University of Reading

Guidance on reflecting on practice with colleagues

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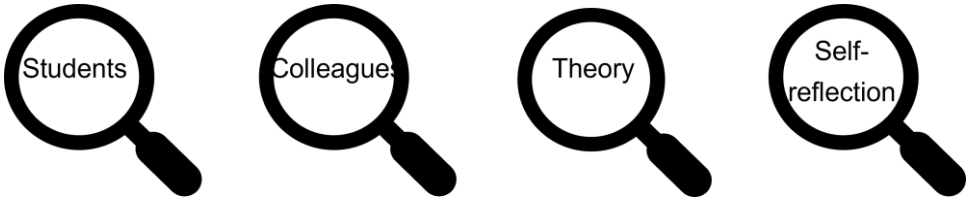
Introduction

1. Brookfield (1995) suggests that to become critically reflective practitioners, educators should view their practice through four interconnected lenses:



2. The University's approach to reflecting on practice with colleagues aims to prompt **self-reflection**, by nurturing a **culture of colleagues supporting each other**, discussing ideas, debating evidence and engaging in non-judgmental dialogue. This process can be supported through the triangulation of evidence from **students** and making links between **theory** and practice. The value in reflecting on practice with colleagues is twofold - there are benefits for both the practitioner and the facilitator to reflect on their teaching and students' learning.
3. This guidance is intended to supplement the policy on *Reflecting on practice with colleagues.* It is intended to be flexible; Schools should interpret it according to their own context. It aims to help Schools/Departments design and operate a local structure for reflecting on practice with colleagues and offers suggestions for setting up collaborative partnerships. It also includes practical guidance for practitioners and facilitators on how to make best use of the process and suggestions for sourcing evidence from students and the pedagogic literature.
4. Appended to the guidance are two optional pro-formas for completion by facilitators:
    - Appendix 1: 'Teaching conversation' pro-forma;
    - Appendix 2: Direct observation of teaching pro-forma;

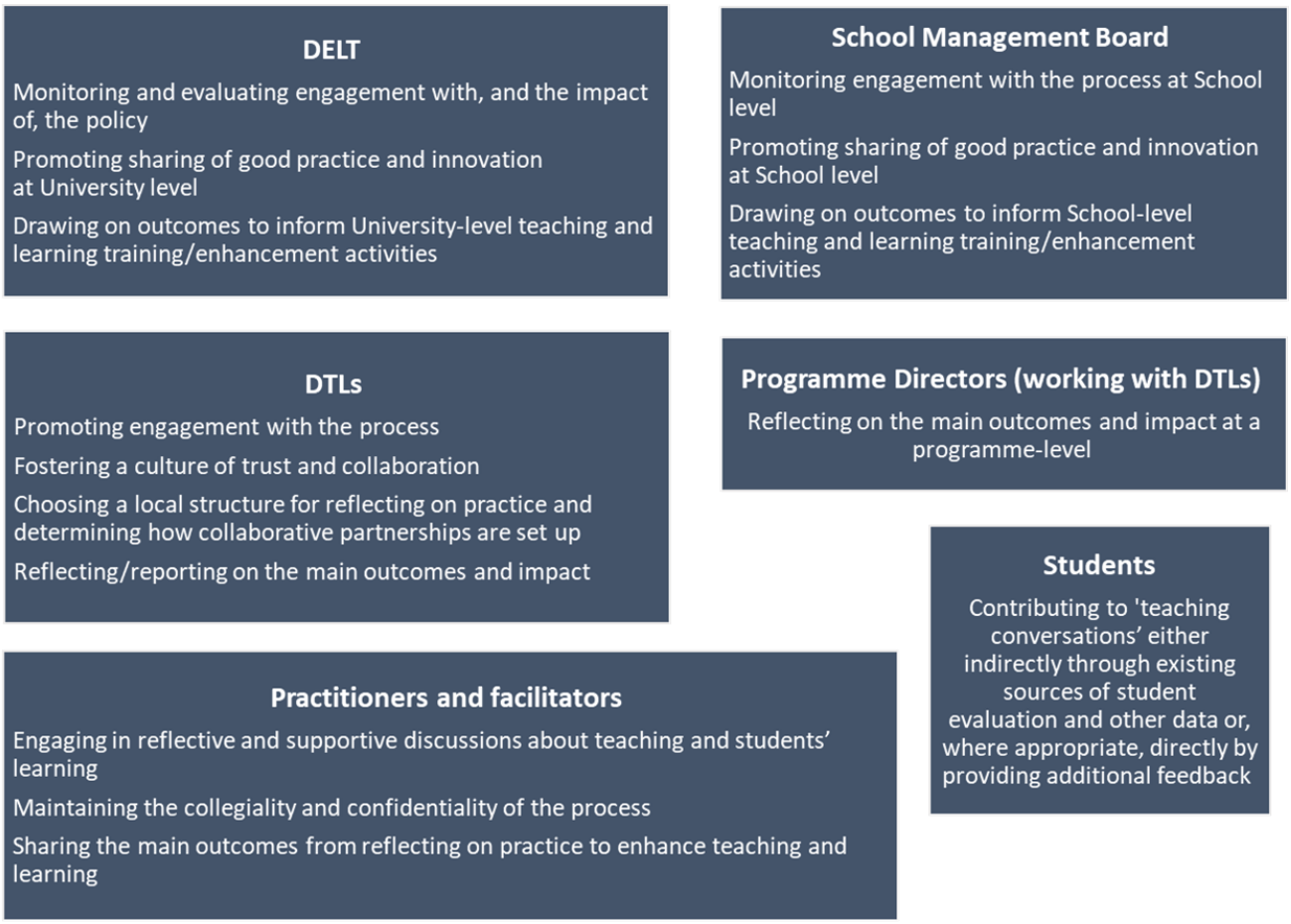
    Links to two Microsoft Forms templates are available here:

