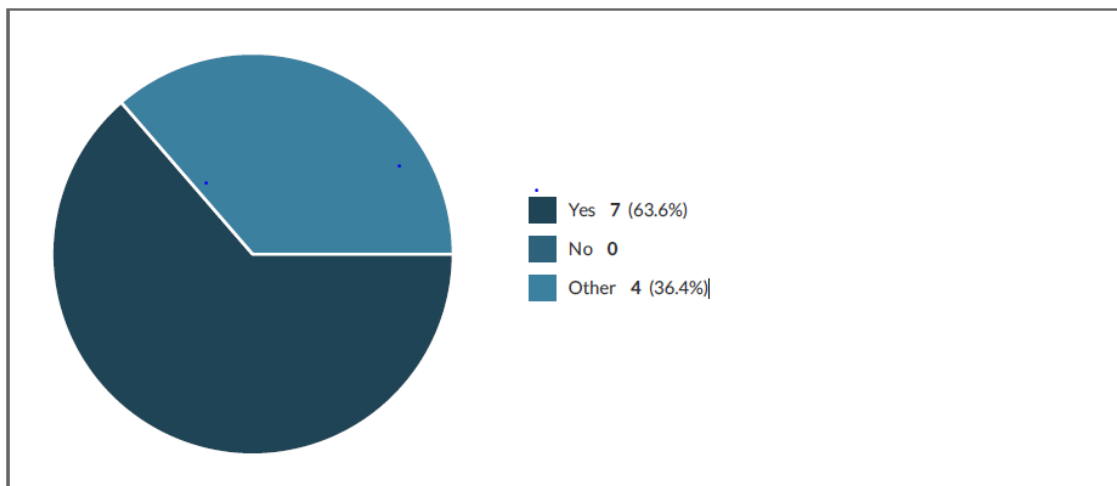
Two of the four responding 'other' noted that their schemes were currently under review. One of these stated that they are in the process of piloting various activities, whilst the other noted that the introduction of a new learning and teaching strategy, and its clear focus on excellence in teaching, is helping support a thorough scheme review. Another noted under 'other' that their scheme includes, but is not restricted to, peer observation of teaching. The fourth provider responding 'other' noted that in response to COVID-19 they had moved to peer discussion, which could be supported by peer observation if agreed between both parties. Staff see peer discussion as more constructive than peer observation, and it has been continued as a result.

All regulated and funded providers in Wales therefore either have a peer observation of teaching scheme, which may include one or more options, or are in the process of revising an existing scheme. Several stated in conversation that the pandemic and the subsequent move to online learning had led them to reflect on their scheme and broaden its scope.
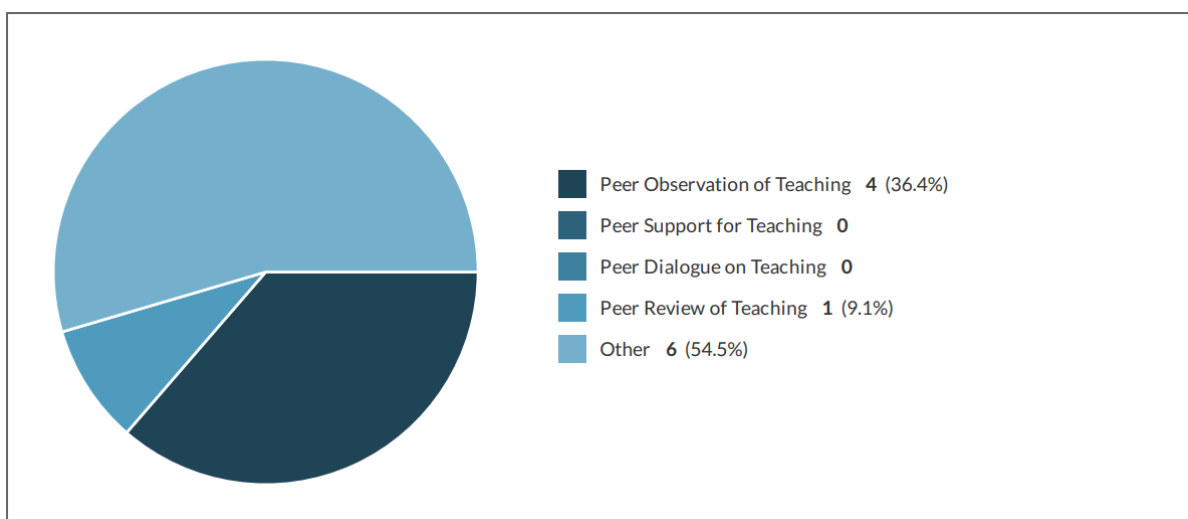
The desk-top research on practice in the UK more generally indicates that peer observation is also commonplace in providers in the other nations of the UK.

Name and administrative home of peer observation scheme

A range of names are used by providers in Wales for their schemes, with four of those surveyed choosing 'peer observation of teaching'. The others primarily include terms such as 'peer support' or 'peer reflection' in their scheme title. Several such terms are often used interchangeably in conversation, however for the purposes of this report, peer observation is the term used in line with the project brief.

Some providers in the interviews noted how the name of the process was a key factor in establishing the correct ethos and cultural mindset. Observation was seen by some to have negative, performance-related undertones and therefore when reviewing a scheme, wide-spread consultation regarding an appropriate name was considered a key factor in establishing staff ownership and ensuring engagement by all. All those interviewed stressed the developmental, non-judgemental, and confidential nature of their schemes.

What is your process called?

Pie chart legend:
- Peer Observation of Teaching   4 (36.4%)
- Peer Support for Teaching   0
- Peer Dialogue on Teaching   0
- Peer Review of Teaching   1 (9.1%)
- Other   6 (54.5%)

As indicated below, four providers noted that their schemes were devised by, and run from, a central unit, primarily a teaching and learning centre or similar. In some cases, responsibility is shared, in that directors of learning and teaching or associate deans lead on operational elements of the scheme in their respective faculties. Two providers noted on their questionnaire responses that individual faculties are solely responsible for ensuring a peer observation process occurs, and another included this under 'other'. In the case of all three providers, it is the responsibility of the individual faculties to decide how they wish to operate their institutional schemes, although there is an expectation that all staff are observed annually. In another provider, responsibility for ensuring a peer observation scheme is undertaken sits in individual schools. Those with schemes currently under review are looking to house their schemes centrally.

