

University Centre Colchester

Peer Observation, Teaching Review and Learning Walk Policy

Version: 5.0
Updated: September 2021
Review Date: August 2022

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 A lesson/session observation is the process of colleagues observing each other in their teaching, with the overall aim of improving pedagogical practice, and thus the student experience. It has become common practice to engage with lesson/session observations through both formal and informal structures such as learning walks, peer observations and teaching reviews. These form part of a strategic institutional approach to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.
- 1.2 When the main focus of peer observation is on helping colleagues develop their teaching, the process is generally undertaken as a reciprocal exercise, with staff observing each other, sharing their insights and providing mutual support¹.
- 1.3 The traditional view of the process also includes an assumption that colleagues can learn effectively from each other's considered and constructive feedback about observed teaching. Furthermore, evidence is increasingly emerging that learning from watching a colleague teach can be just as beneficial as, if not more than, receiving observer feedback, even when that feedback is well constructed. The benefit to the reviewer from watching a colleague teach can explicitly enhance a tutor's self-confidence through observational learning or 'vicarious experience'².

¹ Bell, M. (2005). Peer observation partnerships in higher education. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc., Milperra, NSW.

² Hendry, Graham D. and Oliver, Gary R., Seeing is Believing: The Benefits of Peer Observation, Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 9(1), 2012.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol9/iss1/7>

2. Categories of Teaching Observations

2.1 University Centre Colchester promotes the notion of observed, and observing, teaching on three levels: an informal Learning Walk, a documented collaborative Peer Observation, and a formal Teaching Review. The organisation views the difference between these as follows:

Learning Walk

A Learning Walk is an informal quality tool, aimed at enabling the observer (usually a Head or Assistant Head of School) to sample the student experience.

Learning Walks can occur at any point during the academic year. They are neither scheduled nor announced.

Peer Observation

A Peer Observation is a reciprocal, collegiate observation in which both parties identify best practice in each other's work, and (where appropriate) make recommendations aimed at improving the student experience. Peer Observations are formally scheduled activities. For further information, please see item 4.2 of this policy.

Teaching Review

A Teaching Review is a line management tool for documenting the quality and effectiveness of a staff member's practice. It informs the Check In Conversation process. Teaching reviews are formally scheduled activities. For further information, please see item 4.2 of this policy.

2.2 The observations of a Learning Walk do not normally inform the Check In Conversation, but may result in the scheduling of a Teaching Review, if required.

2.3 The resulting documentation from a Peer Observation may be referred to by a line manager as part of a Teaching Review, or Check In Conversation. Staff can also refer to peer feedback as part of any professional development activities, such as studying for a PGCE or supporting an HEA Fellowship application.

3. Purpose of the Policy

- 3.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the main characteristics of the University Centre Colchester lesson/session observation system. The policy applies to all UCC teaching staff. Permanent staff are required to participate in a Peer Observation one year, and a Teaching Review the next. Ideally, this establishes a two-year cycle of documented reflective practice.
- 3.2 Sessional staff receive a mandatory Teaching Review once every two years, but may elect to be part of the Peer Observation system.
- 3.3 The spirit of lesson/session observations is to monitor and improve the standard of teaching, learning and assessment in UCC, and to enable staff to engage in constructive and collegiate dialogue about pedagogical practice. It also enables the institution to document an ongoing engagement with reflective practice across all Schools.
- 3.4 It is a strategic aim of Colchester Institute to have all members of the University Centre Colchester teaching staff formally recognised by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the context of the Professional Standards Framework (see: appendix 2) as having either descriptor 1³ or descriptor 2⁴ status, with all core staff and course leaders holding at least descriptor 2 status.
- 3.5 The present policy supports the Colchester Institute's and UCC's strategic planning documents 2017-2020 by aiming to deliver excellence in teaching, learning and assessment in all aspects of the student experience.

³ Descriptor 1 status is aimed at a typical individual who is a new staff member to teaching but can demonstrate an understanding of specific aspects of effective teaching, learning support methods and student learning. In addition the holder of D1 status can receive the title of Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

⁴ Descriptor 2 status is aimed at a typical individual who holds substantive teaching and supporting learning roles and can demonstrate a broad understanding of effective approaches to teaching and learning support as key contributions to high quality student learning. In addition the holder of D2 status can receive the title of Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

4. The Process

The process is intended to provide a collegiate yet developmental approach whereby UCC teaching staff are supported to improve their teaching, learning and assessment practice with the help of observers.

4.1 Organisation and timetabling

At the start of the academic year the Head of School confirms the expected teaching teams for their areas. UCC Academic Services is responsible for setting up a central register of all expected observations for the academic year, and of when peer observations are due to be completed, pairing staff, and setting deadlines for completion.

Heads of School are then responsible for monitoring the scheduling of observations within their teaching teams.

From the 2020/21 academic year onwards an observed session can be either a traditional face to face session, or can be a live session delivered on-line.