    - Reflecting on practice with colleagues;
    - Impact of reflecting on practice with colleagues in your School.

Please refer to the policy on *Reflecting on practice with colleagues* and the section below on 'Monitoring and next steps' for details of how the online forms are to be used.

Roles & Responsibilities

5. The diagram below summarises the main roles and responsibilities of colleagues, students and School/University-level boards and committees in respect of reflecting on practice with colleagues.



Choosing a local structure

6. Schools are free to choose an appropriate local structure for reflecting on practice with colleagues. In setting up a local structure, School Directors of Teaching and Learning (or Departmental Directors of Teaching and Learning as designated by the relevant School Directors of Teaching and Learning) (DTLs) should highlight to staff the purpose and 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 the process as a 'tick-box exercise'. This could be achieved through opportunities for broader discussion about the process at School/Departmental level. DTLs should emphasise that reflecting on practice should not involve summative judgements and is separate from formal performance management processes.

Focus, scope and format of reflecting on practice

7. As noted in the policy on *Reflecting on practice with colleagues*, reflecting on practice could take the form of a direct observation of teaching, or it may encompass a 'teaching conversation' focussed on an area of learning and teaching practice. For example, curriculum design, enhancing inclusive practice, 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.

8. Experience shows that giving staff freedom over the choice of topic can be empowering; therefore, within the agreed local structure, the practitioner and facilitator should agree between themselves the focus and scope for reflecting on practice. This should be based on the practitioner's interests, skills and areas for enhancement, highlighted for example via student evaluation and/or a recent Performance and Development Review (PDR).
9. Reflecting on practice could also be linked to strategic improvements in teaching and learning. For example, Schools could highlight a cycle of strategic themes aligned to the School Teaching Enhancement Action Plan (STEAP) priorities, from which colleagues could choose an area of focus. This could provide a mechanism for implementing local and university-wide priorities and provide evidence of impact but should not detract from the focus on individual development.
10. Where a direct observation is to take place, the practitioner and facilitator should agree on a suitable session for observation. To gain the maximum benefit, the practitioner 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'.
11. Practitioners and facilitators can draw on existing guidance/frameworks to help identify and agree potential prompts for dialogue. These might include, but are not limited to, the following examples:

