

## Guidance on peer review of learning and teaching

### Introduction

1. This guidance was developed by the Working Group on Improving Teaching Quality via Observation during the Autumn Term 2014 and Spring/Summer Terms 2015. It is intended to supplement the policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching* which takes effect from the 2015-16 academic session.
2. The guidance is intended to help with the planning, introduction and operation of a School (or intra-School Department where relevant) system of peer review of teaching and learning. It also includes practical guidance for reviewers and reviewees on the peer review process. The guidance aims to draw out good practice and reflect experiences from this University and others. It is intended to be flexible; Schools should interpret it according to their own particular context and needs.
3. Appended to the guidance are three pro-formas:
  - Appendix 1: Direct observation of teaching pro-forma;
  - Appendix 2: Peer review of learning and teaching practices pro-forma;
  - Appendix 3: Joint statement on peer review of learning and teaching pro-forma.

### Choosing a local structure for peer review

#### **Aims of peer review**

4. In setting up a local structure for peer review, School Directors of Teaching and Learning (or Departmental Directors of Teaching and Learning as designated by the relevant School Directors of Teaching and Learning) (collectively referred to as DTLs throughout the remainder of this document) should highlight to staff the value of engaging in a collaborative developmental process. It is important that staff are committed to taking a critical look at their own practice, rather than seeing peer review as a 'tick-box exercise'. This could be achieved through opportunities for broader discussion on the peer review process at School level. It should be emphasised that peer review is NOT a mechanism for judging staff against set criteria or exposing and remedying poor performance. In such circumstances, separate performance management processes should be initiated. Peer review is about giving individuals the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue about their teaching and to assist in the dissemination of good practice at School level and beyond.

#### **The choice of reviewer**

5. Review by a peer from the same School or Department is the most common scenario. Some alternatives are review by a mentor (for example, for participants on the Academic Practice Programme), School or Departmental 'expert', University Teaching Fellow, or by

a colleague from another School or Department with experience in a particular pedagogic approach.

6. It is important to note that the seniority and level of expertise of the reviewer could have a significant impact on the nature of review and on the openness of discussions. The key to successful review partnerships is normally mutual trust and respect.
7. As noted in the policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching*, Schools are encouraged to explore possibilities for cross-disciplinary review as this can be valuable in terms of promoting reflection on pedagogy and less on subject content. This might be particularly beneficial in the case of small, intra-School Departments where the choice of review partnerships is limited.

### **Organising review partnerships**

8. Schools are free to determine locally how review partnerships are set up. Free choice of reciprocal pairs, triads or small, self-forming groups of people who peer review each other is normally found to work best in terms of creating trust and open discussions. Peer review partnerships could be built upon existing team teaching arrangements, for example, a group of staff who are jointly responsible for designing or delivering a module might agree to act as an ongoing network to exchange ideas and experiences, engage in critical reflection with each other, produce resources together and collaborate in group problem solving.
9. A peer review system which encourages a yearly change in review partnerships is recommended in order to encourage wide-ranging discussions and facilitate sharing of good practice and fresh perspectives.
10. Experience shows that reviewers can learn as much, if not more, from the peer review process as those being reviewed. A reciprocal partnership system which swaps roles will tend to reinforce personal development more than a system which uses designated reviewers and could be seen as judgmental. Indeed, you may wish to focus your scheme with an expectation that the reviewer will be the partner who has most to gain in terms of their development.
11. It should be noted that staff enrolled on the on the Academic Practice Programme (APP) are required to provide evidence of peer reviews of teaching in their assessed work. The assessment for EDMAP1 (leading to Associate Fellow status of the HEA) requires a direct observation of teaching by their mentor (or another experienced colleague), and EDMAP2 (leading to Fellow status) requires a further three peer reviews: one as a reviewee, one as a reviewer and one 'free choice'. These requirements should be taken into account when determining a local structure for peer review.

