



Key questions to consider when implementing a peer observation of teaching scheme

The following reflective questions have been developed from the HEFCW-funded QAA enhancement project on Peer Observation of Teaching that was carried out in 2022-23. The project led to a report and a webinar to share practice. These questions represent areas for consideration when developing new or revising existing peer observation (or similar) schemes.

1 What should the proposed scheme be called?

Observation can have negative performance related undertones. Widespread consultation can help establish staff ownership and engagement by all when considering a name for the scheme.

2 What is its key purpose?

There is a growing focus across the UK on a collaborative, peer-driven, reflective model which is confidential and non-judgmental in nature. Peer observation is not normally part of a performance management process but is formative and developmental in nature.

3 Will the peer observation scheme sit centrally or locally within faculties or schools?

The review of regulated and funded providers in Wales suggests that basing the administrative elements of a scheme in a central unit such as a Teaching and Learning Unit ensures greater consistency in approach and engagement in general. Operational elements are frequently taken forward by a network of associate deans or faculty teaching and learning leads.

4 Who will be observed and who will undertake the role of observer?

Consideration should be given to including any staff that support the learning experience. Normally, there is an expectation that all full-time/part time teaching staff take part in a peer observation scheme, but several other categories of staff should also be considered, such as those in professional services that directly support students as well as postgraduates who teach. Observers in some providers are volunteers; other providers expect all relevant staff to be observed and undertake the role of observer.

5 How often will observation occur?

Many providers observe all staff annually, however others work on a two-year cycle or choose to observe experienced staff less frequently than new staff. The process needs to be ongoing and not seen by staff as a 'one-off' event. Workload allocation models need to

acknowledge the time required to undertake such an exercise appropriately, whether it be in pairs or in small groups.

6 What aspects of teaching will be covered by peer observation?

Peer dialogue is sometimes seen as less intimidating than peer observation, and provider resources frequently emphasise the importance of including a wide range of 'professional dialogue' opportunities that encompass teaching in its broadest sense, as well as a more traditional classroom observation. Any educational activity that facilitates learning is appropriate for consideration. Cross-disciplinary observation can help encourage a focus on pedagogy, rather than individual subject areas, thereby potentially helping to remove certain barriers.

7 How can a sense of trust and a culture of agency among staff be developed?

Offering a choice of developmental options as part of a scheme and enabling individuals to choose who they wish to work with are two ways in which reflective, empowering experiences can be encouraged. Establishing the correct ethos and cultural mindset is important from the start.

8 What sort of support will be provided for observers and observees?

Providers across the UK offer a range of training and guidance which includes online courses and face-to-face group discussions. The use of scenarios and case studies is popular and optional observation templates with key prompts frequently provide useful scaffolding. Selected further reading is sometime included in handbooks.

9 Will the model help enable the sharing of innovative practice more widely?

Peer observation of teaching can contribute significantly to staff growth. The sharing of innovative practice through schools, faculties or teaching and learning conferences can all contribute to the sustained enhancement of teaching and learning across disciplines. A specific institutional online space is a popular means of sharing good practice across all staff.

10. Could students contribute to the peer observation of teaching scheme?

Increased involvement of the student voice in such schemes has the potential to enhance the value of reflective peer observation. Several providers across the UK are looking at ways of involving students in peer observation.

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