Focus of 'teaching conversation'	**Examples of corresponding prompts for dialogue**
Module design	Self-supporting resources for ABC curriculum design
Diversifying and decolonising your reading list	Inclusive and Accessible Reading Lists
Reflect on your role as a PhD supervisor [N.B. Any overarching themes relating to reflecting on PhD supervision should be shared with School Directors of Postgraduate Research Studies.]	Good Practice Guide Supervising PhDs and Other Research Degree Programmes
Quality of assessment feedback	7Cs of quality feedback

Management and structure of online learning materials and activities in Blackboard modules	Blackboard Module Review Form

Forming collaborative partnerships

12. Schools/Departments are free to determine how collaborative partnerships between practitioners and facilitators are set up, bearing in mind the focus on individual development. Careful consideration should be given to the potential benefits and disadvantages of different structures in the particular context of the School/Department.
13. The key to successful partnerships is mutual trust and respect. Free choice of reciprocal partnerships (where practitioners and facilitators swap roles) is normally found to work best in terms of creating trust and open discussions and will tend to reinforce personal development more than a system which uses designated facilitators and could be seen as judgmental. The seniority of the facilitator could have a significant impact on the nature and openness of discussions.
14. A local system which encourages a yearly change in practitioner/facilitator partnerships is recommended in order to encourage wide-ranging discussions and facilitate sharing of good practice and fresh perspectives.
15. Schools/Departments are encouraged to explore possibilities for cross-disciplinary partnerships as this can be valuable in terms of focussing 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 partnerships is limited.
16. Some possibilities for collaborative partnerships are:
    - free choice of **reciprocal pairs**
    - **teaching triads** (either self-forming or allocated)
    - **teaching squares** (either self-forming or allocated)
    - relationships built around existing **team-teaching arrangements**: for example, a group of staff who are jointly responsible for designing/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. This could usefully include colleagues from professional student support roles, for example technical staff.
    - **designated facilitators** with whom others can sign up: for example, a colleague with experience/expertise in a particular pedagogic approach (e.g. a University Teaching Fellow).