### **Focus and scope of peer review**

12. The University has deliberately moved 'Beyond Peer Observation' to adopt a more inclusive focus, whereby teaching is defined in its broadest sense and is inclusive of all aspects of teaching and learning, both in and beyond the classroom. The focus and scope for peer review could be a direct observation of teaching, or may encompass aspects such as curriculum design, alternative assessment methods, devising new approaches to the use of formative feedback, effectiveness of supervision, or developing innovative methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
13. Experience shows that giving staff freedom over the choice of topic for peer review can be empowering; therefore, within the agreed local structure, the reviewer and reviewee should agree between themselves the focus and scope for peer review. This should be

based on the reviewee's interests and areas for development, highlighted for example, via student feedback and/or their Performance and Development Review (PDR). Peer review could also be linked to strategic improvements in teaching and learning; for example, DTLs could highlight a cycle of strategic themes aligned to the University Learning and Teaching Strategy and emerging priorities in School Teaching and Learning Plans, from which staff could choose an area of focus for their review.

### Student involvement

14. As peer review is seen as a developmental, inclusive and collaborative process, student evaluation should be included in the process wherever possible.
15. For direct observations, this could take the form of a brief paper where students are asked to spend one minute during the teaching session writing down their personal (and anonymous) responses to one or two questions, such as, "What was the most important thing that you learnt during today's session?" and, "What important question do you still have?" (See Stead, 2005 for more information: <http://alh.sagepub.com/content/6/2/118.full.pdf+html>.)
16. Alternatively, a mini focus group could be arranged, where the reviewer or another colleague asks a small group of students for feedback on a particular teaching session/teaching materials/assessment or other aspect of teaching and learning which forms the focus of the review. Student comments can then be fed back into the discussion between the reviewee and the reviewer.
17. This process can also serve as a form of light-touch mid-module evaluation, which Schools are strongly encouraged to undertake in addition to more formal end-of-module evaluation (please see the *Requirements for Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning*, Section 4b of the *Guide to Policies and Procedures for Teaching and Learning* <http://www.reading.ac.uk/cqsd/QualityAssurance/PoliciesandProcedures/cqsd-PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>).

## Guidance for reviewers and reviewees on the peer review process

### Agreeing on the focus, scope and format of the review

18. As noted above and in the policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching*, peer review might involve a direct observation of teaching; alternatively, it might take the form of a professional conversation between reviewer and reviewee regarding a specific aspect of the reviewee's learning and teaching practice. The reviewee and reviewer should discuss the scope and focus of the review and decide on the most appropriate review mechanism to adopt, with reference to the Areas of Activity within the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). It might be agreed that a professional conversation around an aspect of practice combined with peer feedback on a direct observation of teaching is the most suitable method of evaluation.
19. Where a direct observation is to take place, the reviewer and reviewee should agree on a suitable session for observation. To gain the maximum benefit from peer review, the reviewee may wish to select a session where they are trying out a new innovative teaching strategy or a session that has been problematic in the past. An observation should normally last for about an hour, so a longer practical class, for example, may need to be 'sampled'.

## The peer review process

20. The peer review process can be viewed as comprising three stages:

- an initial briefing;
- observation of teaching and/or review of an aspect of learning and teaching practice and associated materials;
- peer feedback/professional conversation.

### Initial briefing

21. The reviewee should take the lead in the initial briefing which may be either face-to-face or electronic.

22. The purpose of this briefing is to:

- **Set the scene:** It is important that the reviewer understands how the teaching session/activity being reviewed relates to other learning opportunities within the module/programme;
- **Focus the reviewer:** the reviewee should raise any issues that he/she would particularly like feedback on (e.g. any new or experimental aspects of the session/activity).

23. The reviewer and reviewee should also discuss any practical considerations at this stage. For example, how will the review process be explained to the students (if relevant), how can student feedback be incorporated into the review process and who will lead on gathering this feedback? Where a direct observation will take place, the reviewer and reviewee should decide where the reviewer will sit and whether they will participate in the session.

24. Following the initial briefing, any materials for review (e.g. session plan, module description, assessment briefs, assessment criteria, sample of anonymised student work and feedback comments) should be sent by the reviewee to the reviewer for their consideration.

### Observation/review of learning and teaching practice and associated materials

25. At the initial briefing, the reviewer and reviewee may have agreed a particular focus for the observation/review of learning and teaching practice. However, as the observation/review progresses the reviewer may also wish to make some more general observations.

26. The following prompts are provided to encourage a student focussed approach to the review process depending on the session/activity/materials to be reviewed:

- Is it clear to the students how this session/activity relates to previous and future work?
- Are there clear aims and learning outcomes for the session/activity/materials? And are these aligned with overall learning outcomes and aims for the module/programme?
- Are there opportunities for students to actively participate and engage with the session/activity?
- What is the pedagogic rationale for the use of a particular approach to teaching (including technology enhanced learning)/assessment (including e-assessment) and is it appropriate?