4.2 Undertaking the Peer Observation/Teaching Review

The reviewers complete and exchange the first page of the Observation & Teaching review form (see: appendix 2). Once both observations have taken place, both members of staff meet to reflect on the lessons/sessions observed and agree the information required for the completion of the remainder of the form. The completed forms are then forwarded to the Head of School for confirmation and referenced in the individuals' Check In Conversations. A copy should also be forwarded to the Senior Academic Services Officer in UCC Academic Services for monitoring purposes.

All peer reviews must take place in Semester One. Teaching Reviews may be scheduled for Semester One or Semester Two.

4.3 Best practice and monitoring

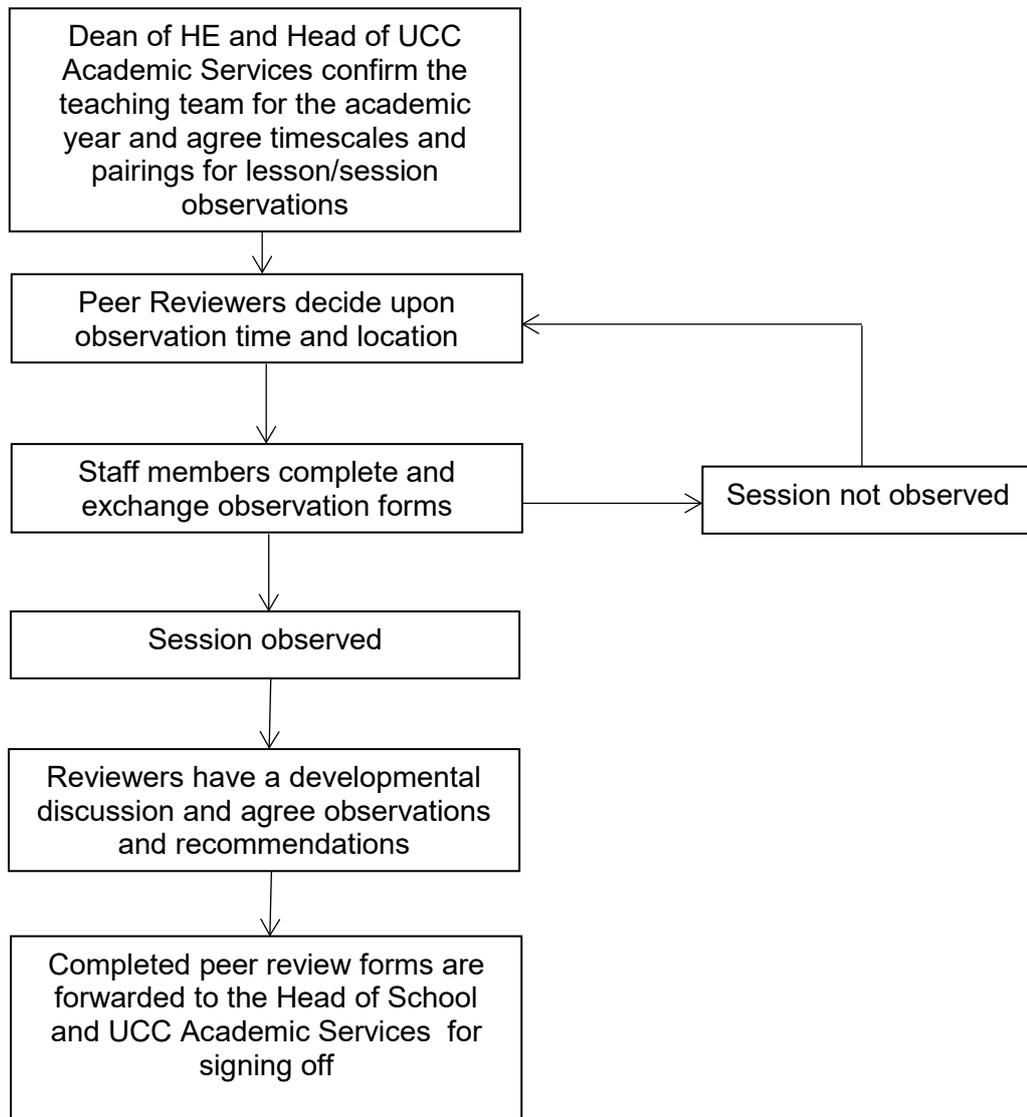
Heads of School are required to identify best practice, which is to be shared across the UCC community, utilising Learning & Teaching Forums and Committee meetings to disseminate such recommendations.

4.4 UCC Academic Services will monitor the completion of the lesson/session observation process throughout the academic year and provide verbal reports to UCC Learning & Teaching Committee and a verbal headline summary at UCC Academic Board.