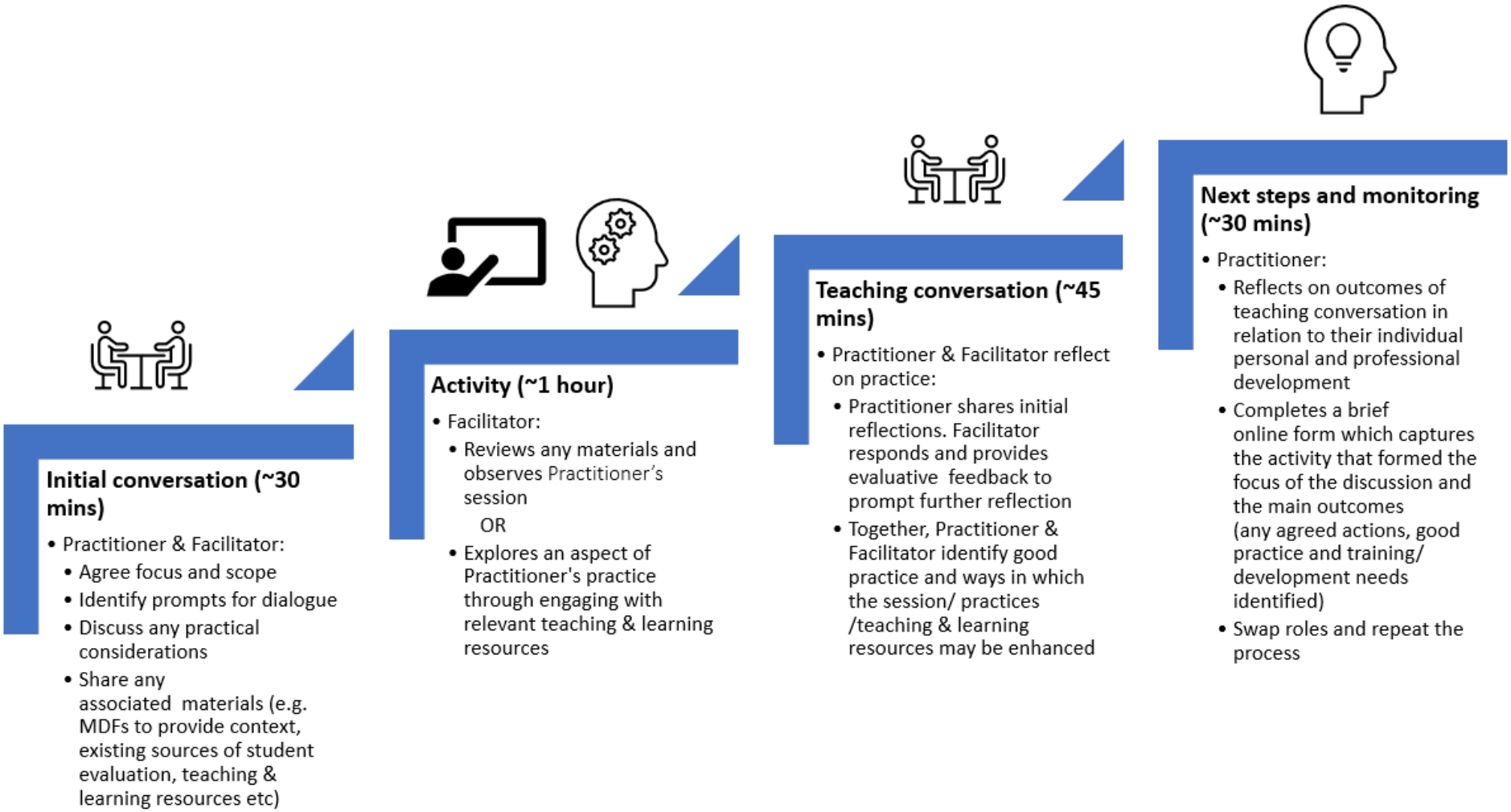
The reflecting on practice process

17. This section outlines three possible models for reflecting on practice with colleagues. This is not intended as a restrictive list of options; as noted above,

Schools/Departments are free to choose a structure/system that meets their needs, within the parameters of the policy.

18. A series of sample questions to prompt reflection/dialogue among facilitators and practitioners during the different stages of reflecting on practice is provided in Appendix 3.

