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|  | Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement |

## Context

As a University we want to:

* encourage and support staff to contribute to the development of academic practice;
* promote opportunities for sharing and dissemination of excellent academic practice and;
* foster the development of an academic community across our University.

To this end, the University’s Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement scheme acts as a collegial, supportive and developmental process that aims to enhance the education and experience for our students.

## Purposes

The purpose of this peer supported enhancement scheme is to provide academic staff with opportunities to:

* reflect on and review their skills in learning, teaching and assessment with the assistance of colleagues;
* develop a shared understanding of best practice in learning, teaching and assessment;
* identify good practice worthy of dissemination more broadly;
* identify their own development and training needs as part of an ongoing approach to personal and professional development;
* identify common enhancement needs to feed into subject-level or School development initiatives.

## Principles

The principles of our University’s Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement scheme are that it is:

* a supportive, developmental process that promotes self-reflection;
* an expectation that all who teach engage in the process at least annually;
* a confidential process that is totally within the control of participating members of staff;
* a collegial process that has mutual learning benefits for all participants;
* not connected with managerial or performance review processes.

## Scope

* Responsibility for strategic leadership and ensuring implementation of the scheme lies with the Dean of School, although operational management may be delegated to Heads of Subject.
* The Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement scheme provides a flexible process that enables:
	+ some variation in local implementation (see Appendix 1);
	+ alignment with local strategic goals and priorities e.g. through having an annual theme or focus for review;
	+ the key driver to be enhancement of the education and experience of our students;
	+ a broader range of teaching and related-duties to be reviewed, for example laboratory or practical classes, synchronous or asynchronous online sessions, assessment practices, and the use of MyBeckett for module teaching activity;
	+ peer review to be undertaken by staff on a Course, Subject or School basis.
* The scheme will be open to all colleagues who teach at Leeds Beckett University. There is an expectation that full-time staff will engage with the scheme annually (though there is no barrier to more frequent engagement). Other colleagues (including hourly-paid colleagues and graduate teaching assistants, as well as those who contribute more broadly to students’ educational experience) are encouraged to participate, as part of their personal, and professional, development.
* Where peer support is for a taught session, the reviewer would typically be expected to attend for the duration of the session to enable a holistic view to be taken and feedback to be given in the context of the overall effectiveness of the session.
* Any staff, particularly those who are newly appointed or who are undertaking a teaching award or fellowship, may request to have their teaching observed outside of the scheme for purposes of their own professional development.
* It is expected that Head of Subjects or their nominee will manage the scheme, including monitoring participation through maintaining a record of the timing, nature of the support and the participants involved in each cycle.
* Whilst the outcomes are intended to be confidential to those directly involved, participants are encouraged to identify positive outcomes plus good and/or innovative practices that can be shared more widely - for example through School and course based Learning and Teaching meetings The process should also include a mechanism through which participants are able to raise common development and training needs and challenges or concerns that are best addressed at School-level.
* Although the Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement process is not directly linked to PDR, academic staff are encouraged to record and discuss their engagement with the scheme as part of their Personal Development Review (PDR), for example to use feedback from the process as evidence of good teaching practice or in relation to future support and staff development activity.
* The Peer Support for Teaching Enhancement is intended to promote self-reflection on individuals’ teaching practices. Participants are encouraged to maintain a record of teaching activities, achievements and innovations plus evidence to support the quality of their teaching. Such information will be of value in supporting professional recognition (such as an application for a category of HEA Fellowship) or promotion and for purposes of career development.
* Responsibility for reporting on the implementation of the scheme lies with the Head of Subject, via a light touch but formal requirement to record staff participation for consideration by the School Academic Committee, as required, and to AQSC on an annual basis.
* Heads of Subject will need to ensure that they are confident that all teaching staff in their Subject area engage in the agreed process.

## Appendix 1

In all examples below, the approach is intended to make peer observation a less judgemental and more reflective process (Gosling & O’Connor, 2009)[[1]](#footnote-1).

