

## Peer Review of Teaching Guidance 2013

*“Good talk about good teaching can take many forms and involve many conversation partners- and it can transform teaching and learning. But it will happen only if leaders expect it, invite it, and provide hospitable space for the conversation to occur. “ Palmer (1998, 160).*

### Background

All staff engaged in teaching activities are expected to participate in the peer review process. Peer review of teaching is an established quality enhancement process at Keele University. Peer review is used for the evaluation of teaching and adapts the long-standing academic tradition of peer review of research activities to the activities of higher education teaching. Its predecessor process, peer observation of teaching, has an event, delivered by one colleague and witnessed by at least one other, as its central point of evidence to inform collegiate dialogue about teaching. Peer review includes peer observation but also allows for collegiate discussion on a wider range of teaching practices and artefacts, for example, analysis of curriculum design, online learning activities, tutorials and supervisions, student evaluations, student support and guidance work.

The University is committed to a collaborative model (see Table 1) of peer review as a mechanism to encourage scholarly dialogue and development of individual, team and School-level teaching practices. The University expects each School to develop and operate a peer review scheme annually for all teaching staff. In December 2012, a consultant from the Higher Education Academy led a review of the current peer review processes in Schools. This revised guidance is based on the findings of that work which used appreciative inquiry to explore what elements of peer review were working well and what needed to be improved.

Schools are requested to consider this guidance when devising and developing their annual schemes of peer review. The guidance has been drafted to adhere with the key principles underpinning the University's quality and standards policy. It has also been developed to encourage explicit links between peer review and the UK Professional Standards Framework for learning and teaching (available at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/UKPSF>). In keeping with a scholarly approach to peer review, a number of key articles and works have been listed as resources for those developing peer review schemes locally. A further resource containing case study examples of practice and guidance templates for use and adoption will be available in due course.

| Characteristic                              | Evaluation Model  | Developmental Model   | Collaborative Model   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Who does it to whom?<br>(peer relationship) | Senior staff, or chosen 'evaluators' or 'auditors' review other staff.                              | Educational developers observe/review practitioners; or expert teachers observe others in the department. | Teachers observe each other.  |
| Purpose                                     | Identify under-performance, confirm probation, appraisal, promotion, quality assurance, assessment. | Demonstrate competency/ improve teaching competencies.  | Improving teaching through dialogue; self and mutual reflection.        |
| Outcome                                     | Report/judgement.   | Report/ action plan for improvement.  | Analysis, reflection, discussion, wider experience of teaching methods. |
| Status of evidence                          | Authority.  | Expert diagnosis.   | Peer shared perceptions.  |
| Relationship of observer to observee        | Power hierarchy.  | Expert/ learner.  | Equality/ mutuality.  |
| Confidentiality                             | Between manager, observer and staff observed.   | Between observer and the observed, might include manager.   | Between observer and the observed- could be shared with a learning set. |
| Inclusion                                   | Selected staff.   | Selected/ sample.   | All involved in supporting student learning.                            |
| Judgement                                   | Pass/fail, score, quality assessment, worthy/unworthy.  | How to improve, pass/fail.  | Non-judgemental, reflective feedback.                                   |
| What is observed?                           | Teaching performance.   | Teaching performance, class, learning materials.  | Teaching performance, class, learning materials.                        |
| Who benefits?                               | Institution.  | The observed.   | Mutual between peers.   |
| Conditions for success                      | Effective management.   | Respected 'developers'.   | A culture in which teaching is valued and discussed.                    |
| Risks                                       | Alienation, lack of co-operation, opposition.   | No shared ownership, lack of impact.  | Complacency, conservatism, unfocused.                                   |

**Table 1** Models of Peer Review of Teaching. From Gosling (2005: 14).

## Shared Principles of Peer Review Schemes at Keele

The ultimate intention of all peer review schemes at Keele is to allow teaching staff to explore and develop their understanding of student learning and to improve the student experience of study at Keele. Peer review is thus a quality enhancement mechanism that contributes to raising the profile of learning and teaching quality and scholarship. For professional development purposes, foci for review and dialogue can be usefully aligned to relevant aspects of the UK Professional Standards Framework (Appendix 1).

The process of peer review is predicated on the following shared principles:

*Individual* - Peer review is a constructive, developmental process with a focus on individuals' personal and professional development and encourages peer discussion and reflective practice. Peer review is independent of formal appraisal and probation processes but individuals may wish to use peer review outcomes in SPRE discussions focused on teaching development.

*Collegiate*- Peer review is a mechanism to encourage openness and sharing amongst staff and to raise awareness of diverse pedagogies and approaches to teaching. It provides a forum for professional development conversations between peers.