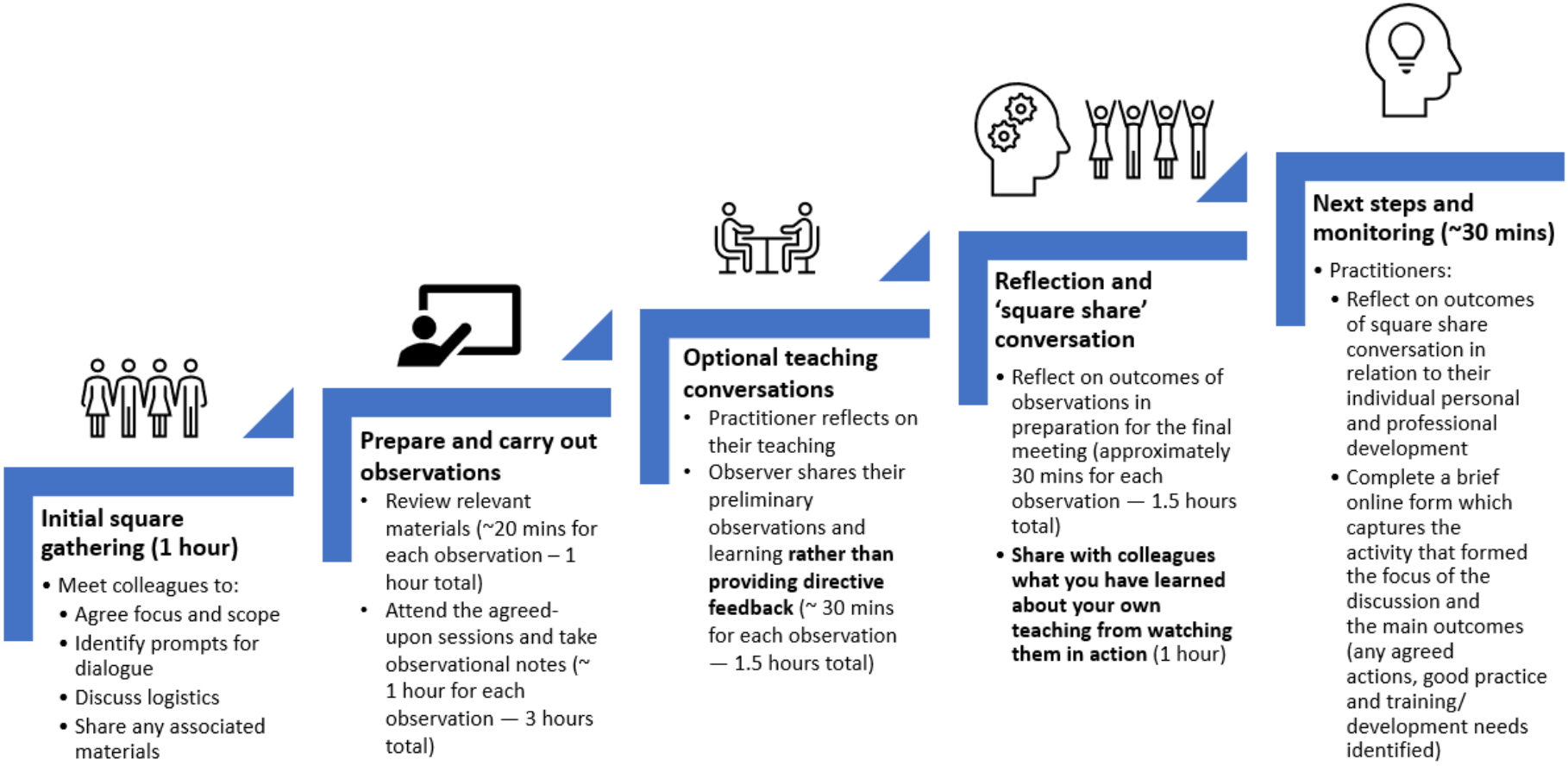
Reciprocal pairs



Teaching squares

In contrast to reciprocal pairs which focus on the giving and receiving of evaluative feedback among pairs of colleagues, Teaching Squares (or Triangles) emphasise self-reflection on what can be learned about one's own teaching through observing colleagues throughout the academic year. Individual colleagues act as both practitioners and facilitators in this process.

Adapted from Berenson, C. (2017)



Mentor-based model

This model aims to further encourage long-term enhancement of teaching skills across the University. It uses self-forming reciprocal pairs or small groups that choose a theme for reflecting on practice; for example, team-based learning or screencasting. The pair/group will contact a colleague within the University who has experience in the particular pedagogic approach chosen[1] and organise a conversation to discuss the theme. It may also be appropriate to observe the colleague incorporate the theme into teaching or to have a subsequent conversation to discuss the theme in more detail. The pair/group will then continue with the reflecting on practice process as described above.

