

Observation of Learning and Teaching Policy 2022-23

Background

It is our duty as educators to provide our students with a high-quality learning experience through aligning our practice to agreed principles and expectations and by continuously striving to learn and grow as academic professionals. The Observation of Teaching Learning and Teaching Policy (OLT) takes a reflective and developmental approach to observation and seeks to cultivate engagement with the Study Group Teaching, Learning and Assessment Framework and principles of constructive alignment. The introduction of trained Teaching and Learning Champions (T&L Champs) provides a previously untapped quality assurance and source of expertise a whilst maintaining the collegiate peer review culture generated by the 2021-22 Professional Development Review.

This policy does not cover evaluative or management observation. Guidance for this type of observation can be found in Appendix A and relates to HR processes.

Purpose

The purpose of the OLT is as follows:

- To assure ourselves, our university partners and external regulatory bodies such as the UK's QAA, England's QAA, Ireland's QQI, Australia's TEQSA, and Teaching Council Aotearoa New Zealand as to the quality of learning and teaching enjoyed by our students;
- To increase student outcomes by ensuring teaching staff receive high quality guidance from expert practitioners in order to enhance their practice;
- To foster a culture of reflection, pedagogical scholarship and continuous enhancement in relation to the quality of learning and teaching;
- To build a picture of learning and teaching quality across the network, both in terms of effective and innovative practice and areas to be developed;
- To enable a network-level development strategy to be produced

Study Group aligns with the Higher Education Academy's (HEA 2006) reasons why academics should be observed and observe teaching:

- To enhance the importance attached to quality of teaching.
- To encourage all staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching and identify their development needs.
- To foster discussion and dissemination of best practice.
- To increase staff awareness of the whole student experience.
- To identify any weaknesses and put in place an action plan to remedy them.

- To assist departments in providing a high-quality educational experience for their students.

(Abridged from Gosling, 2006)

Scope

This policy applies to all academic staff employed by Study Group, including permanent and fixed term; variable hours and salaried, teaching on programmes approved by Study Group or validated by a partner HEI. Teaching staff employed by partner institutions are welcome to engage with the process, at the discretion of the university.

Principles and Policy Statements

The OLT strives to:

- align to the principles and expectations of the Study Group TLA Teaching Handbook, as well as to the UKPSF, Six Standards for the Teaching Profession (New Zealand) and the principles of constructive alignment
- link to important elements of the student learning experience, such as the VLE and assessments, without these forming the core part of the review
- focus on the impact on student learning rather than the actions of the teacher alone and promote both a supportive and developmental approach to observation and a culture of continuous improvement
- ensure the student voice is heard in the observation process
- actively contribute to both local and Provider level understanding of the quality of learning and teaching being delivered
- champion effective practice and address key areas for development

Gosling (2002) identifies three broad models of observation in use:

1. Evaluative - observation and summative assessment of a teacher (i.e graded) by a superior as part of the management processes of an institution.
2. Developmental - summative assessment of an individual's teaching skills to give expert feedback in order to encourage improvement in teaching supported by the use of an agreed action plan.
3. Collaborative/peer - a formative process in which teachers observe each other, discuss the experience and engage in 'non-judgemental constructive feedback'.

The OLT brings together the collaborative/peer process and developmental observation.

Stages

Stage 1 – Buddying/formative

Stage 1 of the process focuses on:

- facilitating engagement with the Study Group TLA
- providing a safe space for peer discussion and sharing of practice

furthering staff ownership of their own development

Maintaining peer review and providing a “buddy” with whom to discuss practice leads to learning both for the observer and observee, as the observer learns:

“by using the peer’s teaching as a lens through which to reflect on their own practices’, with the ultimate benefits for both being “greater collegiality, confidence, learning of teaching techniques and the development of greater self-reflective skills” (Engin, M., 2016, p.3)

In this stage, staff are buddied together and are expected to complete a set of activities, on which they will receive training during the launch period, the minimum requirements being as follows:

- Short self-reflection using Study Group TLAF Teaching Handbook, including review of last year’s actions if appropriate
- Selection of focus area for development from the Handbook
- Observation by peer
- Summary Log (including actions and effective practice identified)

The Summary Log is the only document submitted to line managers and Quality Leads in order that progress with actions can be sufficiently supported.

See **Appendix B** for more detail on implementing Stage 1.

Stage 2 – Developmental/summative

Stage 2 of the process focuses on:

- providing high quality guidance and expertise through dialogue and observation, ranging across all areas of the TLAF Teaching Handbook
- centrally capturing effective practice and key areas for development across centres to feed into a network development strategy

Stage 2 will be developed over a period of two academic years (2022-2024) as it involves the training and introduction of Teaching and Learning (T&L) Champs. T&L Champs will be academic staff who have the necessary expertise to fulfil the role of what Biggs and Tang refer to as staff developers:

“Staff developers have the expertise to act as critical friend and provide important insights on all stages of teaching where your own perspective might be limited” (Biggs, J. and Tang, C, 2011, pp.53-4).

This addresses QAA advice on effective learning and teaching, which states that:

“Effective learning and teaching in practice features delivery by individuals...whose ongoing development is underpinned by robust evidence and expertise” (QAA, 2018, p.5).

Centres will be asked to nominate their T&L Champs based on a combination of factors including experience, teaching qualifications and awards, student outcomes, student feedback and critical engagement with the 2021-22 Professional Development Review

process. T&L Champs will be required to engage in open-minded dialogue and provide non-judgemental guidance for colleagues while aligning with the principles of the OLT, as well as committing to participation in network training. Ultimately, T&L Champs will be nominated at the discretion of centres, but Quality Leads must be confident that they will be able to fulfil the role.