***Who has overall responsibility for the process?***
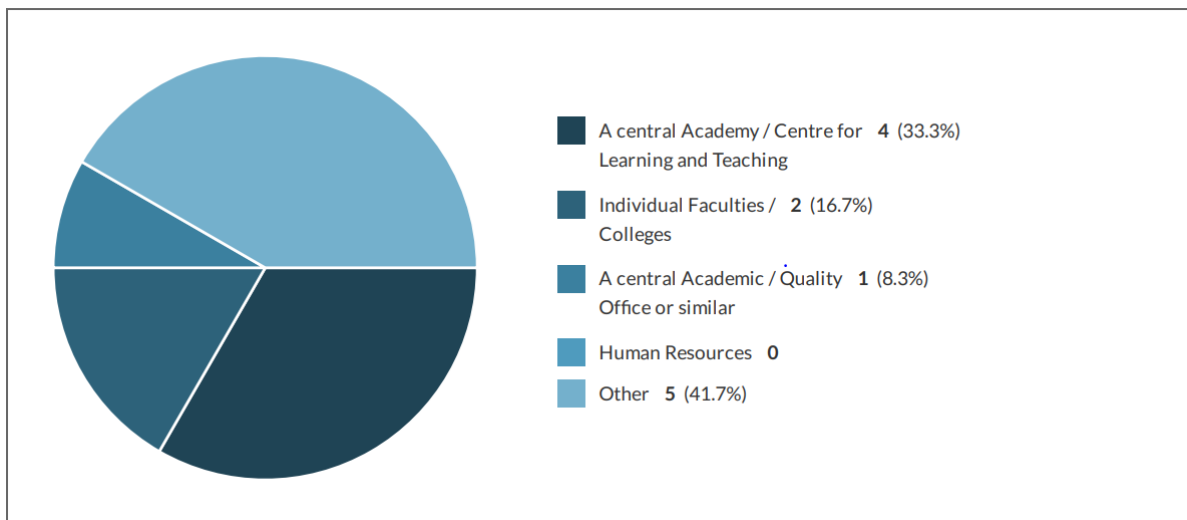
The variation found in the name and home of the scheme in Wales is similar to that across the UK. Across the UK, there is a growing focus on a collaborative, peer-driven model, and an increased use of words such as support, reflection and enhancement being included in the scheme title. Similarly, a central unit, such as an institute for academic development or a learning and teaching academy, frequently administers key aspects of the scheme and is responsible for training and general guidance. Under such a system, faculties or similar generally focus on the day-to-day operational elements of the scheme, reporting back to the central unit on completions through a staff member with designated responsibility for peer observation.

Benefits of a peer observation of teaching scheme

Providers in Wales were asked about the benefits of the scheme and to rate six statements from 1- 6 with 1 being the most important. Seven providers, namely 63.7% of respondents, placed the statement, 'peer observation is non-judgemental and encourages collegiality, networking and reflective debate', in their top three. Seven providers also included that it enhances teaching practice and improves the quality of the student experience in their top three.

Similar sentiments were expressed under 'other comments', with one provider stating it 'encourages collaborative and meaningful interdisciplinary relationships and practice, including across faculties.' Another provider stressed peer observation is important in supporting a culture that values teaching and learning and supports schools to make enhancements in areas of strategic importance.

***Peer observation is non-judgemental and encourages collegiality, networking and reflective debate.***

Legend:
- 1 5 (45.5%)
- 2 1 (9.1%)
- 3 1 (9.1%)
- 4 2 (18.2%)
- 5 0
- 6 2 (18.2%)
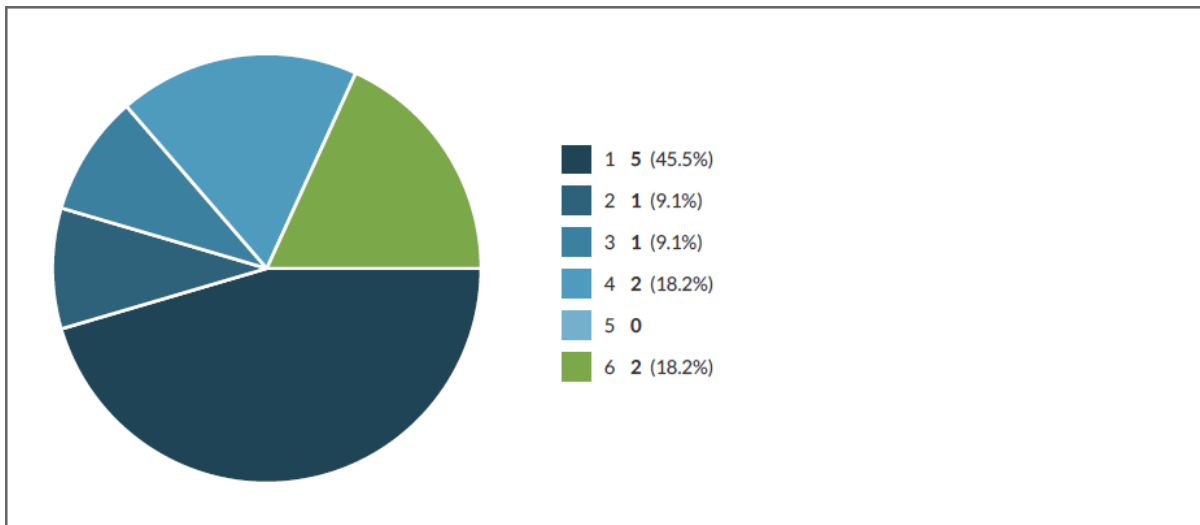
Peer observation enhances teaching practice and improves the quality of the student experience.

Legend:
- 1 3 (27.3%)
- 2 2 (18.2%)
- 3 2 (18.2%)
- 4 1 (9.1%)
- 5 1 (9.1%)
- 6 2 (18.2%)
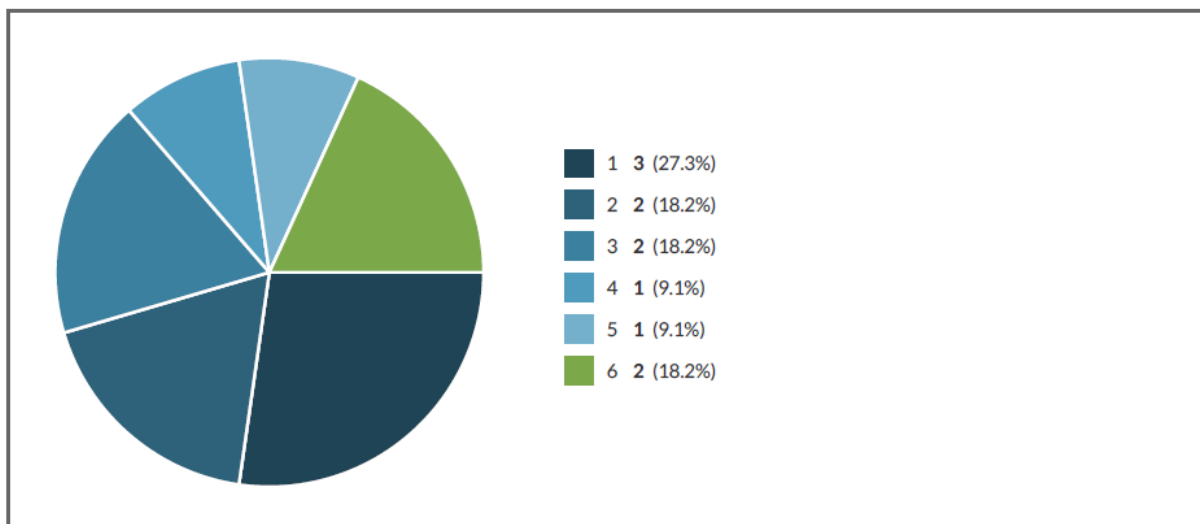
Six providers, namely 54.6% of questionnaire respondents ranked the fact that peer observation helps raise confidence and the development of practice in their top three, whilst 54.6% of providers also saw its role as a means of identifying best practice an important scheme benefit.