Other sources of evidence

Students

19. As noted in the policy, teaching conversations should include opportunities to discuss and reflect on already existing sources of student evaluation e.g. module evaluation data and/or feedback from Student-Staff Partnership Groups.
20. For direct observations, practitioners might choose to use additional mechanisms to capture the student voice as part of the reflecting on practice process. Brookfield (2017, Chapter 6) outlines several activities for gathering informal feedback from students including the one-minute paper, letters to future students and Critical Incident Questionnaires. These techniques can also serve as a form of light-touch mid-module evaluation, which Schools are required to undertake for all modules on an annual basis (please see the Policy on Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning).
21. Alternatively, practitioners could work in partnership with Student Partners and/or Student Reps to elicit real-time feedback, and support for, the design and planning of teaching, learning and assessment (please see Guidance for working in partnership with students).
22. In addition to what students say, it may also be helpful to reflect on what students do by drawing on student performance, attendance and engagement data.

Pedagogic literature

23. Teaching theory and published findings in the pedagogic literature provide a vocabulary for teaching and learning and offer another lens through which to view

[1] The pair/group might wish to refer to the T&L Exchange or to the NTF and UTF webpages to identify a colleague with the relevant experience/expertise.

and make sense of practice. Colleagues can access the pedagogic literature through engagement with external webinars/conferences, journals, and events on CQSD's Teaching & Learning Programme.

Monitoring and next steps

24. Suggested pro-formas for completion by the facilitator are provided as Appendices 1 and 2. They are intended to encourage reflective, explorative and supportive conversations. Use of these pro-formas is entirely optional, and Schools/Departments and colleagues may wish to adapt them for local use.
25. The practitioner must complete a brief online form which captures the activity that formed the focus of the discussion and the main outcomes (any agreed actions, good practice and training/development needs identified). DTLs should duplicate and adapt the Microsoft Form template to their local context.
26. During the Autumn Term, DTLs will complete an online form which provides a short summary of the outcomes and impact of reflecting on practice in their School/Department during the previous academic year.
27. Guidance and support on using Microsoft Forms is available through Microsoft.
28. Through reflecting on their practice with colleagues, practitioners may identify particular training/development needs which could be addressed by engaging with sessions on CQSD's Teaching & Learning Programme. School Management Boards will draw on the outcomes of reflecting on practice to inform School-level T&L training/enhancement activities, and the Sub-Committee on Delivery and Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (DELT) will draw on the outcomes to inform University-level teaching and learning training/enhancement activities.

Further Support

29. Further advice in relation to reflecting on practice with colleagues is available from the Academic Development and Enhancement Team (CQSD-ADE@reading.ac.uk) in CQSD.

References and further information

The following references give more information and ideas on reflecting on practice with colleagues.

Berenson, C (2017) Teaching Squares: Observe and Reflect on Teaching and Learning**.** Available at: https://taylorinstitute.ucalgary.ca/resources/teaching-squares-observe-reflect-on-teaching-learning-article (Accessed: 19/07/2021)

Brookfield, S. D. (2017) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher,* 2nd edition, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Available as an e-book.

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

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

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*, 3rd edition, pp.198-231, New York and London: Routledge. Available as an e-book.

Version control

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Effective from	Next review	Keeper (responsible for policy maintenance and review)
1.0	N/A	N/A	2021-22 academic session	June 2024	CQSD

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Appendix 1: 'Teaching conversation' pro-forma

The purpose of this pro-forma is to encourage reflective, explorative and supportive conversations regarding a specific aspect of practice beyond the direct observation of teaching. It is designed to be **completed by the facilitator** and **retained by the practitioner**.

Use of this pro-forma is optional. Colleagues may adapt it to suit the focus of the 'teaching conversation'. Following a teaching conversation, practitioners should complete the local online reporting form available from their School Director of Teaching and Learning (or their nominee).

Facilitator:		Practitioner:	
Focus of teaching conversation:		Date:	
Programme/ Module:		Length of session or approximate hours of student effort required:	
Level of students:		Number of Students:	

Feedback on topics specifically requested by the practitioner
Other feedback
Agreed actions

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Please comment on strengths and areas for enhancement. You will need to agree the most relevant areas for comment as contexts will vary.

