

## Regent College London

### Observation of Teaching: Policy and Process

#### 1. Introduction

Observation of teaching is widely practiced in higher education in the United Kingdom. It is seen as an activity which is important for both enhancing the quality of teaching, resulting in greater student satisfaction with their learning experience, and strengthening quality assurance processes. However, it must be regarded as just one element for enhancing the student learning experience. Observation is unlikely to provide a full picture of the lecturer and areas such as curriculum design, assessments being fit for purpose, and student support are best evaluated and reviewed by more indirect methods. Nevertheless, observation of teaching does get to the very heart of the student learning experience and it is generally regarded as valuable to engage in the practice.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 Regent College London (the College) has operated the present approach to teaching observation since the start of the 2013-14 academic year. In that time all academic staff have been observed and annual summary reports produced for consideration by Academic Board. A summary report of teaching observations for each academic year will normally be considered at the Autumn meeting of Academic Board.

#### 3. Regent College London's Policy for Observation of Teaching

- 3.1 It is the College's policy that observation of teaching is mandatory and should take place at least once a year for each member of academic staff. The Principal and Academic Dean are responsible for making arrangements to observe teaching. It is important to ensure that different types of teaching (lectures, seminars, etc.), are observed for each member of academic staff. In order to ensure consistency in approach, and in the comments and evaluations made by observers, there will be a Staff Development Event timetabled for all academic and management staff undertaking teaching observation led by the Principal and Academic Dean.
- 3.2 New academic staff will be observed at least once during their first three months at the College during their probationary period. Upon successful completion of the probationary period the member of academic staff will be observed once more in their first year at the College. Thereafter, observation of teaching will be according to 3.1 above.
- 3.3 The Academic Dean is responsible for writing a summary report following observations of teaching. This summary report will identify cross-college good practice, areas for enhancement and staff development, and a comment on the observation of teaching process. The latter will feed into any enhancement and changes to be made to the policy and pro-formas. The summary report should develop an action plan, which can be up dated in future summary reports of observation of teaching.
- 3.4 The summary report on observation of teaching should be considered at the next appropriate meetings of Academic Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

#### 4. The Process of Observation of Teaching

Observation of teaching by managers should be announced and agreed in advance with the member of academic staff to be observed. The process of observation of teaching falls into three phases:

- 1) Pre-observation phase
- 2) Observation phase
- 3) Post-observation phase

#### 4.1 Pre-observation Phase

Before any teaching observation takes place the manager (observer) should hold a pre-observation meeting with the lecturer. This is important for setting the scene for the observation, clarifying any issues before the observation, and ensuring that a rapport exists between the observer and lecturer.

The observer and member of staff to be observed should confirm and/or agree the following:

- where the observer should sit in the classroom
- whether or not the observer's presence should be explained to the students in the class
- the form to be used to record observations and the range of ratings available to the observer
- protocols regarding confidentiality and anonymity<sup>1</sup>
- when the feedback meeting will be held
- what will happen to the teaching observation record made by the observer

The member of staff to be observed should:

- provide the observer with relevant information about the module, the learning objectives of the teaching session to be observed and any supporting material, whether hard copy or provided or electronically
- provide any relevant information about the student group attending the teaching session to be observed.

#### 4.2 Observation Phase

In agreeing which teaching session to observe there may be an inclination for the lecturer to suggest one that they are most comfortable and confident with. However, maximum benefit from observation is likely to be gained from selecting a session, which may be new, in need of change, or where students have difficulty with concepts, calculations, etc.

The observer should observe a significant part of the teaching session ensuring that either the start or end is observed. If an observer was present for the start of the teaching session it may be a good idea to observe the latter part of the session next time.

The observer should avoid talking to students at the end or during a break about the teaching session that is under observation. Student feedback about teaching is obtained through module and course questionnaires that students are asked to complete each semester.

The observer should ensure the following for any observation of teaching:

- sit in the location agreed at the pre-observation meeting
- be as discrete and unobtrusive as possible, and not make any comments during the teaching session itself. The observer should refrain from joining in any discussion even if directly invited to do so by students
- record details of the observation on the pro-forma provided

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the observation session, and any follow-up meetings, may be shared with relevant staff

- ensure that all parts of the teaching observation pro-forma are completed.

The member of staff being observed should ensure that:

- the observer has been introduced to students in the class, their role explained and students asked not to talk to the observer or try to draw him/her into any class discussion
- undertake teaching as usual without further reference to the observer
- no attempt is made to draw the observer into any class discussion or any other activity with students in the classroom.

#### 4.3 Post-observation Phase

It is good practice to ensure that the post-observation debriefing between the observer and the member of academic staff takes place as soon as possible after the observed teaching session. Ideally, this should take place on the same day. It is normally best to let the observed member of academic staff go first and comment on how they felt the session went, their own views on what went well and what could have gone better, and identify points of satisfaction as good practice. This can then be followed up with feedback from the observer. This may be best achieved by going through the various sections on the pro-forma. The evaluation for the session should be provided and reasons given for the evaluations made.