The contribution of peer observation to strengthening institutional awareness of training and support needs, thereby informing departmental and central staff offers, was also noted by one provider as an additional benefit of such a scheme. During the interviews, providers further stressed the increased self-efficacy a peer observation of teaching scheme can enable, which can lead to wider institutional improvements. In discussion, all emphasised the mutual benefits of a peer observation of teaching scheme, with the observer benefitting as much as the observee.

Peer observation supports confidence raising and the development of practice for all parties.

1 4 (36.4%)
2 1 (9.1%)
3 1 (9.1%)
4 0
5 2 (18.2%)
6 3 (27.3%)
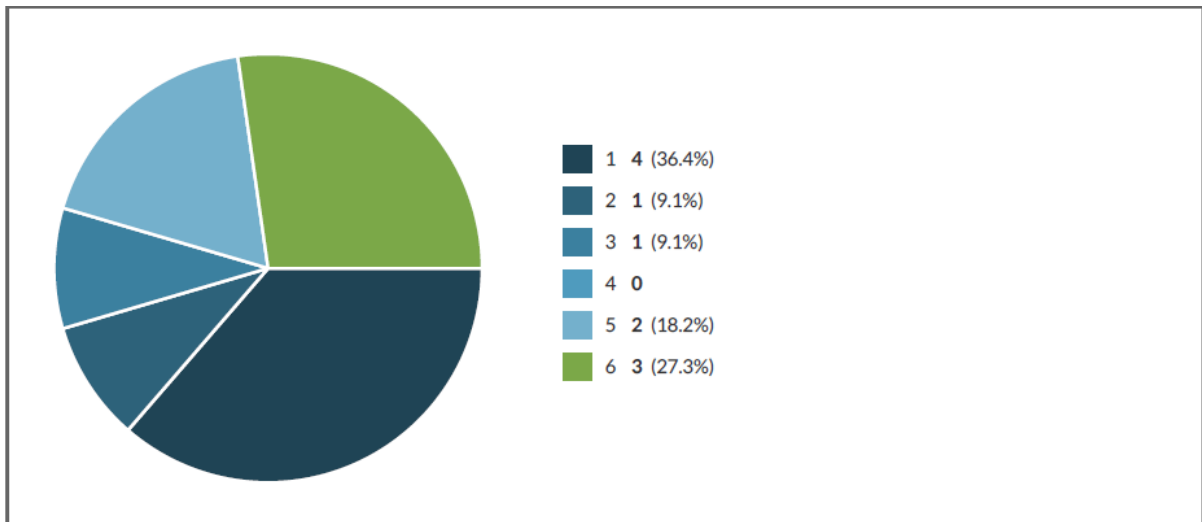
Peer observation identifies best practice for wider dissemination.

1 2 (18.2%)
2 3 (27.3%)
3 1 (9.1%)
4 0
5 1 (9.1%)
6 4 (36.4%)
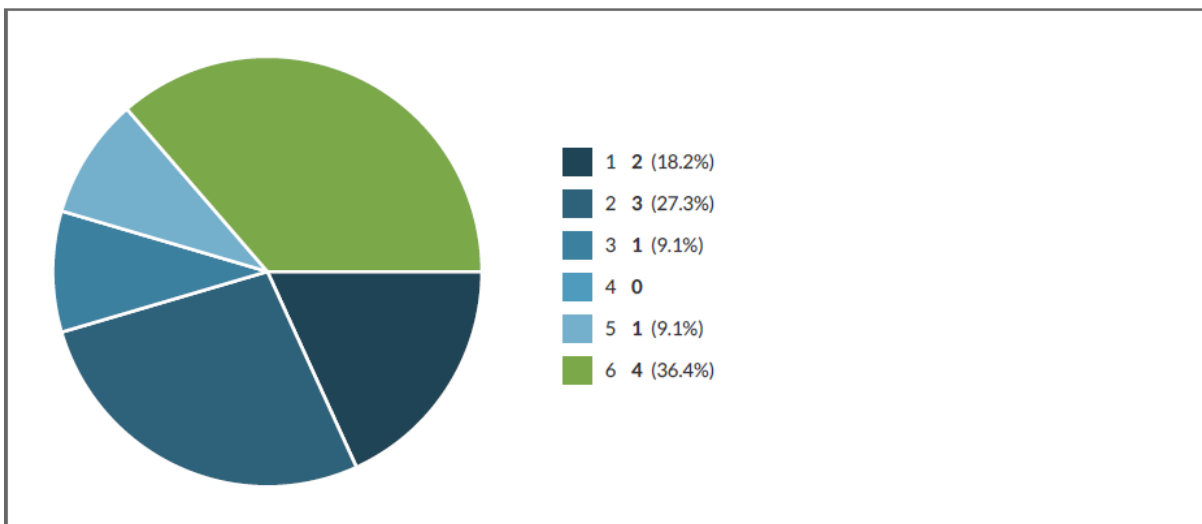
Five providers, namely 44.5% of questionnaire respondents ranked 'raises awareness of different approaches to teaching', and 'helps support personal and professional development', as one of the top three benefits of a peer observation scheme. Providers see peer observation as a formative process, supporting staff to identify how they may progress their careers. Several providers suggested that peer observation could be used as an opportunity to discuss an application for Advance HE Fellowship/Associate Fellowship. It was also suggested that participation as an observer could be a valuable evidence source of mentoring experience for those applying for Senior Fellowship.

Peer observation raises awareness of different approaches to teaching and learning.
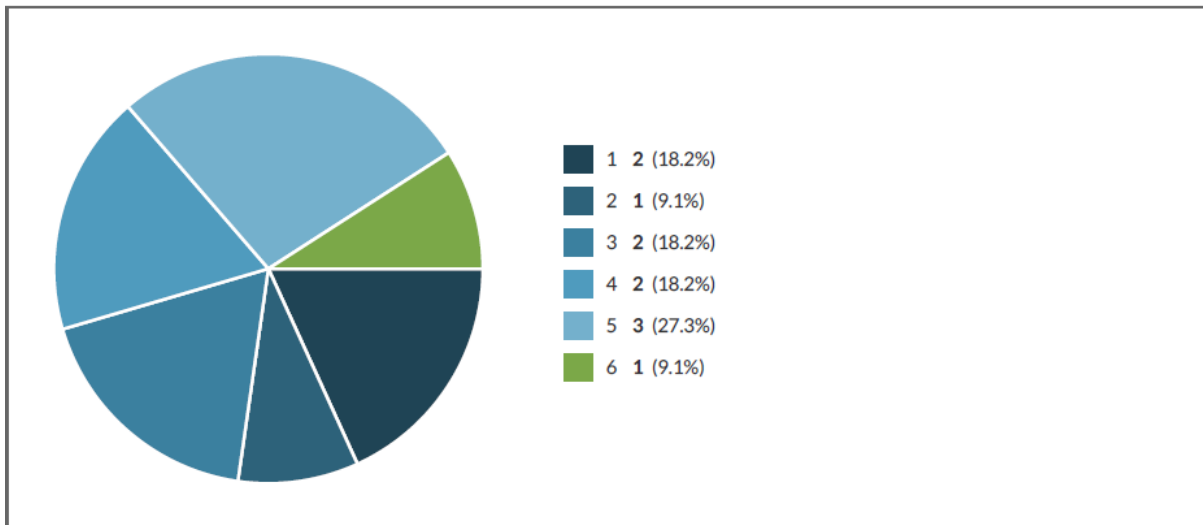
1 **2** (18.2%)
2 **1** (9.1%)
3 **2** (18.2%)
4 **2** (18.2%)
5 **3** (27.3%)
6 **1** (9.1%)

Peer observation helps support personal and professional development.