Prompts*	Strengths	Areas for enhancement

*Practitioners and facilitators can draw on existing guidance/frameworks to help identify and agree potential prompts for dialogue. Examples of these can be found in the *Guidance on reflecting on practice with colleagues*. You could also draw on any relevant dimensions of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). This may assist practitioners with providing evidence of engagement with the UKPSF for applications via the FLAIR CPD Scheme. Facilitators/practitioners are not required to be familiar with the UKPSF for the purposes of completing this form.

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Appendix 2: Direct observation of teaching pro-forma

The purpose of this pro-forma is to encourage reflective, explorative and supportive conversations about direct observations of teaching. It is designed to be **completed by the facilitator** and **retained by the practitioner**.

Use of this pro-forma is optional. Schools/colleagues may wish to adapt it to suit their context. Following a direct observation of teaching, practitioners should complete the local online reporting form available from their School Director of Teaching and Learning (or their nominee).

The prompts for dialogue below are referenced against the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). This is to assist practitioners with providing evidence of engagement with the UKPSF for applications via the FLAIR CPD Scheme. Facilitators/practitioners are not required to be familiar with the UKPSF for the purposes of completing this form.

Facilitator:		Practitioner:	
Observation date:		Module:	
Length and type of session:		Length of observation:	
Level of students:		Number of Students:	

Feedback on topics specifically requested by the practitioner
Other feedback
Agreed actions

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Please comment on strengths and areas for enhancement, particularly in relation to the learning outcomes.

Prompts	Strengths	Areas for enhancement
Introducing the session to the students (Evidencing UKPSF A1)		
Planning, structure and organisation (Evidencing UKPSF A1, K3)		
Content (Evidencing UKPSF A2, K1)		
Methods and approaches (Evidencing UKPSF A2, K2)		
Delivery and pace (Evidencing UKPSF A2, A4)		
Student participation and engagement in learning (Evidencing UKPSF A4, V2)		
Use of learning environment (Evidencing UKPSF A4)		
Equality of opportunity for individual learners and diverse learning communities (Evidencing UKPSF V1, V2)		

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Assessment and Evaluation (Evidencing UKPSF A3, K5 A5)		

Reflecting on practice with colleagues

Appendix 3: Sample questions to prompt dialogue/reflection

Initial conversations Purpose: set the scene, focus the facilitator and discuss practicalities	**Activity (observation / exploring an aspect of practice)** Purpose: focus the facilitator, guide the activity, encourage a student-focussed approach	**Teaching conversations** Purpose: reflecting on practice (also see Reflective Practice Models from University College Dublin)
What are the aims for this session/module? How does this relate to the rest of the module/programme?	Is it clear to the students how this session/activity relates to previous and future work?	How successful was the session/activity/materials in relation to student learning?
Why do students take this module?	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?	What was effective and why?
What do you want students to achieve? What are the learning outcomes?	Are there opportunities for students to actively participate and engage with the session/activity/materials?	What was less effective and why?
How many students are taking the module?	What is the pedagogic rationale for the use of a particular approach and is it appropriate?	What would you do differently next time?
Who are your students?	What evidence is there that formative assessment is used to	

	enhance student learning?	
Have you taught this session/module before? Are you trying anything new? Is there anything that has been problematic in the past?	What opportunities are there for students to internalise the assessment criteria?	
Why are you doing things this way, on what educational basis or previous experience is your practice based?	What evidence is there that individual learners and diverse learning communities are catered for?	
Is there anything in particular you would like feedback on?	Are there opportunities for the students to think, clarify their understanding and provide feed-back? How is this handled?	
If the session is in a traditional classroom setting, where will the facilitator sit? Is it appropriate to wander around and speak to students?		
Will the facilitator participate in the session?		
How will the observation be explained to students?		
How will the student voice be incorporated into the process?		
How will the facilitator record information? Will the facilitator use the optional pro-formas?		
Are there any existing guidance/frameworks to help identify and agree		

potential prompts for dialogue?		
When will you meet to reflect after the observation /exploration of learning materials?		