A Guide to Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching

York St John University

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Introduction

YSJU is committed to enhancing students' learning through the provision of high quality teaching; the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF appendix 1) underpins a sector-wide approach to ensuring the quality of teaching and learning.

It is the University's expectation that all academic staff who are involved with teaching and facilitating student learning will engage annually with Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching and all Fellows of the Higher Education Academy are expected to maintain good standing in terms of the on-going development of their pedagogic practice. Both these objectives can be achieved in part by a commitment to engage in regular review of practice through peer observation.

What is Peer Observation?

At York St John University peer observation is viewed as a collaborative, non-judgmental process involving two or more peers who mutually benefit from the dialogue that takes place. "Teaching" is used in its broadest sense to encompass the design of curricula and the planning of assessment as well as all activities that happen in physical learning spaces, and pedagogic activities that make use of the virtual learning environment. The variety of our pedagogic practice requires a flexible approach to its review, because much learning (both staff and student) happens in spaces other than the traditional classroom setting.

It is anticipated that, typically, staff will work reciprocally in pairs when engaging in peer observation. A reciprocal approach means that each person takes their turn in reviewing a mutually determined area of professional practice, and subsequently engaging in a professional dialogue. The intention is that within this dialogue questions are used to stimulate reflection and discussion, and where appropriate, to provide each other with feedback.

Our process does not exclude the role of a developmental model of peer-supported particularly for staff new to teaching. In a developmental model peers work together; one is more experienced than the other, and the intention is that the more experienced individual provides feedback purposefully geared toward the development the less experienced colleague's practice. Typically,

this might include a mutually-determined action plan.

What is expected of staff in relation to the peer observation process?

It is expected that you will participate in a minimum of one peer observation round per academic year. Each round will require two to three meetings as described below. The meeting structure is anticipated to be flexible and the number may depend on the context and focus of the peer review.

What does the evidence suggest is the value of peer observation?

Peer observation of teaching, as a quality enhancement and review process was first adopted by HEIs in the 1990s and was driven by the Teaching Quality Assessment methodology (QAA subject review 1997). It was commonly described as peer observation as opposed to peer Observation of learning and teaching. In more recent times the QAA (2012) in chapter B3 promotes the need for teaching staff to be engaged in reflection and evaluation of their professional practices. The Browne review (2010) and the Higher Education White Paper (2011) have highlighted a renewed emphasis on the quality of the student experience and peer review is one way that we can demonstrate that we are reflecting on the quality of our teaching, learning and assessment practices.

A review of the literature suggests there are numerous benefits to peer review of teaching including: increased teacher confidence, greater collegiality, encourages debate and dissemination of best practice: and improves teacher interactions with students (Marshall 2004, Bell and Mladenovic 2008). In their own study, Bell and Mladenovic (2008) found

Dialogic	Talking about teaching promotes reflection on one's practice
Scholarly	Uses available pedagogic evidence
Consistent with good professional practice	It reflects how professionals learn

How does peer observation work?

Typically, colleagues work in pairs for the purposes of peer observation. Coordination of pairings is determined at School/University level.

Can more than two of us engage in a peer observation round together?

Yes, if it is appropriate for the context of the pedagogic practice you wish to review, more than two members of staff can participate in a peer observation round together, as long as you ensure that you follow the same format as described below and that a reflective dialogue takes place.

You decide the focus of the review.

The review and the dialogue that follows are personal, and can be focused on a variety of teaching, learning or assessment practices. Here are just a few examples:

Observing an innovative teaching strategy you are trying out in the classroom

- Reflecting on and discussing your assessment strategies for a module or programme. This may include
- Reviewing how you have constructively aligned assessment to content and learning outcomes; how well your formative assessment processes worked; how your students have engaged with feedback processes; the use and effectiveness of innovative assessment or feedback methods
- Reviewing the content and aims of a Moodle module. This may include discussing your rationale
- For the design used and exploring underpinning e –pedagogy; considering how students are or are not engaging with the module online; reviewing how successful online discussions have been; or how the
- Use of video and audio and other technology enhanced teaching tools are incorporated
- Reviewing PDP activities for your students across a programme of study, how this links to work based learning activities and future employability
- Reflecting on plans for a new programme of study and ideas for a learning, teaching and assessment strategy and how this might translate into your module activities.

What happens in the meetings?

Meeting 1: Your first meeting may either be face to face or electronic and its purpose is to discuss what the focus of your review and post-review dialogue will be. It is important that context is established, and that the reviewer understands how the activity being reviewed relates to other learning opportunities within the module/programme/curriculum development etc. If the review includes observation of teaching practice, It may be helpful to share what the particular learning outcomes for the session are. You will also need to agree the practical arrangements for the review, when, where and how long it will take. This is your opportunity to discuss with your colleague what aspects you would like them to concentrate on and what sort of feedback you would like. You may want to agree the use of a prompt form, examples can be found in appendix 2. These can be adapted for other pedagogic practices, as you feel are appropriate, or you may want to develop your own. Remember this document is for your own personal use and it is not necessary to share this, other than with each other. You should also use meeting one to plan your post review meeting and dialogue.

Meeting 2: The second meeting is the review. Where this is not a classroom observation, the second meeting may take the form of a demonstration to your colleague of your Moodle module; a presentation about the rationale for a particular curriculum design for a programme, or your reasons for particular programmes assessment strategies etc.

