Brief guide for Peer Observer

As the Peer Observer in the process, you must ensure that confidentiality and the creation of a non-judgmental environment is evident; your aim is to encourage the colleague you are observing to reflect on and talk about their teaching. The process should be formative, developmental and allow for personal reflection and exploration of practice. You should discuss the aims of Peer Observation of Teaching at the pre-observation meeting with the Observee. It is also useful to encourage the Observee to raise any issues they may want you to focus on during the observation.

During the Observation

You should refrain from participating in the session you are observing as this may change the focus of the activities undertaken and may reduce your capacity to comment objectively on the teaching processes used. It is also useful to remember that your observation is a snapshot of your colleague’s teaching practice and your feedback should factor this in by allowing the Observee to discuss the processes they used. This can be done at the discussion phase (post-observation).

Some questions you may want to ask yourself during the observation of teaching to help you with your role may include:

- How well does the teaching match the intended learning outcomes?
- Are students invited to participate? How is this done?
- What processes are in place for students to engage with the session?
- Do students receive feedback? How is this done?
- Are students supported to be critical and reflect on their learning?
- Is the session signposted to previous content covered, or online resources and other related material?

Post-Observation

Following the observation, you should engage with the Observee in a reflective feedback discussion at the earliest possible opportunity. Together with the Observee, you can analyse the session you observed and try to look into the question of ‘Why’ instead of only the ‘How’ in relation to teaching methods used.

When giving feedback, you should consider the following:

- Always allow the Observee to talk about their session before you give feedback;
- Allow the Observee to highlight issues and possible solutions first;
- Feedback on its own does not give room for improvement; be specific about what in your view worked well or may need to change. Use evidence based on your practice or how students responded during the session you observed;
- Effective feedback should be focused on information that the Observee can make use of and is based on evidence collected during the observation of their teaching.

Throughout the process, it is important for you to recognise that the Observee has control over all stages of the process. This includes choice on who will observe them, what will be the focus of the observation, which class you will be invited to observe and the type of feedback they would like to receive.

The Observation form used for the observation should be returned to the Observee. As a Peer Observer you don’t need to keep a copy. The Summary Form will need to be returned to the department/school/institute where the Observee is based to show that the process has been completed. Both you and the Observee must sign both forms.

For any questions on peer observation of teaching matters, please contact the Educational Development Division – eddev@liv.ac.uk