- What evidence is there that formative assessment is used to enhance student learning?
- What opportunities are there for students to internalise the assessment criteria?
- What evidence is there that individual learners and diverse learning communities are catered for?
- Are there opportunities for the students to think, clarify their understanding and provide feed-back? How is this handled?

### **Peer feedback/professional conversation post-review**

27. The reviewee and reviewer should meet for a face-to-face conversation about the session, materials or teaching practices reviewed. To gain the maximum benefit from the peer review process, feedback should be given immediately after the session/review of activities or materials, or as close to it as possible, when detail will be easier to recall.
28. The reviewee should be invited to comment first on their thoughts on the material or teaching practices under review, including strengths and areas for development. The following questions may help to facilitate the reviewee's reflections:
  - How successful was/were the session/activity/materials in relation to student learning?
  - What was effective and why?
  - What was less effective and why?
  - What would you do differently next time?
29. The reviewer should respond to these comments in a positive and constructive way and should then provide further feedback, based on his/her notes. It is important to remember that the role of the reviewer is to encourage reflection.
30. Together, the reviewee and reviewer should identify ways in which the session/ practices/ materials reviewed may be enhanced or improved. A constructive dialogue between reviewer and reviewee may lead to an action plan for personal development and/or an agreement to use another observation/review as a way of reviewing progress.

### **Record keeping**

31. As part of the peer feedback discussion/professional conversation, the reviewer and reviewee should complete a written record of the peer review process, which should remain under the control of the reviewee. Suggested pro-formas are provided as Appendices 1 and 2; Schools may wish to adapt these for local use. The pro-formas are intended to encourage reflective, explorative and supportive conversations in the context of peer review.
32. The reviewer and reviewee should also complete a joint written statement, which the reviewee should then submit to the relevant DTL. A suggested format for a joint written statement is provided as Appendix 3.

## **Mentor-based peer review – a variation on the peer review process**

33. As an alternative to the approach described above, staff can choose to follow the 'mentor-based model' of peer review, which aims to further encourage long-term development of teaching skills across the University.

34. Under the mentor-based model, peer review will take place in self-forming, reciprocal pairs or small groups.
35. A theme for the observation of teaching/review of learning and teaching practice will be chosen by the peer review pair/group, based on their skills and development needs: for example, team based learning or screencasting. As noted above, DTLs might wish to highlight a cycle of strategic themes aligned to the University Learning and Teaching Strategy and emerging priorities in School Teaching and Learning Plans, from which peer review pairs/groups could choose an area of focus.
36. The peer review pair/group will contact a colleague within the University who has experience in the particular pedagogic approach chosen. The peer review pair/group might wish to refer to the T&L Exchange<sup>1</sup> or to contact the Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD), who can suggest the name of a colleague with the relevant experience. The pair/group will then organise a meeting with the colleague to discuss the theme. Depending on the theme chosen, it may be appropriate to observe the colleague incorporate the theme into teaching, e.g. by watching a team based learning session, or to have a subsequent meeting to discuss the theme in more detail.
37. The peer review pair/group will then continue with the peer review process as described above (paragraph 20 onwards). As part of the initial briefing, they should discuss how to incorporate the particular pedagogic approach into their own teaching. The peer review pair/group might wish to use the following questions as prompts:
- What did you each learn from observing/talking to your colleague with experience in your chosen pedagogic approach?
  - How can you apply this learning to your specific context?
38. A written record of the process must be made and retained as detailed in paragraphs 31 and 32 above.

## Support and training on peer review

39. Further advice and assistance in relation to peer review, including advice in relation to the mentor-based model, is available from the Academic Staff Development Manager, Dr Nina Brooke ([n.m.brooke@reading.ac.uk](mailto:n.m.brooke@reading.ac.uk)), and the Senior Enhancement Officer, Dr Maura O'Regan ([m.oregan@reading.ac.uk](mailto:m.oregan@reading.ac.uk)), in CQSD.
40. Further guidance on how the revised policy on *Peer review of learning and teaching* and this accompanying guidance can be implemented will be developed by the DTLs Community of Practice in conjunction with, and supported by, CQSD.

## References and further information

Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P. (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gosling, D. (2005) *Peer observation of teaching: implementing a peer observation of teaching scheme with five case studies*. SEDA paper 118.

