



# **University of Plymouth Peer Review Scheme Guidelines**

January 2005

EDaLT  
1/1/2005



## University of Plymouth Peer Review Scheme Guidelines

January 2005

### **Introduction**

Peer review is an integral part of the University of Plymouth's approach to teaching quality enhancement. The purpose of peer review is to enable teachers to gain feedback from colleagues as part of the process of reflection on teaching performance. Teaching is defined here in the broadest sense and incorporates any activities which support student learning and assessment.

These guidelines describe the essential elements of the scheme. Schools devise the detailed procedures that reflect particular disciplinary traditions, procedures and approaches to teaching.

### **Performance management and peer review**

Please note these guidelines do not incorporate procedures for observations/reviews which are triggered by poor performance. In these circumstances separate procedures are required, which are best considered in a policy relating specifically to performance management.

### **The elements of the scheme**

#### **Institutional minimum requirements**

- All lecturers are reviewed once a year (new lecturers are observed/ reviewed by three different people during their PGCert (LTHE) course);
- A record of each annual review (date and name of reviewer; the nature of the review) is kept on a standard form in a central location in the school/department where it is accessible to the Head of School and programme leader(s);
- Any identified professional development needs and evidence of effective practice are recorded on a standard form and should be introduced into the appraisal process by the appraisee.

#### **Faculty processes**

Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees receive annual reports from Schools on their review processes and outcomes. This ensures that

- the peer review scheme is consistently applied;
- the quality enhancement opportunities emerging from the process are widely discussed and disseminated.

## School processes

Schools produce detailed guidance on the operation of the peer review scheme to include:

- the extent to which peer review will apply to different types of teachers (i.e. should you include all part time tutors, visiting speakers and graduate teaching assistants?);
- who will undertake reviews (e.g. how should reviewers be selected?; should the process involve external reviewers?);
- how reviews will be undertaken (i.e. how will peers work together to maximise the effectiveness of the process?; what will the feedback process be?);
- the nature of the records that will be kept centrally (Schools should adopt the standard form provided with these guidelines or devise an alternative);
- where these records will be kept and who is responsible for keeping and monitoring the records;
- how the qualitative outcomes of peer review will be recorded and fed into the appraisal process (Schools should adopt the standard form provided with these guidelines or devise an alternative);
- how the aggregate information about peer review will be used to monitor/ evaluate teaching quality (e.g. its contribution to the annual programme monitoring process);
- how the aggregate information will feed into enhancement activities and staff development plans.

## Teaching Groups

Teaching groups negotiate the details of the scheme. This encourages them to take ownership and ensures that peer review is effectively aligned with the developmental needs of groups. For example, in any one year a group may wish to adopt a strategic focus on a particular aspect of teaching that has arisen through monitoring or student feedback. The details decided by the group include:

- the types of teaching activities that will be reviewed/observed each year;
- the people who will undertake the reviews each year;
- the timetable for review;
- how to share the outcomes of the review.

## Facilitating successful peer review

Peer review works most successfully when

- teaching groups discuss the process. For example, groups might discuss past experiences of peer review; whether this has boosted confidence, been a good use of time and resulted in achievable actions.
- there is a sense of ownership of the process.
- there is a well defined 'review etiquette'. \*
- the observer has an induction into the process of observing and giving feedback. \*

In many institutions teaching groups facilitate the professional development activities that arise from peer review and are called **teaching development**

*Approved Peer Review Scheme Guidelines: L&T Committee January 2005.  
Further information from EDaLT ([EDaLT@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:EDaLT@plymouth.ac.uk))*

**groups.** This is an effective way of taking the outcomes of peer review forward and teaching groups who would like to consider adopting this approach are encouraged to contact EDALT for details and support. \*

\* Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT) provides supportive materials, can undertake training for peer reviewers and teaching development groups and has trained staff who can act as peer reviewers on request.

## Formal Record of Peer Review



This form should be signed by both the reviewer and the person being reviewed and returned to

\_\_\_\_\_ *(the School should complete the instructions here)*

Person reviewed	Reviewer	Date

What type of teaching activity has been reviewed?

Please sign this form and send a copy to the appropriate School office as a record of peer review. It is important to keep a copy for your own records.

Person reviewed

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal Record of Peer Review



This form is a personal summary of the issues discussed during the review and should contribute to your next appraisal. This summary may be linked to more comprehensive observation notes (see supporting notes for peer review scheme).