1 **4** (36.4%)
2 **1** (9.1%)
3 **0**
4 **1** (9.1%)
5 **1** (9.1%)
6 **4** (36.4%)
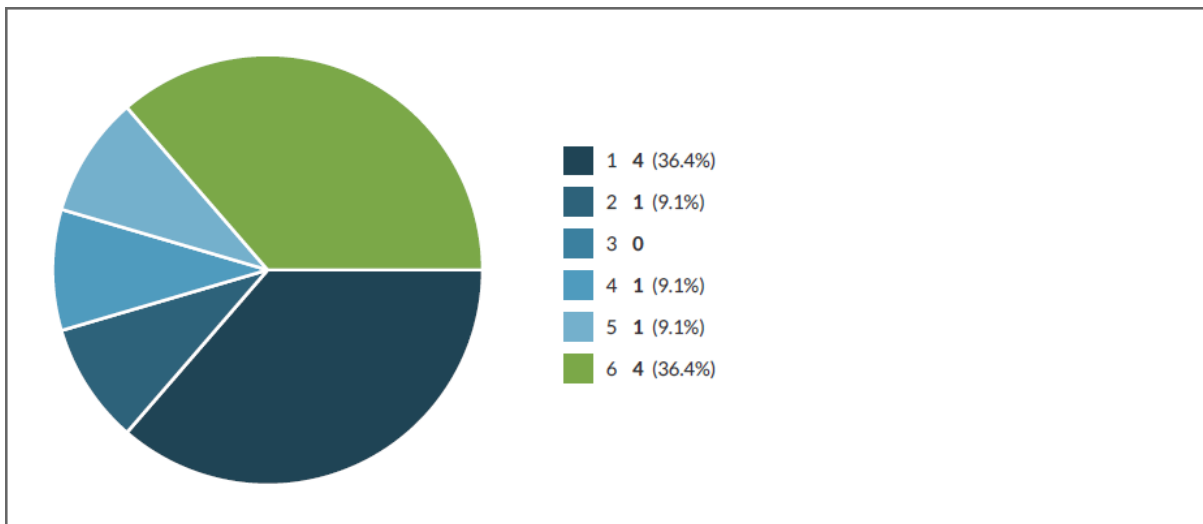
All graphs above show a wide range of responses, for example, four providers ranked 'peer observation helps support personal and professional development' as the most important benefits of a peer observation scheme, whilst four providers also ranked it as the sixth most important benefit.

A similar range of sentiments to those in this survey, are expressed in the handbooks of providers across the UK. Handbooks in general however, focus on the ability of the process to enable personal reflection and exploration of practice in a non-threatening environment through discussion with a colleague. Peer observation is not part of a performance management process in any of the providers considered across the UK, but rather is considered a means of enhancing teaching and the quality of the student learning experience. In line with the confidential nature of such schemes, there does not appear to be an expectation that faculties or schools report in detail on outcomes as such, but document either centrally or at faculty level whether the process has occurred.
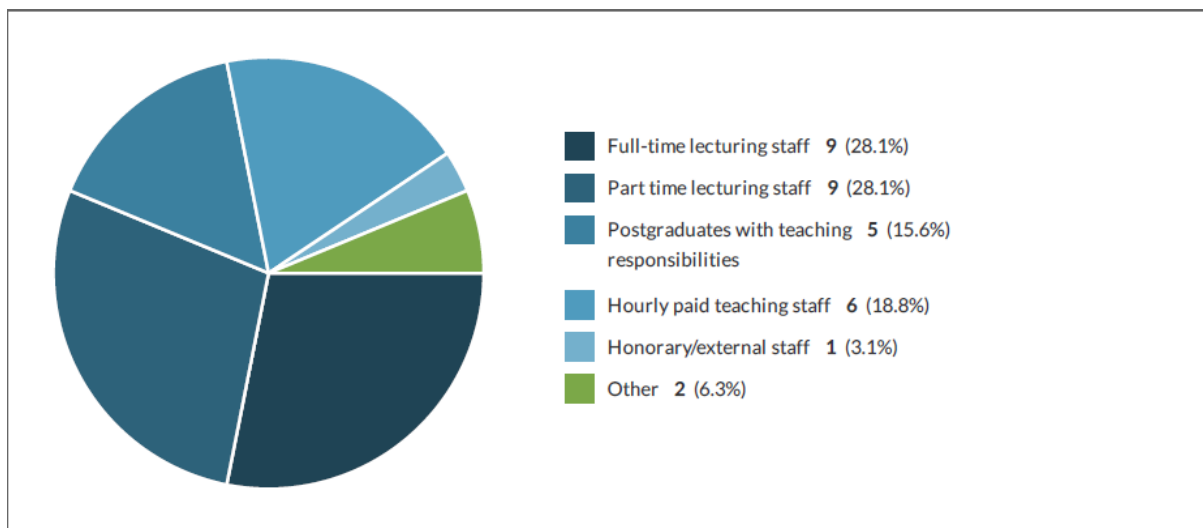
Staff resources created by many providers outside of Wales highlight the benefits to all participants which, along with the development and advancement of good teaching, may include opportunities for the expansion of their professional network and new collaborations.

Many providers outside of Wales, like those in Wales, also specifically reference how their peer observation processes can be used as evidence in Advance HE Fellowship applications or in promotion claims. A minority of providers outside of Wales benchmark their scheme to the UKPSF.

Participants in peer observation of teaching

Nine providers in Wales stated in their responses that there is an expectation that all full-time and part-time staff who have teaching responsibilities undertake peer observations as observer and observee every year. Library staff and others who support teaching and learning are also offered the opportunity in a small number of providers, whilst two providers stated that they were considering the inclusion of professional staff and hourly paid staff, although it was noted by one provider that the inclusion of hourly paid staff could raise resource implications which would need to be considered. Hourly paid staff are currently observed in six providers.

Is the process mandatory for certain categories of staff? Tick all applicable boxes below.

Full-time lecturing staff 9 (28.1%)

Part time lecturing staff 9 (28.1%)

Postgraduates with teaching 5 (15.6%) responsibilities

Hourly paid teaching staff 6 (18.8%)

Honorary/external staff 1 (3.1%)

Other 2 (6.3%)

Five providers in Wales noted that postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities are observed, although, in several instances, their observations are undertaken through a doctoral college or similar, as their training needs are generally slightly different. Regular peer observation is a key element of Advance HE accredited programmes in teaching and learning, and several providers during interview stated that they had research students undertaking such an accredited programme. A minority of providers include honorary staff or external staff or similar in their peer observation of teaching scheme.