5. The Time Scale

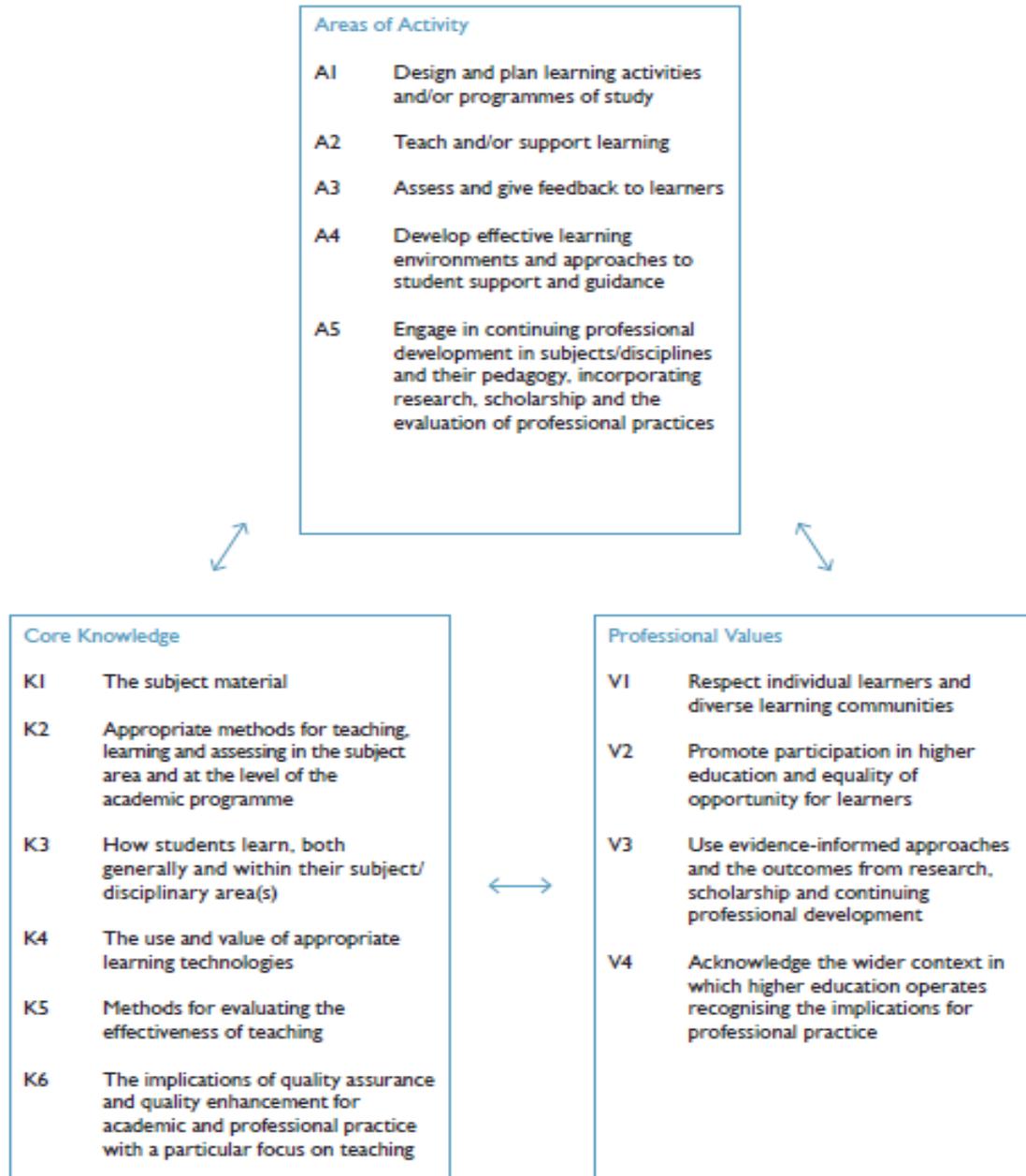
5.1 All Peer Reviews will take place in Semester One (Semester One or Two for Teaching Reviews) within a time frame agreed by the Head of School in order to cause as minimal disruption as possible to the course teams and the students. Staff who have not yet taken part in the lesson/session observation process should be brought to the attention of the Dean of Higher Education, along with scheduled dates for a planned observation. Heads of Schools are responsible for ensuring that all eligible teaching staff are engaged with the process.

Figure 1: Flow chart to demonstrate the Peer Review Process



Appendix 1 - Higher Education Academy (HEA) UK Professional Standards Frameworks

Dimensions of the Framework



Appendix 2 - Peer Observation and Teaching Review Form

PEER OBSERVATION AND TEACHING REVIEW FORM	
Academic Year	2021/22
Lecturer	
Observer	
Date, Time, Room	
Course, Module	
Focus/Content/Aim of session	
How I intend to achieve this	
What I hope to gain from the review	

Points for Discussion	
Observer Points raised in the dialogue	
Observer Insights gained from the dialogue	
Lecturer Insights gained from the dialogue	
What HEA standards have you observed during this session (see: Appendix 1)	Areas of Activity (A1-A5)
	A1 A2 A3 A4 A5
	Core Knowledge (K1-K6)
	K1 K2 K3 K4 K5 K6
Session strengths for sharing at L&T forums and committee meetings	Professional Values (V1-V4)
	V1 V2 V3 V4
Main action points for Development	1. Specific area to be developed
	2. Specific area to be developed
	3. Specific area to be developed

Signed Observer: _____

Date: _____

Signed Lecturer: _____

Date: _____

When completed please send a copy of this form to both your Head of School at UCC and to the Senior Academic Services Officer