Meeting 3: This may take place immediately following the review session, or later (as agreed). This is the opportunity for both parties to reflect and discuss what took place. It is important to consider possible underpinning theoretical and subject or pedagogic research influences and identify if further scholarly investigation might add to the discussions. You may wish to record your discussions for your own future benefit using the Confidential Shared Discussion Record (appendix 4) but there is no requirement for this record to be shared with anyone else. You may jointly agree on a number of aspects from this dialogue that you have learnt about together which could be reported in the peer observation form (appendix 3). This can usefully highlight areas of good pedagogic practice that might be shared more widely. If there are any developmental needs arising from the process you must agree, if and how those needs will be fed back to your Head/Deputy Head of School. After the

dialogue the form in appendix 3, should be completed and sent to your School Learning and Teaching Leader (LT Leaders)

What are the reporting mechanisms?

Essentially peer observation is a confidential process that occurs between you and your peer. There is an expectation that you will confirm to the Head/Deputy Head of School and Learning and Teaching lead that you have engaged in it, using the form in appendix 3.

The minimum information you must provide for the LT Leader is the date, location and nature of review session and the name of the reviewer, thereby recording that it took place.

Each LT Leader will maintain a record of the members of staff who have participated.   You are encouraged to discuss your peer observation experience at your PDR, and use the outcomes of peer observation as evidence of your good pedagogic practice and/or to agree a personal development need.

What will the coordinators do?

The LT Leaders will report to the Head of School and the Head of Learning and Teaching as to how many members of staff have completed peer observation in an academic year. They will also share an anonymous summary of areas of good practice and development needs from the peer reviews they oversee.

What will Heads of School do?

Heads of School will ensure that an annual report on the outcomes of peer observation is fed into the appropriate University annual evaluative processes. The outcomes of annual evaluative processes are used to inform resourcing and action planning in support of the University's strategic objectives.

How does peer observation relate to issues of poor performance?

The remit of peer observation does not include reviews that are triggered by poor performance. In such circumstances separate processes would be initiated through in the University's capability procedure.

References

Bell, A. and Mladenovic, R. (2008) The benefits of peer observation of teaching for tutor development. Higher Education,55, 735–752

Browne, J. (2010). Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education www. independent.gov.uk/browne-report Gosling, D. and Mason O'Connor, K. (2009) Beyond the Peer observation of Teaching, SEDA Paper 124

Marshall, B. (2004) Learning from the Academy: From Peer observation of Teaching to Peer Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. Journal of Adult Theological Education, 1, (2), 185-204

McMahon, T. Barrett, T. and O'Neill, G. (2007) Using observation of teaching to improve quality: finding your way through the muddle of competing conceptions, confusion of practice and mutually exclusive intentions. Teaching in Higher Education, 12, (4), 499-511

Quality Assurance Agency (2012) Chapter B3 Learning and Teaching Institutional Audit Staff Support and Development Arrangements Quality Assurance Agency (1997) Subject Review Handbook October 1998 to September 2000. Gloucester

Appendix 1 - What is the UKPSF?

The UK Professional Standards Framework provides a general description of the main dimensions of the roles of teaching and supporting learning within the HE environment. It has two components:

1. The descriptors:

These are a set of statements outlining the key characteristics of someone performing four broad categories of typical learning and teaching support roles within higher education.

2. The dimensions of practice:

These are a set of statements outlining the:

Areas of Activity undertaken by teachers and supporters of learning within HE

- Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study

- Teach and/or support learning

- Assess and give feedback to learners

- Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance

- Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices

Core Knowledge that is needed to carry out those activities at the appropriate level

- The subject material

- Appropriate methods for teaching and

learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme

- How students learn, both generally and within their subject/ disciplinary area(s)

- The use and value of appropriate learning technologies

- Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching

- The implications of quality assurance and quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching

Professional Values that someone performing these activities should embrace and exemplify

- Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities
- Promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners
- Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development
- Acknowledge the wider context
- in which higher education operates recognising the implications for professional practice

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ recognition-accreditation/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf

Appendix 2 – Prompt Forms

Example prompts form for use in an observation of teaching (please adapt to suit individual needs)

To be completed by the reviewer

Prompts	Reflections/points for discussion
Planning and organisation of the session	
Methods and Approach	
Delivery and Pace	
Student participation and engagement in learning	
Use of environment	

Example prompts form for use in the review of a module within Moodle

To be completed by the reviewer

Prompts	Reflections/points for discussion
Organisation and layout of the Moodle module	
Rationale for the approach (e-pedagogy)	
Use of specific technology tools	
Student participation online and engagement in learning	

Example prompts form for use in the review of an assessment strategy

To be completed by the reviewer

Prompts	Reflection/points for discussion
Rationale for use of assessment approach(es)	
Constructive alignment between learning outcomes and content and assessment	
Use of formative assessment to enhance student learning	
Student participation in understanding criteria etc feedback quality and timeliness	

Appendix 3 – Review Record Form

Reviewee:	Reviewer:
Date:	
Module/Activity Reviewed:	

Staff Development Needs Identified

Elements Worthy of Wider Dissemination

Please give a brief description for use by the School Learning & Teaching Lead

Signatures

Appendix 4 – Confidential Shared Discussion Record

Reviewee:	Reviewer(s):
Date:	
Module/Activity Reviewed:	

Focus of Review

Key points from the post observation discussion

Agreed action points for the future

Elements of practice worthy of wider dissemination

Note: The purpose of this form is to provide a confidential record of post-observation discussions. There is no requirement for it to be shared with anyone else.

How many words of 4 letters or more can you make from the words Environme... Sust... in one ...