One HEI noted that the staff that will be included in their new scheme is under consideration at present. Another HEI stated that involvement in their scheme will not be mandatory moving forward, but they are looking at participation by a wide range of individuals involved in the enhancement of the student experience through offering several collaborative, discursive options. Another provider in interview noted that collaborative partners are also involved in their scheme.

In terms of participants, the pattern is similar across the UK providers considered as part of the desk-based exercise. The focus in general is on any staff that support the student learning experience. All note the expectation that full-time and part-time/fractional staff undertake some form of peer observation. A minority of providers expand on their

expectations in their documentation, noting for example that demonstrators, technicians and library and support staff should be included, whilst others indicate that hourly paid staff and postgraduates are encouraged to be part of the scheme. Certain providers state clearly that they are looking for 100% engagement with their peer observation scheme. One provider outside of Wales specifically refers to the fact that new members of teaching staff, including part-time staff, should be peer observed during their first term of teaching, with experienced staff observing hourly paid lecturers. Similarly, one provider in Wales noted in interview that new staff without a teaching qualification are observed informally in the first instance in their first term. In a minority of providers, both within Wales and the wider UK, observers are volunteers. In the majority, however, there is an expectation that all staff undertake the role of observer as well as being observed.

How often does peer observation occur?

Six respondents noted that peer observation occurs annually amongst all eligible staff. Whilst, as noted under participants, there is variation amongst providers in relation to who is observed, several stressed in interview, that full time staff are observed every year.

How often does the process occur?
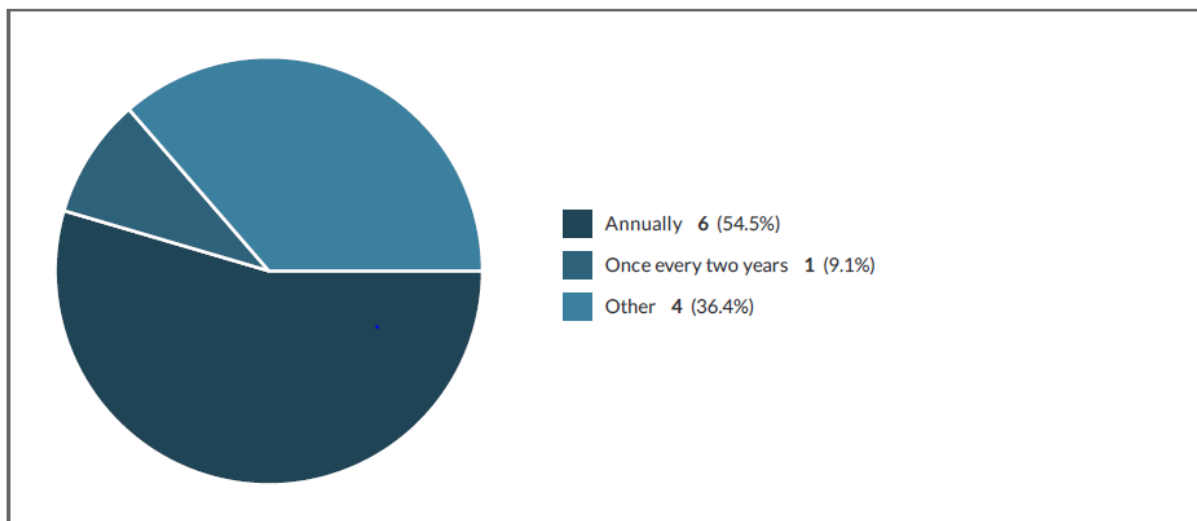
There is variation amongst the other providers in Wales, in one case all staff are observed twice within a year and another runs their scheme over a two-year period. Under 'other', another provider also stated that they run their scheme over two years. Staff in both providers on a two-year cycle are required to participate each year, with at least one of the observations in every two-year cycle being a taught activity. As noted previously, two HEIs are in the development phase in terms of the creation of a revised peer observation scheme. One of these providers intends to allow individual teams flexibility as to when they arrange observations as part of their practice development. The other provider is also looking at providing flexibility in terms of how regularly observations will occur, with staff profile an important consideration, rather than a standard timeline for all. This provider is of the view that consideration of roles in this way will make it a more meaningful activity. Similarly, one of the providers, who noted that peer observation occurs annually, stated that experienced staff are sometimes not observed as often as those with less experience.

The number of observations of staff members is also calculated according to need in a minority of the UK providers reviewed. Typically, however, providers run their schemes on an annual basis, although every two years is favoured by some providers. Sometimes there is flexibility within the process for faculties to run the scheme yearly or biennially, as they see fit. However, several handbooks emphasise that the process needs to be on-going, not a

'one-off' event. For example, to help ensure it does not become purely an administrative exercise, one provider outside of Wales notes in their resource material that observees will be invited to a focus group with other observees several months after the observation to discuss how the process has impacted upon their teaching and students' learning.

Aspects of teaching covered by peer observation

In light of the focus being very much on collaborative critical reflection, a wide range of 'professional dialogue' opportunities that encompass teaching in its broadest sense is offered by most providers in Wales. As well as those elements covered in the pie chart below, several providers noted, either under 'other' on the questionnaire, or during the interviews, that their scheme includes opportunities for a reflective discussion with colleagues on all activities related to the teaching and support of students. Examples include leadership of teaching and learning, such as chairing of teaching and learning-related committees, teaching and learning review meetings with external partners, design of teaching materials including virtual learning resources, and assessment design and feedback. Several providers suggested that a professional dialogue can be a good opportunity to discuss faculty or school strategic plans. One provider noted that embracing all aspects of practice has helped to break down silos and develop trust, whilst another stated they wished it to be a vehicle to capture all work being undertaken and not to be seen as an 'add-on.'

What teaching activity can be considered as part of your peer observation process? Please tick all relevant activity, whether it be face-to- face or online.

