

Peer Observation of Teaching

The University of Sussex recognizes the value and importance of peer observation of teaching as an activity that is both collegial and developmental. It is important both for enhancing the status of teaching and learning and for strengthening quality assurance processes. It is the University's policy that all departments (and interdisciplinary groups) must engage annually in peer observation of teaching.

1. The objectives of peer observation of teaching at Sussex are to:

- foster discussion and dissemination of best practice
- help ensure that the University is providing a high quality educational experience for its students
- encourage all staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching
- enhance the importance attached to the quality of teaching
- help inform both personal and departmental staff development planning
- identify any weaknesses and put in place an action plan to remedy them
- help staff prepare for a periodic or external review.

2. The procedures for peer observation of teaching are that:

2.1 Peer observation is organized and managed by departments (or interdisciplinary groups) with a named individual (the head of department or her/his nominee) responsible for the process.

2.2 Each department should engage in peer observation each academic year, and each member of full-time academic faculty is expected to participate at least every other year.

2.3 Other members of teaching staff (part-time staff or associate tutors for example) should be invited to participate in peer observation. At least some staff in these categories should be observed each year.

2.4 The department should ensure that the full range of teaching methods deployed (lecture, seminar, laboratory etc) are sampled during the two-year period.

2.5 Peer observation is a developmental and collegial exercise, and is not to be considered as a part of appraisal or review, although any member of faculty may choose to include evidence from a teaching observation in their own submissions for appraisal or career advancement.

2.6 Training for peer observation will be provided.

2.7 There are a number of well founded peer observation schemes, which have been developed both internally and externally, which a department (or interdisciplinary group) may choose to adopt or adapt. Advice on such schemes is available from the TLDU. Peer observation schemes should, however, always enable the following seven stages of an annual process to be carried out:

- Departmental (or interdisciplinary group) planning for peer observation
- Observer and observee holding pre-session meeting
- Teaching session(s) and report
- Observer and observee holding feedback meeting
- Production of individual action plans
- Departmental (or interdisciplinary group) discussion, summary and group action plan
- Staff development (for individual and for department) undertaken and evaluated.

2.8 A variety of forms for recording peer observation sessions - including ones developed internally - are available from the TLDU. Departments are encouraged to develop particular versions appropriate to their needs. All peer observation records should include three sections:

- Section 1: observation record
- Section 2: individual action plan
- Section 3: summary to be sent to the peer observation organizer within the department, to inform the group's discussion of teaching and learning

Sections 1 and 2 are confidential to the observer and observee, and remain the property of the observee.

2.9 It is the responsibility of the department's peer observation organizer to ensure that the department or group discusses the results of each year's scheme and identifies developmental issues to be incorporated in departmental staff development plans and/or and discussed with TLDU or the SDU.

2.10 Departments should produce a short report on peer observation. This should be considered concurrently with their annual monitoring reports. The report should confirm that the process has been completed , include numbers of staff observed and identify whether this is consistent with the departmental plan. It should also note any general issues about the process itself; identify both good practice for dissemination and any developmental needs.

2.11 It is the responsibility of the Schools to ensure that this policy is implemented at departmental level and to consider the departmental reports.

3. Supporting materials

3.1 A set of peer observation forms, developed by academic faculty at Sussex follows and can be accessed at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/tldu/ideas/profdev/pot>

3.2 Further advice and support can be obtained from TLDU.

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