**1. Any professional development needs that have been discussed with your reviewer. You may wish to use this in your appraisal.**

**2. Any examples of effective practice that could be shared more widely with colleagues.**

# Supporting notes for Peer Review Scheme



"Teaching, like research, should be peer reviewed"

(Roberts, 2007)

## What is meant by peer review of teaching?

The purpose of peer review is to enable you to gain feedback from your colleagues on your teaching or learning support activities. It is widely used to ensure that staff support each other in evaluating their teaching. Through peer review the expectation is that staff will act as professional colleagues to each other in relation to teaching, just as they do in research.

In 2005 the University published its peer review guidelines; these are a development of the well established 1993 guidelines on teaching observation. In the new guidelines 'teaching' has been defined in the broadest sense to incorporate any activities which support student learning and assessment. Central to peer review is critical reflection:

*"What distinguishes good teachers from adequate ones is not so much any particular method they use as their ability to adjust... they are reflective about their teaching and can point to a variety of sources of evidence to back up their insights"*  
(Gibbs 1998).

## Why is peer review important in Higher Education?

### Student expectations

- Students are now paying for their education and are asking demanding questions about teaching quality.
- We need to adopt the same critical and evaluative stance about our work that we expect of our students in their work.

### Personal professional development

- Finding opportunities and time to reflect on, develop and improve our own practice can sometimes be difficult. However, these processes can be encouraged through agreed peer review of teaching in a non-threatening atmosphere.

### Institutional commitment

- The University's Learning and Teaching strategy refers to quality enhancement through peer review.

### External requirements

- The Quality Assurance Agency has signalled its interest in internal peer review processes. If we have rigorous internal processes, there should be no external 'observation' during audit visits.

## Interpreting the Peer Review Guidelines

### **The guidelines say... the University has these minimum requirements**

- All lecturers are reviewed once a year (new lecturers are observed/ reviewed by three different people during their PGCert (LTHE) course);
- A record of each annual review (date and name of reviewer; the nature of the review) is kept on a standard form in a central location in the school/department where it is accessible to the Head of School and programme leader(s);
- Any identified professional development needs and evidence of effective practice are recorded on a standard form and should be introduced into the appraisal process by the appraisee.

### **Interpreting what this means in practice...**

These are the basic requirements for all lecturers and this includes others supporting learning. However, there are additional reasons why teaching may be reviewed e.g. for promotion, probation, preparation for external audit or teaching accreditation (eg LTHE course). In these cases clearly defined procedures will be discussed with colleagues before the review occurs. This is not the same as the peer review process.

### **The guidelines say...the Faculty is responsible for assuring the quality of the peer review process**

Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees receive annual reports from Schools on their peer review processes and outcomes. This ensures that

- the peer review scheme is consistently applied;
- the quality enhancement opportunities emerging from the process are widely discussed and disseminated.

### **Interpreting what this means in practice...**

Learning and Teaching Committees will need to establish a timetable for receiving feedback from the Schools. This might be aligned with the annual programme monitoring process and could be achieved by incorporating an additional question in the programme monitoring form.

### **The guidelines say... Schools take responsibility for the operational details of peer review...**

School guidance on the operation of the peer review scheme should state:

- the extent to which peer review will apply to different types of teachers (i.e. should you include all part time tutors, visiting speakers and graduate teaching assistants?);
- who will undertake reviews (e.g. how should reviewers be selected?; should the process involve external reviewers?);
- how reviews will be undertaken (i.e. how will peers work together to maximise the effectiveness of the process?; what will the feedback process be?);
- the nature of the records that will be kept centrally (Schools should adopt the standard form provided or devise an alternative);



- where these records will be kept and who is responsible for keeping and monitoring the records;
- how the qualitative outcomes of peer review will be recorded and fed into the appraisal process (Schools should adopt the standard form provided or devise an alternative);
- how the aggregate information about peer review will be used to monitor/ evaluate teaching quality (e.g. its contribution to the annual programme monitoring process);
- how the aggregate information will feed into enhancement activities and staff development plans.

#### **Interpreting what this means in practice...**

The basic protocols need to be agreed by School Management teams. Guidance notes which set deadlines and address the issues mentioned above should be published for teaching groups. While it is important that peer review is completed each year, the processes should be efficient, well organised and not too onerous. It is a good idea to identify an administrator in the School who co-ordinates the process.