In Stage 2, staff are expected to complete a set of activities, the minimum requirements being as follows:

- Initial meeting with T&L Champ
- Developmental observation (including all key areas of T&L Teaching Handbook)
- Discussion with T&L Champ
- Action Plan

Action Plans are submitted to line managers and the T&L Champ logs areas for development and effective/innovative practice on a central spreadsheet, which is accessible by T&L Champs, Quality Leads, the Learning Effectiveness Team and the Academic Professional Development Team. The same are logged for teaching staff exempt for observation based on their Summary Logs. Areas for development will be recorded using a drop-down menu and will not include any detail or rating of current practice. Effective practice will be recorded in more detail to capture techniques which are working well across the network, particularly in relation to certain sub-sets of students and to specific levels and subjects. This policy recognises that

“What is effective for this teacher, for that subject, at this level, for those students, may not apply to other teachers, working under their own conditions” (Biggs and Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*)

See **Appendix C** for more detail on implementing Stage 2.

Panel of Observers (ToRs)

Role

The role of the Panel of Observers will provide strategic direction and leadership to ensure that the OLT is successfully embedded and regularly reviewed and that outcomes in relation to areas for development and areas of effective/innovative practice are analysed with the purpose of designing a strategic development plan for the Study Group network.

Membership and Meetings

- Quality Leads x 4 (representative from each group of centres), including a Chair
- T&L Champs x 4 (to be from different centres to Quality Leads if possible)
- Secretary
- Membership to rotate annually
- Meetings to be held quarterly

Roles and Responsibilities

The Panel of Observers is accountable for:

- representing views and sharing evidence from their centres or group of centres in relation to the OLT
- raising and recommending solutions to barriers to successful implementation of the OLT
- reviewing and analysing outcomes of the OLT process
- co-ordinating the input of quantitative data outcomes into Power BI for further analysis
- contributing to a strategic development plan for the network
- reviewing and evaluating the success of the OLT
- reporting to the Academic Board

Quoracy

For meetings to be quorate, the following members are required:

- Chair (or nominee)
- 2 x Quality Leads
- 2 x T&L Champs

Appendix A

Guidance on Evaluative Observation

Evaluative observation does not form part of the main observation of learning and teaching process as this is managed by line managers. Evaluative observation should be carried out for new staff in their probation period and a development plan agreed with the line manager. Evaluative observation can also be triggered by poor student outcomes or poor student feedback and can form part of a performance management process supported by HR. Quality Leads and T&L Champs are not involved in evaluative observations except in the capacity of expert practitioners to provide advice to line managers should they request it.

Appendix B

Stage 1 Process Notes

Current and returning staff members should be grouped into twos or threes from the beginning of the term/semester at the discretion of the individual centre. It is the centre's decision as to whether staff should be of a similar discipline or whether they should be in inter-disciplinary groups and whether inexperienced staff should be grouped with those more experienced; however, careful planning should be undertaken to ensure that all teaching staff involved benefit from the process. It is envisaged that in 2022-23 staff will be grouped internally, but that going forwards the scope of grouping should be expanded to allow cross-centre sharing of practice. Staff should remain grouped together for the entire

term/semester if possible, in order to build trust and promote confidential discussion throughout that period.

If staff wish to initiate further activities, such as action research in relation to their focus area, they will need to either agree the additional time required with their line manager or complete these in their own time. Any additional activities can be added to the Summary Log and/or further developed to be included in their HEA Fellowship application.

Appendix C

Stage 2 Process Notes

It is envisaged that during Stage 1 of 2022-23, the first cohort of T&L Champs will undergo centrally-produced observer training in the form of an asynchronous self-directed learning course supplemented by synchronous standardisation sessions, ready to begin their role in Stage 2. In 2023-24 the training process will be repeated, increasing the number of T&L Champs and enabling more teaching staff to be observed.

This two-year implementation process is in place to allow centre leaders adequate time to plan and resource the process, as according to the Higher Education Academy's recent peer review of teaching:

“schemes need to be adequately resourced with time available for PRT activities and appropriate training for reviewers and participants” (HEA, 2017, p.5)

In Stage 2, each T&L Champ will be assigned a group of teaching staff (suggested maximum of eight) at the beginning of the term/semester and will review their Stage 1 Summary Logs. T&L Champs who are line managers should not be assigned staff who they manage. For smaller centres this may mean that T&L Champs are shared across centres from the offset. In 2022-23, standard groupings will be internal.

Ideally, all teaching staff will be observed by T&L Champs from 2022-23. If Centres do not have the resources to achieve this, the Summary Log will dictate which staff the T&L Champ selects to observe. If the Summary Log suggests minimal additional support is needed, T&L Champs will conduct a short meeting with the member of staff to engage in pedagogical dialogue and share their expertise in relation to their area(s) for development. If the Summary Log suggests there is a need for additional support, the T&L Champ will conduct an observation, giving at least seven days' notice, and support in the creation of an Action Plan. If the Summary Log has not been submitted this is a line management issue and should be raised as such rather than dealt with by the T&L Champ. In 2023-24, when more T&L Champs have been trained, it is envisaged that they will be assigned teaching staff across centres and that all teaching staff will receive an annual developmental observation in Stage 2 from 2023-24 onwards.

Some centres may choose to go beyond minimum requirements and seek to maximise development opportunities by promoting further sharing of practice and discussion within the group, or peer observations for those tutors not being observed by the T&L Champ within the group. This is at the discretion of centre leaders.

This policy seeks to allow centres the flexibility to respond to peaks and troughs in the academic year. The only stipulation is that stages 1 and 2 must both take place over the course of one academic year and that staff be permitted the time to develop between stages.

References

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