Gosling, D. and O'Connor, K. (2009) *Beyond the Peer Observation of Teaching*. SEDA paper 124.

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<sup>1</sup> The T&L Exchange is an online directory of teaching and learning expertise currently under development by CQSD which captures examples of innovative practice in the University and makes them available to the teaching and learning community to promote the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Hounsell, D. (2009) Evaluating Courses and Teaching, in H. Fry et al (ed) *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, pp.198-231, New York and London: Routledge.

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

Stead, D.R. (2005) *A review of the one minute paper*. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: The Higher Education Academy and SAGE Publications, 6 (2), pp. 118-131. <http://alh.sagepub.com/content/6/2/118.full.pdf+html> (Accessed 21 May 2015).

## Appendix 1

### Direct observation of teaching pro-forma

To be completed by the reviewer and retained by the reviewee

Reviewer:		Reviewee:	
Observation date:		Module:	
Length and type of session:		Length of observation:	
Level of students:		Number of Students:	

#### Feedback on issues specifically requested by the reviewee

#### Other feedback

Comment on strengths and development needs, particularly in relation to the learning outcomes of the module. Prompts are provided here to assist the reviewer and reviewee. These are referenced against the relevant Dimensions of Practice of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) to assist reviewees with potential future applications for formal recognition by the HEA. Reviewers/reviewees are not required to be familiar with the Dimensions of Practice for the purposes of completing this form.

Prompts	Strengths	Areas for development
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<p><b>Introducing the session to the students</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A1)</p> <p><b>Planning, structure and organisation</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A1)</p> <p><b>Content</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A2)</p> <p><b>Methods and approaches</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A2)</p> <p><b>Delivery and pace</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A2, A4)</p> <p><b>Student participation and engagement in learning</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A4)</p> <p><b>Use of learning environment</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A4)</p> <p><b>Assessment and Evaluation</b> (Evidencing UKPSF A3, A5)</p>		
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[Optional] Please indicate which key areas of the UKPSF have been demonstrated.

## Appendix 2

### Peer review of learning and teaching practices pro-forma

To be completed by the reviewer and retained by the reviewee

Reviewer:		Reviewee:	
Review date:		Material for review:	

Feedback on issues specifically requested by the reviewee

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Identify areas for clarification in your professional conversation with the reviewee

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Please comment on strengths and development needs, particularly in relation to the learning outcomes of the module. NB: You will need to agree the most relevant areas for comment as contexts will vary.

Strengths

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Areas for development

[Optional] Please indicate which key areas of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) have been demonstrated.

## Appendix 3

### Joint statement on peer review of learning and teaching pro-forma

To be completed jointly by the reviewer and reviewee and sent to the School/  
Departmental Director of Teaching and Learning

Reviewer:		Reviewee:	
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Nature of session if direct observation					
Lecture		Practical session		Studio session	
Small group session		Fieldwork		Other (please specify)	

Focus/ scope of peer review

The following examples of good practice could be shared:

The following training, development and other needs were noted:

The following actions were agreed:

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[Optional] Please indicate which key areas of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) were covered in the peer feedback discussion/professional conversation.

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**Signed**

Reviewee		Reviewer	
Date			

## Appendix 4

# Annual Report of Peer Review of Learning and Teaching in the School of XXX

2016-17

To be completed by the School Director of Teaching and Learning (*or nominee*) and emailed to Jennie Chetcuti [j.l.chetcuti@reading.ac.uk](mailto:j.l.chetcuti@reading.ac.uk) by 8 December 2017

<b>Number of teaching staff who engaged in Peer Review:</b>		<b>Percentage of teaching staff who engaged in Peer Review:</b>	
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Type of Peer Review	Numbers of Staff who engaged:
Direct Classroom Observation	
Curriculum Design	
Assessment Methods	
Other, please specify	

Please note here if the School engaged with an innovative use of Peer Review, e.g. on a particular theme; cross-disciplinary peer review; etc.	
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**What will be the impact of your School's Peer Review this year? How will the outcomes inform and enhance practice in your School?**

What examples of good practice were identified that could be shared with CQSD for wider dissemination? *(please give brief details):*

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What training and development needs were identified? Will these be met locally by the School/department or is input from CQSD requested? *(please give brief details):*

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Please use this space if you would like to add any comments about how your School engaged in the process:

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Signed

SDTL

Print  
Name:

Date