#### **The guidelines say...Teaching Groups negotiate the details of the scheme from year to year**

This encourages groups to take ownership of the peer review process and ensures that it is effectively aligned with their developmental needs. The details decided by the teaching group include:

- the types of activities that will be reviewed/observed each year;
- who will undertake these reviews and the protocols involved;
- the timetable for review;
- how to share the outcomes of the review.

#### **Interpreting what this means in practice...**

The definition of a teaching group may need to be clarified. In general it will refer to a self identifying group of colleagues who work closely in support of students who are doing a particular programme. Some teachers will belong to more than one group and, for the purposes of peer review, will need to identify the most appropriate group to work with; this might vary from year to year.

Any element of work may be selected as the focus for review. Groups might decide to be observed presenting a lecture, facilitating small group discussion, giving a tutorial or supervising a professional placement. Equally, assessment activity might be the focus for review, with reviewers providing comments on marking and assessment feedback, whether verbal or written. Examples of the sort of activities you might decide to work on:

- Module feedback shows that seminar presentations given by their peers are not always a good learning experience for students. Tutors work in pairs to observe seminars and subsequently the teaching group pools its experience to devise strategies to enhance the quality and improve the content of student

presentations. In the following year a survey is used to determine whether students report better learning experiences in seminars.

- The Undergraduate Student Perception Questionnaire indicates that students are not happy about the amount and timing of feedback on their assignments. The teaching group decides to focus peer review for the year on evaluating the quality of feedback offered and monitoring the timing of feedback. Working in teams of four, staff support each other in devising feedback forms and evaluating how successful these are.
- External examiners have noted that the distribution of student module scores seems to be skewed so that it is difficult for level three students to achieve first class degrees. Over the year the teaching team undertakes a quantitative analysis of marks awarded; pairs of staff work together to review the marking criteria used for individual assignments at level three and the team brings together the results of this process to revise their grading criteria.
- The teaching group teaches large cohorts (100+ students); increasingly these sessions are taking place in the new lecture theatres in Portland Place. They decide that it would be useful to undertake observations of these lectures with a focus on how well they are using the technology available in the lecture theatres. A session is held for all staff to introduce the range of facilities available, tutors are paired for observations and then the outcomes are pooled in a discussion about making the most of technology in the lecture theatres.
- A group of staff working in central services is responsible for offering staff development opportunities. The group decides to focus on the quality of its questioning techniques. A seminar is held on effective questioning and then pairs of staff observe each others sessions with a focus on those elements that involve question and answer.

Choosing appropriate reviewers can be difficult. You maybe told who you will be working with; alternatively and preferably, you may be involved in selecting a review partner. If so, it is important to choose a reviewer who will offer you the right combination of support and insight. Your choice might reflect the purposes and contexts of the review, and it might vary from year to year. For example

- If you are preparing for an external review, or taking the LTHE course, you might need a person with wide experience of reviewing.
- If you are developing a new course, you might want someone to review you who is a close working colleague who will know the specifics of teaching and curriculum design in your subject area.
- You might want to maximise empathy and support for review at an early stage of a project or career by choosing an observer with the same sort of personal characteristics as yourself – in terms of gender, age or ethnicity, for example.
- If your main aim is to produce some sort of evidence connected with a contract, a promotion, or appraisal you might want to choose someone at an appropriate management level.

## **Some protocols for peer review**

Any activity that is selected for review will involve peers in working alongside each other and commenting on colleagues work. Getting the protocols right is vital.

### **Planning and meeting beforehand**

- Make sure that the reviewer has enough background to understand the context of the review.
- Discuss in advance what aspects their work is the focus of observation. The reviewer may be invited to attend to very specific features of work or the tutor may give the reviewer the freedom to comment on any aspect of the activity.
- Decide whether (and what) to tell any students who might be present.
- Agree on the way the feedback discussion will work (e.g. who will speak first? Is there a preferred way of approaching the positive and negative comments?).
- Jointly decide how the outcomes of the review will be recorded and what will happen to them.

### **Deciding on a reporting process**

Reviewers often use some kind of schedule which is intended to:

- support the gathering of evidence
- structure the post-review discussion.

The type of review will determine the formal record that is kept. Choose one that suits your teaching group's needs; there are a range of published schedules available (see attached peer review form for one example); you can adapt and modify these as you wish.

### **During the review**

If students are present remain unobtrusive and do not get involved in the session unless there has been an agreement about this.

Be mindful of the language used in writing the record:

- Stick to the agreed focus.
- Record particular events, behaviours and talk as concrete examples for investigation that might provide insights about teaching and learning.
- Avoid judgemental statements or interpretations that are not based on evidence available through specific examples.