Legend:
- Lectures 8 (16.7%)
- Tutorials 9 (18.8%)
- Seminars 8 (16.7%)
- Fieldwork 5 (10.4%)
- Laboratory work 7 (14.6%)
- Postgraduate supervision 5 (10.4%)
- Other 6 (12.5%)
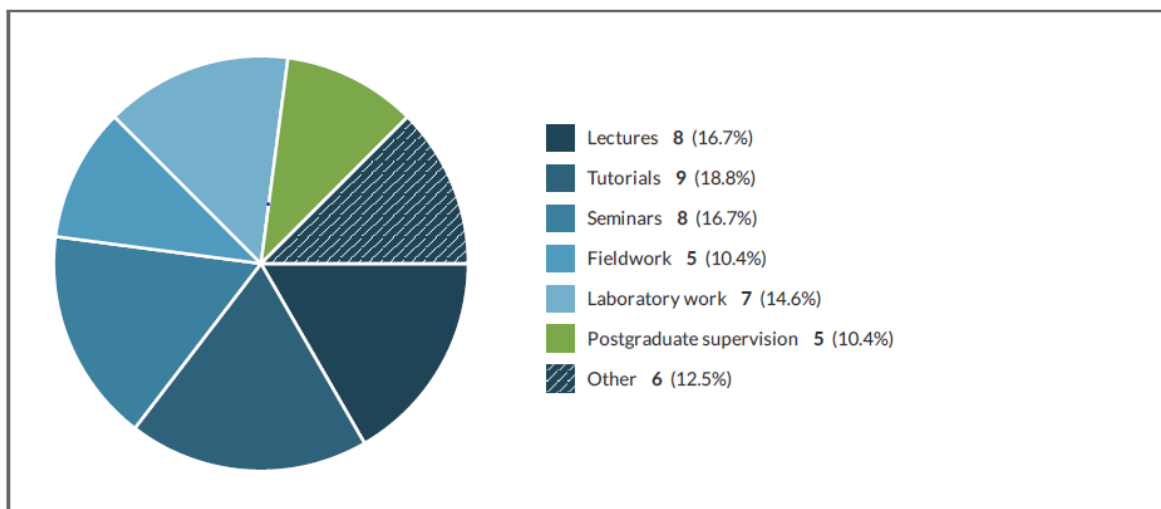
This increased focus on opportunities for observation and discussion outside of the traditional lecture or seminar mirrors thinking and practice across the UK more generally. Some UK providers state in their handbooks that teaching can include laboratory sessions or field trips, as well as PhD tutorials, whilst the majority also now include synchronous and asynchronous online teaching as an option. In their resources, schemes across Wales and the UK often stress that any form of educational activity that is facilitating learning is appropriate for consideration.

## Flexibility and format of peer observation schemes

How much flexibility faculties and those being observed have in terms of their institutional schemes varies from provider to provider in Wales as indicated by the bar charts below, where 1 indicates very limited flexibility and 5 indicates total flexibility. 10 respondents chose to answer this question in relation to their current practice.

Faculties or Schools

1	1 (10%)
2	3 (30%)
3	4 (40%)
4	0
5	2 (20%)

Observees

1	0
2	2 (20%)
3	5 (50%)
4	1 (10%)
5	2 (20%)
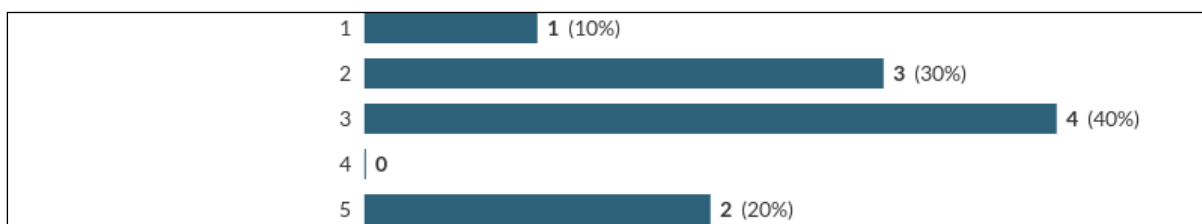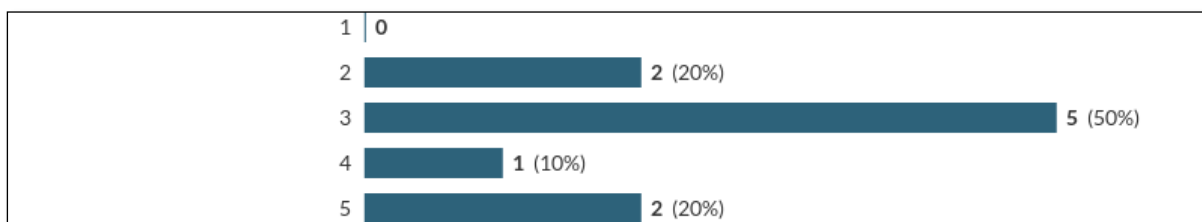
In part, this variation can be explained by the nature of the various schemes, and whether overall responsibility for a scheme sits centrally or with a faculty or school as discussed earlier. Where faculties or schools manage the scheme themselves, there may be no standard institutional processes to follow, but example templates and proformas are generally provided from a central unit, to support scheme development. Several providers commented on how enabling staff to choose an individual or individuals with whom to work helps create a culture of trust and a sense of agency, critical for a successful reflective experience. To help support ownership of teaching and learning by staff, as well as empowering them to consider their personal development more widely, one provider is looking to introduce a range of developmental options, varying in length, intensity, and focus, as part of their revised scheme.

Some regulated providers in Wales actively encourage disciplines to observe each other teaching, whilst others are considering enabling this possibility or undertaking pilot activities in this area. In addition to school-based reflective sharing processes that are mandatory, another provider is looking to offer opportunities to engage in cross-disciplinary reflective sharing through an opt-in institutional scheme from 2023-24. One provider stated that cross-disciplinary observations 'helped individuals get out of their comfort zone and focus on pedagogy, not their subject'. Another also noted that cross-campus observations were sometimes enabled.

Depending on the nature of the observation, the format will obviously vary. However, a traditional observation of teaching, whether it be face-to face or online, tends to include a pre-meeting to agree criteria and areas for observation, the observation itself (approximately one hour) and a post-observation discussion. One provider noted that the same process is used in their FE and HE provision, with many staff teaching across both. Several providers include documented lecturer self-reflection, prior to the initial joint meeting, as part of the format. Several providers noted that the emphasis of the joint meetings is on personal development and a collaborative approach to enhancing the student learning experience through conversation.

Most providers keep a record centrally of who has undertaken an observation, and some central units also record good practice. In other providers, records are kept at faculty level, whilst one provider noted the importance of ensuring that the individual being observed owns the process, and therefore there is deliberately no central monitoring or paperwork. Although

it is not a performance management tool, a minority of providers noted in the interviews that peer observation may be discussed in appraisals or personal development reviews, the focus being on discussing pedagogical practice in general and any training needs.

The variation found amongst providers in Wales is reflective of the wider UK picture. In many of the providers outside of Wales that were considered, those being observed can choose what is observed and by whom, with some specifically stating in their guidance that individuals should choose someone who is able to contribute to their growth as a lecturer. In a minority of providers, self-selection requires approval by a manager. Working in pairs or groups of three is popular both in Wales and across the UK, and staff are sometimes allocated to a particular pairing or grouping by a manager or a faculty lead for peer observation. A minority of UK providers offer the option for small groups of staff to work together on a faculty or school strategic enhancement theme.

Pairings in Wales and beyond are often reciprocal but do not always have to be. The observer in all instances is seen very much as a facilitator and supportive coach and many UK providers that have recently reviewed their schemes have, like in Wales, chosen to include a 'professional dialogue' option in addition to a more traditional peer observation. Many UK providers' resources stress the value of cross-disciplinary observation or dialogue, as a means of reflecting on how teaching and enhancement is undertaken in different subject areas. Some UK providers also suggest the inclusion of students in the process, for example, through focus groups. This is a mechanism that is used on occasions by some providers in Wales, such as when considering an underperforming programme, but in general students do not contribute widely to peer observation schemes across the UK currently. Audio and video recordings, together with the taking of photographs, are specifically referred to in some handbooks. One provider in Wales is considering including the optional use of video within their observation scheme.