*School/ Institutional* –The School role in peer review is to extend the value and impact of individual professional teaching conversations between peers by encouraging discussion on the purposes and outcomes of peer review and setting local, shared foci for peer review and developing the process that will be implemented in the School. This may often be done in response to external data, such as student survey outcomes (NSS, PTES, PRES), external examiner comments or focusing on a particular value, area of activity or knowledge from the UK Professional Standards Framework.

Traditionally, reviewers provide comment and feedback to reviewees on the reviewee's teaching practice. There is much evidence that the reviewer often feels they have learned a considerable amount from engaging in peer review. Changing the emphasis such that a reviewer observes another's practice and this stimulates reflective dialogue on *their* professional learning and development is permitted as a School-based approach within these guidelines.

## The roles of Reviewees and Reviewers

All<sup>1</sup> individuals that teach students at Keele irrespective of whether they are part-time, full-time or sessional staff and including postgraduate researchers, are expected to be:

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<sup>1</sup> The only exception to this is those staff and postgraduate students that are studying on the first module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, EDU-40086 Teaching Reflectively in

- willing to take part in the School's peer review process annually as both a peer reviewer and a reviewee.
- willing to contribute to the development of peer review as a process of scholarly dialogue to improve student learning and the student experience in their School.
- Sensitive to the expectation of confidentiality of the discussions between reviewer and reviewee and to agree on any more widely shared information, for example, good practice examples and personal learning gains.

Reviewees are additionally expected to:

Arrange a four-phase process of review: an initial conversation to determine the focus, structure, timing of the review event; a review event; and a post-event conversation. The conversation should inform the content of a short commentary including action points for professional development and any agreed good practice or feedback to share forward to the School. Finally, the fourth phase is to report the completion of the peer review process to the School and to share any emerging good practice and feedback on the process.

To ensure that students are fully informed of the peer review process, and that where appropriate, permission is sought from the student(s).

### **The School's Role**

To identify a named individual who will take responsibility for the operation of the peer review scheme each academic year.

To consult and agree on the School's peer review scheme each academic year.

To ensure all teaching staff are able to access summary information on the School's agreed peer review scheme, including any forms or other documents, they may be expected to use.

To ensure students are informed of the use of peer review within the School through appropriate channels, e.g. noticeboards, STaRS, SSLCs.

To maintain summary records of all staff with teaching responsibilities in a given academic year, including those exempt from involvement in the School peer review scheme (by attendance on EDU-40086), to record that a review has taken place and to use these data to calculate participation rates.

To actively encourage and invite participation in peer review annually. Schools are not directed to ensure all staff in all years take part in peer review. However they are expected to encourage and monitor participation rates and ensure all staff can take part in the process to ensure that no

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Higher Education, which involves a series of expectations of classroom observations as part of the programme of study.

individuals or groups are excluded on the basis of contract, teaching load, experience, or other factors.

To feed forward a short summary report outlining the Schools' peer review scheme features (key features, good practice and outcomes, including participation rate), to the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee.

### **The University's Role**

To support peer review as a learning and development enterprise for individuals and Schools, by providing written guidance, examples of practice, training and support for individuals and Schools in the practice and philosophy of peer review.

To provide the opportunity for Schools to share their practice in the conduct of peer review through Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees.

### **Selected Resources and Published Work on Peer Review of Teaching**

Gosling, D (2005) Peer Observation of Teaching. SEDA Paper 118. London: Staff and Educational Development Association.

Gosling, D and Mason O'Connor, K (2009) Beyond the Peer Observation of Teaching. SEDA Paper 124. London: Staff and Educational Development Association.

Harris, K-L, Farrell, K, Bell, M, Devlin, M and James R (2008) Peer review of teaching in Australian Higher Education. A handbook to support institutions in developing and embedding effective policies and practices. Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Australian Learning and Teaching Council. Last accessed 14/07/13

[http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/farrell\\_docs/PeerReviewHandbook\\_eVersion.pdf](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/people/farrell_docs/PeerReviewHandbook_eVersion.pdf)

Kell, C and Annett, S (2009) Peer review of teaching embedded practice or policy holding complacency? Innovations in Teaching and Learning International 46,1, 61-70.

Lomas, L and Nicholls, G (2005) Enhancing teaching quality through peer review of learning and teaching. Quality in Higher Education 11(2) 137-149.

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 21 (3) 299-315.

UK Professional Standards Framework (2011) Higher Education Academy; available to download at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/UKPSF>, site accessed 07/10/13

*Quotation taken from, Palmer, P (1998) The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life. San Francisco, Jossey Bass.*

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