Peer Review of Teaching – Policy and procedure

Introduction

1. This policy and procedure outlines how Birkbeck, University of London will conduct peer review of teaching and how the individuals who will be involved in reviews will be identified.

Purpose of Peer Observation

2. The main purpose of engaging in peer review of teaching is to:
   - Enhance ongoing personal practice;
   - Promote reflection on teaching and learning by both the person being observed and the observer;
   - Engage in reflective, constructive and analytical discussion with a peer;
   - Share good practice and allow for ongoing professional development;
   - Enhance new members of staff's teaching practice, and act as a tool for academic development review;
   - Enhance the students' learning experience through the discovery of new ideas for teaching and learning.

3. Module evaluation should be treated as a separate quality assurance process from peer observation which is a tool for development and enhancement of teaching practice rather than evaluating the performance of academics or a module.

4. Peer review will normally involve classroom observation where appropriate; this might include lectures, seminars, workshops etc., alternative methods may also be necessary (for example when teaching is undertaken by virtual methods).

5. Key features of peer review include:
   - The reviewer - a peer - uses a record sheet for note taking during the review;
   - Benefits derive from constructive feedback and self-reflection - this makes post-review discussion vital;
   - If areas for change/improvement are identified, suggestions for how to bring about the change are needed (time to re-plan the session/ module; attendance at a training workshop; observing a more experienced colleague etc.);
   - Confirmation that all discussions between the academic and observer remain confidential.

6. Peer review may take place-
   - As part of continuing professional development;
   - As part of the probationary period: when the academic advisor may review inexperienced lecturers according to School or Faculty guidelines;
   - As part of personal development, where individuals may seek review of their teaching from peers.

7. Reviews should be flexible and not adopt an audit approach.

8. Positive and constructive feedback is encouraged and areas of development or action points may be highlighted.

The Process

Before the observation

9. Frequency of peer observation may be conducted as follows:
   - Any academic staff may request a peer observation session to support personal development;
   - All new teaching staff to be reviewed in their first year of employment at Birkbeck;
   - Selective auditing should take place at the discretion of the staff in Faculties at School level.

10. Staff should be reviewed by an individual nominated by their School. The Head of School may delegate the nomination of reviewers to appropriate individuals within their area.

11. The School should arrange for the observer to have access to the module's Moodle site and provide them with the module specification and/or programme handbook and any other relevant learning materials. Academics and observers should meet to agree the focus of the observation and to discuss the learning outcomes and content of the session being observed.

During the observation

12. The observer should arrive early, be briefly introduced to the class to assure the students they are not being evaluated in any way, and never intervene in any way in the session.

13. The observer should write notes during the meeting, recording their experience, see appendix 2 and appendix 3 for suggested templates.

Following the observation

14. Schools must have a means of recording that peer reviews have taken place. Reviewees are responsible for informing the faculty when observation has been completed.

15. Once the review is carried out (and no later than 2 weeks thereafter) the reviewer's record sheet should be returned to the member of staff being reviewed. The academic and observer should meet to discuss the observation and reflect on any issues or good practice raised.

16. It is the responsibility of the reviewee to reflect on the peer observation report and discuss any areas with their line manager where appropriate.

17. Where there are examples of good practice it is recommended this be flagged and shared with the wider academic committee at Birkbeck to enhance teaching practice College wide.

Policy Review

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Owner:	Quality and Regulations Manager
SLT owner:	DVC Education and Student Experience
Committee oversight:	Education and Student Experience Committee for Academic Board

Appendix 1: Peer Review Process / Timeline

- **Beginning of academic year**: Heads of Schools identify classes to be reviewed in the academic year and schedule these (activity may be delegated to nominated administrative staff at School level)

- **4 weeks prior to visit**: School submits documentation to staff involved in review

- **Visit date**: Review takes place and report form is filled out by observer. Staff member being reviewed may fill out self assessment form

- **2 weeks after visit**: Visit report returned to staff member being reviewed, observer and reviewee meet to discuss comments.

- **2/3 weeks after visit**: Staff member being reviewed confirms to School that review has been completed.

Head of School (or School administrative nominee) to record that peer observation has taken place to assure the College that good practice is taking place. Any good practice identified in the process to be shared more widely with academic community by the Head of School.

Appendix 2: Template for Peer Observation of Teaching

Faculty	**School**
Observer	**Lecturer**
Module	**Level/Status/Year**
Degree Programme	**Mode**
	Full-time, part-time, distance, network etc
Type of Activity	
Lecture ☐	IT Session ☐
Seminar ☐	Discussion Session ☐
Practical ☐	Other ☐
If Other, indicate type of session:	

Date of Observation and Duration	**Venue**	**Number of Students**
Additional Information or Comments		

Appendix 3: Checklist for observation (indicative guide only)

Area of observation	**Observer's comments**
Learning Outcomes	
Was it made clear to the students what they were expected to learn by the end of the session (cognitive, subject-specific, practical, transferable, professional knowledge and skills)?	
Structure	
Was the material well organised, so that the students could follow the structure or sequence adopted? Were key points clearly signposted?	
Level	
Was the class pitched at a level the students could cope with? Was any provision made for those who experienced difficulties?	
Clarity	
Was the class clearly presented? Were explanatory comments readily understood by the students?	
Use of examples	
Were examples or illustrations used whenever helpful to students in grasping key points? Did these examples engage with students' knowledge and interests?	
Handouts and other materials	

Did the lecturer make appropriate use of handouts or other study materials? If so, were these helpful to the students in summarising, amplifying or reinforcing the material in class?	
Audibility	
Could the lecturer be clearly heard, even by students at the back and sides of the room?	
Pace and timing	
Was the material presented at an appropriate speed? Did the lecturer keep to time?	
Interaction	
Did the lecturer find scope for interacting with students e.g. by giving opportunities for questions or comments, or by drawing upon student interest, concerns or experiences?	