Training and guidance for staff involved in peer observation

A range of training opportunities is offered to staff across all regulated and funded providers in Wales. As indicated below, four providers noted that formal training is provided, whilst another under 'other' differentiated between training for those undertaking observations and guidance for those undertaking peer discussion. A further two providers noted under 'other' that guidance is provided as opposed to formal training, whilst one noted that training and guidance were currently under review. One provider noted that formal training, as opposed to guidance, is not provided because the observations are not being used as part of a quality assurance process as such but are collaborative and developmental in nature and are built into a model of peer-led, organic practice development.

Is training provided centrally for those undertaking observations?

Yes 4 (36.4%)
No 3 (27.3%)
Other 4 (36.4%)
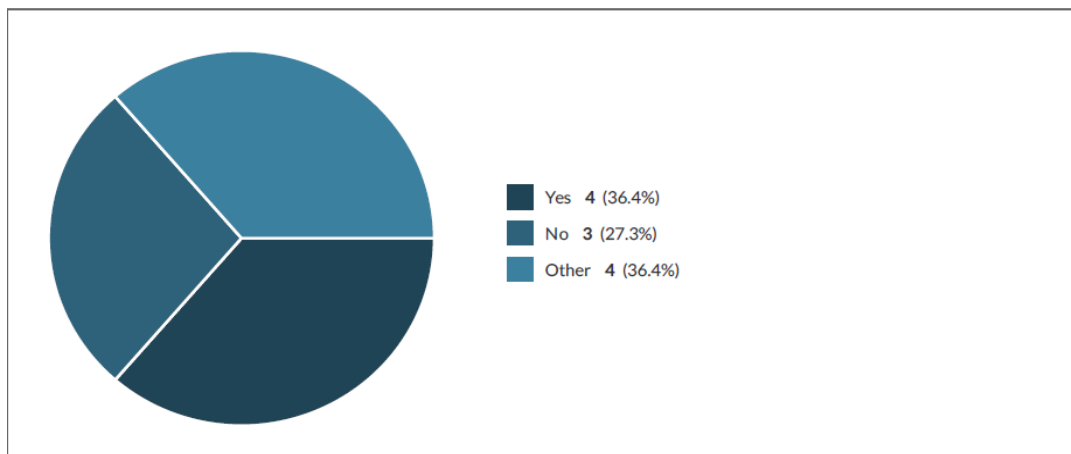
Handbooks or multimedia resources are generally available and provided by a central unit. One provider, for example, offers a self-paced online course that is based on the practice element of their Advance HE accredited postgraduate Teaching in Higher Education certificate, together with additional live sessions to support the online element. Another provider divides their training for observers into two parts. The first element is asynchronous and requires observers to watch a video and read the scheme handbook, whilst the second is synchronous online workshop activity, based around a series of scenarios and prompts which have been gathered from previous experiences of observers. These scenarios offer practical help in relation to a range of issues that may arise. Case studies, which are regularly updated, are provided by another provider to highlight the different approaches faculties/schools might take. One provider stated that whilst faculties varied in their approaches, experienced observers often act as mentors to new observers. Another provider, who is reviewing their provision at present, noted their intention to create a framework of principles as a means of support.

As well as observation guidance, some providers in interviews noted how they also focus on strengthening pedagogical understanding more generally. One provider has invested in the app HOW2 to support pedagogical inquiry and provide evidence-based practical support in terms of teaching methods. The app consists of a wide range of visual guides outlining possible teaching techniques, as well as offering the opportunity for individuals to network and collaborate with other educators. Another offers optional modules in online teaching at various levels, together with a moderated forum on teaching and learning.

Most providers, as previously indicated, provide templates or forms to support staff undertaking peer observation of teaching. A minority of providers have different forms, depending on the nature of the activity chosen. Some forms provide additional guidance in the form of prompts or suggestions to consider. As noted by one provider, such prompts can provide useful scaffolding for those completing the forms. Completion of these forms is not mandatory in most cases; several providers stressed their purpose is to help encourage conversation and critical reflection.

Similar variation between providers can be seen across the UK. Several handbooks considered as part of this project refer to mandatory training in coaching styles for observers, whilst others refer to the fact that guidance documents are provided for all parties, along with bespoke training from a central unit, in response to demand. Observation templates in the UK providers considered are often optional aids and frequently contain question prompts or key themes for both the observer and observee to consider. A small number of providers provide specific guidance/templates in relation to different types of observations such as laboratory observations, fieldwork, and online teaching. Case studies outlining how the process has been adopted by different faculties, along with examples of completed templates, are sometimes used across the UK to provide additional support. Selected further reading is included in a few handbooks both in Wales and more widely.

Sharing of innovative practice linked to peer observation

The questionnaire and subsequent interviews showed that dissemination of enhancement suggestions, and areas of good practice resulting from the peer observation activity, takes place through a variety of means. Whilst in several providers in Wales dissemination appears to be primarily at school level, reference was also made in the responses to faculty meetings, teaching and learning conferences and committees, and annual programme reviews. Data collected centrally is often used to identify areas for professional development. For example, one individual interviewed noted that an anonymous Microsoft form allows for the identification of key themes across the provider.

A similar range of dissemination practices is also cited by providers outside of Wales. Many providers focus primarily on school-level dissemination, often through programme or subject learning and teaching committees. Areas for general development are often shared with a central learning and teaching unit as part of the process of confirming that peer observation has occurred within a particular faculty or school. As in Wales, personal development reviews are seen as an opportunity to share innovative practice or raise personal requests for additional training. Some providers have a specific online resource for the sharing of good practice, as a means of contributing to the sustained enhancement of teaching and learning across disciplines.

Challenges surrounding peer observation

Some key challenges were identified by providers in Wales, such as full engagement of all staff in a consistent manner, especially where faculties run the schemes themselves and there is inevitably variability in approach and engagement. One provider acknowledged that, depending on their academic background, some disciplines are naturally more familiar with reflection and find the process less challenging as a result. Resource capacity was also cited, for example in relation to what training could be offered and time staff have available. Two providers reviewing their schemes at present stressed the importance of ensuring that appropriate time for peer observation is included in any workload allocation model. Another stated that different timescales for teaching can make it hard to set institutional deadlines for completion. One provider noted that moving to peer discussion as the main peer development opportunity, as opposed to peer observation, has eased challenges created by timetabling issues and another stated that whilst the opportunity to work in pairs and groups of three is offered, pairs are naturally easier to organise. Another provider acknowledged that access to VLE resources can be a challenge at times, although the opportunity to consider teaching materials as part of a scheme has been welcomed by staff.

Detailed case studies of observers and observees were outside the scope of this project, but case studies external to Wales have reported that colleagues who are too close sometimes find it difficult to provide honest feedback about negative aspects of teaching.[1] This was not raised by those responsible for the organisation of peer observation in any interview undertaken as part of this project. However, some providers in Wales in discussion did view peer dialogue as less intimidating than peer observation and a more individual-centered approach. It was also suggested that interdisciplinary observations or discussions can help encourage a focus on pedagogy, rather than individual subject areas, thereby potentially helping to remove certain barriers.