#### **Case Study 1 – Reciprocal Peer Observations (School of Clinical & Applied Sciences)**

1. Peer reviewers can either be allocated or individuals may choose their own. In selecting reviewers, these may be colleagues from their own subject groups or similar but there is potential for staff to pair with those from a different area or even School. It is expected that peer observations will be reciprocated within each review cycle although normally a different peer reviewer will be chosen for each cycle of review.
2. Reviewees should arrange a brief meeting with their named reviewer in advance of the session to explain its context and objectives and to agree any particular focus for the observation. For lengthy sessions, for example teaching taking place in a studio, reviewers should negotiate the duration of the observation with the reviewee.
3. All forms of teaching could be considered for review, for example, a tutorial, a practice/work-based learning session or a review of learning materials. The reviewee needs to explain the presence of the reviewer to students. Where teaching is undertaken at a distance, virtual observation and review can be undertaken.
4. Appropriate time needs to be scheduled in for feedback, which should be constructive, focused, supportive and developmental, and should be recorded for the benefit of the reviewee, using a framework appropriate for the session. This framework should be negotiated prior to the date and time of the observed session.
5. During the feedback discussion, aspects of good practice and developmental needs will be shared. It is the reviewer’s role to assist the reviewee in the process of review and reflection with the aim of enhancing the quality of his/her teaching as well as highlighting good practice for wider dissemination.
6. On completion of the review process, the reviewee will contact the scheme co-ordinator by email with the date, location and nature of the observation session and the name of the reviewer to record that this has taken place. The reviewee should also provide any generic feedback points for dissemination more widely and any training needs identified to ensure relevant development opportunities can be provided.
7. At the end of semester 2, Heads of Subject should collate a record of peer reviews completed throughout the year.
8. In addition, an anonymous summary of general areas of good practice and development needs arising from the peer reviews should be compiled and shared. Generic staff development needs should also be recorded for annual reporting.

#### **Case Study 2 – Teaching Clusters (e.g. Squares or Triangles) (Leeds Law School)**

Teaching squares are designed to encourage personal self-reflection, rather than peer evaluation. Colleagues can focus their thoughts on what they have learnt about their own teaching from the process of observing others. The goal is to provide a respectful, safe, and supportive experience for all involved. Leeds Law School termed their approach as the “Learning and Teaching Reflection Scheme”.

A variant on teaching squares is the concept of a learning circle - see Blackwell et al (2001)[[2]](#footnote-2).

In a teaching square, colleagues work in groups of three or four. They observe each other’s teaching sessions, either reciprocally or in rotation. The reviewer gives private feedback to the reviewee. A discussion form is used to provide prompts and themes for both the observer and observe.

At the end of the process the groups meet to discuss areas of good and best practice and highlight areas for broader discussion. Those areas are then fed into a broader School discussion.

The use of teaching squares facilitates the cross fertilisation of ideas from colleagues and other courses.

The scheme is supported by a co-ordinator who allocates colleagues to the squares and sets the timetable for each square:

* Stage 1 -planning meeting of the square - to set the ground rules; outline aims and give context; and agree areas for discussion and feedback.
* Stage 2 - observation of teaching sessions (the reviewer must have copies of the student materials and tutor notes for the session).
* Stage 3 - private discussion between observer and reviewee.
* Stage 4 - de-brief meeting of the square to discuss themes, good and best practice and areas to disseminate within the School.

A potential form for use at Stage 4 is provided in Appendix 2.

“The common thread of positive feedback from colleagues in the Law School about the learning and teaching reflection scheme has been that observing another colleague’s teaching session has been very beneficial, especially for the observer, as it has given the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching skills and expertise through the lens of another’s practice.”

Melissa Askew, Head of Subject

#### **Case Study 3 – A Themed Approach (Leeds Business School)**

The peer supported enhancement scheme in this School used peer observation as a way of members of staff giving feedback to colleagues on lectures/seminars/materials etc. In order to maximise the opportunities that such observations can create, the School wanted to further develop this into developmental feedback that all staff could share in and contribute to.

They adopted a specific theme for each semester for the peer observation to focus on, with the aim of sharing the good practice from these observation themes at Subject group meetings. The themes related to specific School needs, provided a common purpose and the variety of topics helped to maintain staff interest and engagement in the scheme.

In one semester, the focus was on ***student engagement*** and to give feedback on factors observed in each colleague's teaching environment that have either enhanced student engagement or possibly reduced their engagement. Thus the observation was more focussed on the students. The theme for the following semester was ***use of technology*** in teaching.

Participation in the scheme was recorded via a spreadsheet and the following information was confirmed to the Head of Subject:

* 1. Who was peer observed and when.
	2. Confirmed that feedback has been provided to the colleague, which can be written or verbal.
	3. One specific learning point from the observation that could be shared with all.

The specific learning points were collated for wider discussion in a School forum. The feedback was then discussed in the subject group meeting to share ideas and provide contacts for useful ideas.

The use of a theme takes the emphasis away from ‘judging performance’ to more of a practical exercise. It seemed to make people more enthusiastic about taking in the process and made it more useful for the reviewer and the reviewee.

Justine Simpson, Head of Subject

## A close up of a sign  Description automatically generatedAppendix 2

### TEACHING SQUARE DE-BRIEF

**Members of teaching square**

**Date of teaching square de-brief**

**PLEASE LIST AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE, INNOVATION, SUGGESTED AREAS OF SCHOOL STAFF DEVELOPMENT, AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT POINTS:**

1. David Gosling and Kristine Mason O’Connor (eds) “Beyond the Peer Observation of Teaching”, SEDA Paper 124, August 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Blackwell, R., Channell, J. & Williams, J. (2001) Teaching circles: a way forward for part-time teachers in higher education? International Journal of Academic Development **6** (1) 40 – 53 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13601440110033652> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)