**The observer should clearly identify both good practice and areas for enhancement.**

The observer should:

- invite the member of staff observed to provide a reflective evaluation of the teaching session
- focus on the observed behaviour
- provide feedback that is specific, constructive and supported by evidence from the observation
- identify areas for enhancement
- indicate the evaluations that are likely to be made
- confirm with the member of staff the next stages in the process
- complete all aspects of the written teaching evaluation pro-forma and send a copy to the member of staff observed
- send a copy of the report to the Human Resources Manager

The member of staff observed should:

- provide an oral, reflective evaluation of the session
- be open and avoid being defensive
- recognise that the observation of teaching process is intended to be supportive and developmental, and intended to enhance the student learning experience
- make an informal record of any actions that need to be followed up
- when sent the report, to read and sign the teaching evaluation made on the pro-forma

#### 5. The Observation of Teaching Report Form

Observers of teaching must complete each section of the pro-forma as fully as possible. It is very important to provide a summary evaluation of the teaching session observed together with both examples of good practice and areas for enhancement. The value of observation of teaching can only be realised if it is possible to share good practice with all academic staff and that they are supported to

enhance their teaching. Achieving an excellent satisfaction rating from students and striving continually to enhance their opportunities to learn is at the heart of the objective to be achieved.

Below is given some guidance on the questions that you may want to consider for each section of the report pro-forma:

**Introduction**

- were the learning outcomes for the session clearly identified and communicated to students well?
- did the class begin on time and were students punctual for the start of the session. If students arrived late how did the lecturer handle this?

**Planning and organisation**

- did the lecturer relate the forthcoming session to previous sessions and set it in the overall context of the module?
- was the overall purpose of the session made clear to students?
- do the learning objectives support the module learning outcomes and the overall programme objectives?
- has due consideration been given to the teaching space and the appropriateness of the classroom for the teaching activities?
- was the session well-structured with an identifiable introduction, development and conclusion?
- was the session well-planned in terms of time management?

**Learning and teaching methods**

- were the learning and teaching methods used appropriate to the learning objectives of the session?
- were the methods well suited to the students' level and learning needs?
- did the methods used stimulate student interest and result in evidence of good student engagement with the content?
- was there sufficient variability of teaching methods to maintain student interest and motivation for the whole of the teaching session?

**Delivery and pace**

- were the clarity, pace and delivery appropriate for the students?
- did the lecturer build rapport with the students?
- did the lecturer manage student enquiries as part of the delivery?

**Content**

- Did the content, as far as you could tell, support the learning objectives for the session?
- Did the content seem accurate and up-to-date?
- was the session pitched at the appropriate level for the students and for the level of the programme?

- was the material clearly structured and easy for students to understand?

#### **Student engagement and participation**

- did students engage well with the material and were they offered opportunities to ask questions, seek clarification, etc.?
- were students kept engaged with the content throughout the session?
- was student participation well-managed and students encouraged to express their views at appropriate points in the session?
- what strategies were used to gain attention, to refocus at intervals, and to ensure that the attention span was maintained throughout the session?
- was there good eye-contact with students, and was body posture, facial expression, etc. used appropriately?

#### **Use of learning resources**

- where used, was powerpoint and other visual presentations of material used appropriately and presented in a clear, understandable manner to students?
- where used, were handouts and any other hard copy material appropriate to the learning outcomes and well-received by students?
- was reference made to e-learning materials available on the student portal or elsewhere, for example, the internet?
- was the classroom and layout of the classroom appropriate to support the learning objectives of the session?

#### **Summary, good practice and areas for improvement**

Each of these sections of the report must be completed. What is written in these sections should be evidence based and clearly relate back to comments made in one or more of the previous sections.

Examples of good practice will be picked up in the summary report. Areas for enhancement will be monitored generally to determine whether there are wider staff development needs. This will inform further staff development sessions.

### **6. Summary reports on teaching observations**

#### **Summary reports**

The Academic Dean will produce a summary report on the observations of teaching carried out in each academic year. These should be written according to the guidelines provided. The report should be written no later than two weeks following the completion of observations of teaching. The report should be considered at the next meeting of the Senior Leadership Team and Academic Board. The Academic Dean will also liaise with the Human Resource Manager to identify staff development needs.

The summary teaching observation report should be made available to all staff in electronic format through the College's VLE.

## **Annual Course Quality Monitoring Reports**

Annual Course Quality Monitoring reports should make reference to outcomes of the observation of teaching, including both areas of good practice and areas for enhancement.

### **7. Training and staff development for observers of teaching**

It is important to ensure that those who observe teaching and make evaluations of teaching sessions observed are all working to the same standards and looking for the same things. To support this a Staff Development session will be offered to observers. This will be followed up with feedback and discussion sessions once observations have been made. This will be an ongoing process to both achieve and maintain high consistency across all observers.

### **8. Briefing sessions for teaching staff**

All members of academic staff at the College will have the opportunity to attend Staff development events concerning observation of teaching. These events will fall into two broad types:

- i) briefings about the process and an opportunity to clarify any issues that academic staff may have about the policy and process of teaching observation
- ii) follow up briefings about general findings from teaching observations.

### **9. Concluding comments**

It is intended that this approach to observation of teaching both builds upon previous experience and practice at the College and represents good practice. This approach to observation of teaching will be evaluated by the Principal, Academic Dean and the Head of Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement on an ongoing basis to identify enhancements to the policy and process of observation of teaching.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Head of Academic Standards &amp; Quality Enhancement</i>
<i>Version</i>	<i>Version 4.2</i>
<i>Update</i>	<i>October 2019</i>
<i>Approval</i>	<i>Academic Board November 2019</i>
<i>Review Date</i>	<i>August 2020</i>