---

[1] For example: Yiend, J and Weller, S and Kinchin, I (2014) Peer observation of teaching: The interaction between peer review and developmental models of practice, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 38(4), pp. 465-484; and

Carroll, C and O'Loughlin, D (2014) Peer observation of teaching: enhancing academic engagement for new participants Innovations, Education and Teaching International, 51:4, pp. 446-456

Conclusion

It is clear from the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews and the desk-based research undertaken as part of this HEFCW-funded enhancement project that processes in the regulated and funded providers in Wales are generally similar to those of the wider UK. Several providers, in reviewing their schemes, stated they had looked across the sector at what appears to work well, whilst also considering, through consultation, what their staff felt would be of benefit from a personal and professional perspective. All providers reviewed separate their scheme from quality assurance or performance management processes. Whilst there is an element of variation across individual providers, and full engagement sometimes is challenging, peer observation is very much seen as a collaborative developmental activity for all. Peer observation is considered a formative process which has the potential to contribute significantly to staff growth, thereby strengthening teaching and learning.

The specific impact of peer observation of teaching on student outcomes was outside the scope of this project, although one provider did comment that they had noticed an uplift in student success data following the introduction of a new peer observation scheme. Another provider stated that anecdotal evidence suggested that their peer observation process was impacting positively on practitioners' pedagogical skills and on the student learning experience.

As a next step, interviews with a range of individuals who have undertaken peer observation of teaching as an observer or observee could provide valuable quantitative and qualitative data on the direct impact of peer observation on educational practices and student achievement. As many of the regulated providers and funded providers in Wales are either in the process of reviewing, or have recently reviewed, their schemes, this would be particularly timely. At the same time, increased involvement of the student voice in such schemes has the potential to enhance further the value of reflective peer observation practices within the tertiary education system in Wales. Two providers are considering involving students in peer observation in the future, whilst another is looking to include an option to 'become the learner' in their scheme. The focus of such an observation will be the student response and how they are reacting to a particular session, rather than lecturer development as such.

Peer observation has clearly been embraced fully by all regulated and funded providers in Wales. In the interviews, several providers commented that involvement in such a scheme helps individuals feel validated as academics through the creation of a confidential and safe space to reflect critically on practice. This enhancement project has sought to enable the sharing of ideas and innovative practices more widely across the sector, as peer observation schemes continue to expand and evolve for the benefit of all staff and students.

Annex 1 - Project contributors

Aberystwyth University

Bangor University

Cardiff University

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

NPTC Group of Colleges

Swansea University

The Open University in Wales

University of South Wales

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Wrexham Glyndŵr University

Annex 2 - Further reading

Carroll, C and O'Loughlin, D (2014) Peer observation of teaching: enhancing academic engagement for new participants, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 51(4), pp 446-456

Hendry, G D and Oliver, G R (2012) Seeing is Believing: The Benefits of Peer Observation, Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice Vol 9 Issue 1

Yiend, J and Weller, S and Kinchin, I (2014) Peer observation of teaching: The interaction between peer review and developmental models of practice, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 38(4), pp 465-484

O'Leary, M (2014) Classroom observation: A guide to the effective observation of teaching and learning, London: Routledge

O'Leary, M and Savage, S (2020) Breathing new life into the observation of teaching and learning in higher education: moving from the performative to the informative, Professional Development in Education, 46(1), pp 145-159

Shortland, S (2004) Peer observation: A tool for staff development or compliance? Journal of Further and Higher Education, 28(2), pp 219-228

Shortland, S (2010) Feedback within peer observation: Continuing professional development and unexpected consequences, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 47(3), pp 295-304

Tenenberg, J (2016) Learning through observing peers in practice, Studies in Higher Education, 41(4), pp 756-773

Thomson, K and Trigwell, K (2018) The role of informal conversations in developing university teaching? Studies in Higher Education, 43(9), pp. 1536-1547

Yiend, J and Weller, S and Kinchin, I (2014) Peer observation of teaching: The interaction between peer review and developmental models of practice, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 38(4), pp 465-484

Annex 3 - Survey questions

Institution:

Name and role of individual completing the questionnaire:

Email address:

1. Does your institution have a peer observation process/scheme?

    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other

2. Is the process mandatory for certain categories of staff? Tick all applicable boxes below.

    a. Full-time lecturing staff
    b. Part time lecturing staff
    c. Postgraduates with teaching responsibilities
    d. Hourly paid teaching staff
    e. Honorary/external staff
    f. Other – please state:

3. What is your process called?

    a. Peer Observation of Teaching
    b. Peer Support for Teaching
    c. Peer Dialogue on Teaching
    d. Peer Review of Teaching
    e. Other – please state:

4. Who has overall responsibility for the process?

    a. A central Academy / Centre for Learning and Teaching
    b. Individual Faculties / Colleges
    c. A central Academic / Quality Office or similar
    d. Human Resources
    e. Other – please state:

5. What are its benefits? Please rank the following from 1- 6 with 1 being the most important in your opinion.

    1. Identifies best practice for wider dissemination

    2. Enhances teaching practice and improves the quality of the student experience

    3. Supports confidence raising and the development of practice for all parties

    4. Is non-judgemental and encourages collegiality, networking and reflective debate

    5. Raises awareness of different approaches to teaching and learning

      6.   Helps support personal and professional development

Other additional benefits in your opinion – please state:

6.   Does the process occur?

      a.   Annually
      b.   Once every two years
      c.   Other - please state:

7.   What teaching activity can be considered as part of your peer observation process? Please tick all relevant activity, whether it be face-to- face or online.

      a.   Lectures
      b.   Tutorials
      c.   Seminars
      d.   Fieldwork
      e.   Laboratory work
      f.   Postgraduate supervision
      g.   Other – please state:

8.   Is training provided centrally for those undertaking observations?

      a. Yes
      b. No
      c. Other

Please outline the nature of any training provided, noting whether this is optional or mandatory:

9.   On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being total flexibility, how much flexibility do Faculties or Schools have over the process? *For example, rather than a traditional peer observation processes a Faculty/School may wish to supplement or replace such a process by another mutually supportive pair or group activity which may focus on a particular theme or address a strategic development need.*

10.   On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being total flexibility, how much flexibility do observees have over the peer observation process? *For example, in terms of choosing who will observe them, what will be the focus of the observation, and the nature of the feedback they would like to receive.*

11.   Please outline in brief the various steps of the peer observation process in your institution, noting whether set templates are used.

12.   How are areas of shared interest, enhancement ideas and examples of best practice arising from peer observation, disseminated across your institution and beyond?

13.   Have you found there to be any practical, operational challenges in administrating your peer observation process?

For example, has a shortage of Welsh speaking staff had an impact on the observation of Welsh-medium sessions?

14. Is there anything else you would like to raise regarding your peer observation process?

15. Please note below any documentation relating to your peer observation process, which is already in the public domain, which you feel would be helpful to highlight. Please include links, where possible.