### **Debriefing and feedback**

Discussion should take place soon after the review. The dialogue in the debriefing will depend on the relationship between the members of staff. It is widely advised that a debriefing is best opened with the tutor's own comments and feelings about the activity. Another piece of popular guidance is that the reviewer should use a 'praise sandwich'; this involves starting with some positive feedback; following with constructive criticism or challenging of practice and ending with encouraging comments. The process is intended to build confidence and to point to possible future action. Throughout it is important to listen attentively and to aim for a fresh and genuine exchange of ideas.

**Confidentiality**

The reviewer should not use the information/record for any purpose without prior agreement. The person being reviewed should be able to use the information from the review in any way considered appropriate eg for appraisal, promotion, teaching awards.

**A Summary Sheet**

A formal summary sheet for School records is provided with the University's guidance on peer review. Please make sure this (or an equivalent) is available in your School office after the review. Keep a copy for yourself. You may like to refer to this and your personal summary of the outcomes during your appraisal interview.

## Need some support?

Details of some further review schedules/teaching observation forms based on the principles in this leaflet are available from EDaLT. Copies are available on the EDaLT Community on the staff portal.

For those who would like some training or support in peer review, EDaLT, in conjunction with the Schools, will organise sessions as appropriate.

In some institutions **teaching development groups** facilitate the professional development activities that arise from peer review. This is an effective way of taking the outcomes of peer review forward and teaching groups who would like to consider adopting this approach are encouraged to contact EDaLT for details and support.

If you have been reviewed and would like support with issues that were raised during your review, you will probably talk first with your teaching groups. Beyond this you should feel able to contact appropriate senior staff in your School. Sympathetic, professional and, if necessary, confidential support is available from colleagues in EDaLT.

### **Contact:**

EDaLT

Rolle Building, fourth floor

87609

Email: EDaLT@plymouth.ac.uk

Brown, Sally et al (1993) Observing teaching: issues and outcomes  
SEDA Paper 79

Gibbs, G. (1998) Teaching in Higher Education. Milton Keynes, The Centre for Higher Education Practice. The Open University

Race P. (2001) The Lecturer's Toolkit. Kogan Page.

Roberts, M. (2007) Peer Review of Teaching: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Improving Student Learning 5.21-5.25. Available online at:

[http://umanitoba.ca/admin/images/UTShandbook\\_Oct07.pdf](http://umanitoba.ca/admin/images/UTShandbook_Oct07.pdf)

### **Internet site**

Quality Assurance Agency <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to acknowledge that this leaflet has been adapted from one originally produced by the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the College of St Mark and St John during my time as its Director.

*Sue Burkill*

*April 2005*

# University of Plymouth Peer Review Form



Please complete this page before the peer review process starts. Share your intentions with your reviewer.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Reviewer:</b>	<b>Venue:</b>
<b>Feedback date:</b>	<b>Time:</b>

**What is the nature of the activity being reviewed?**

**What are the intended outcomes of the review?**

**Which aspects/issues would you like feedback on?**

Peer Review Form
------------------

### Reviewer's Comments

The reviewer should consider each of the areas for which feedback was requested below. The form should be filled in during a discussion between the reviewer and the person being reviewed. The nature of the review will determine the aspects/ issues that might be discussed but they might include:

**The strategic context:** links with policies and nature of the programme.

**Organisation and preparation:** effectiveness of planning; preparation of materials etc.

**Approaches used:** ways of working with learners; structure of activities; uses of technology.

**Practical competences:** communication skills; questioning techniques; administrative skills.

**Evaluation:** ways of reflecting on the activity and changes that might be made in future.

<b>Aspects/issues you wanted feedback on:</b> <i>(please fill these in from page one)</i>	<b>Comments and outcomes of discussion</b>

**Reviewer's Comments (cont)**

<b>Intended outcomes of the review</b> <i>(please fill these in from page one)</i>	<b>Comments and outcomes of discussion</b>

**Reviewer's comments on:**

**Any professional development needs:**

**Any examples of effective practice that could be shared more widely with colleagues:**



**Personal reflection on the review**

Name: ..... Date: .....

**Any professional development needs that have been discussed with your reviewer. You may wish to use this in your appraisal.**

**Any examples of effective practice that could be shared more widely with colleagues.**

**Feedback on the observation process**

*(How useful has it been? How could the process be improved?)*

**Any other comments?**

*(suggestions for future peer review themes?)*