



## **POLICY ON PEER REVIEW**

### **Requirements**

It is the responsibility of faculties/academic support areas to ensure that a system of peer review is in situ which is in alignment with the following aims. The intention is to enable the process whilst focusing it on the aims below, to ensure fitness for purpose across and within faculties/areas, whilst allowing for appropriate variations in recognition of diversity in structures and practices.

### **What are the aims of the subject/area system of peer review?**

- assisting staff to develop their teaching and learning facilitation skills
- sharing experience and ideas on teaching between members of staff
- identifying and sharing examples of good practice in teaching between members of staff
- supporting colleagues in developing and evaluating new approaches to teaching
- reviewing broader aspects of academic practice such as assessment, feedback, personal tutoring, research activity etc which are related to students' learning
- providing evidence to the Quality Assurance Agency and other external agencies of the subject's commitment to the systematic enhancement of teaching and other aspects of academic practices in the subject/area.

### **Which staff are covered by the expectations of our system of peer review?**

All staff teaching or facilitating learning within a subject/area should be included in Peer Review. This would ideally include all part time staff, although it is recognised that there may be both logistical and financial difficulties in including all these staff in the complete system. It may be possible to involve part time staff in certain aspects of the peer review system – such as the sharing of good practice identified by the operation of peer review. Full-time staff who occupy a non-teaching role in the institution, but who carry out a teaching or learning facilitation function in modules (e.g. Learning Support staff) should be included in the scheme, or be engaged within their academic support area. Opportunities for participation in peer review should be afforded to collaborative partner staff.

### **What activities are to be covered in our system of peer review?**

Whilst peer observation of teaching may be a substantial element in the system of Peer Review, AQSC has recommended that all forms of teaching activity should be reviewed. This may mean observation of seminars and small group work; laboratory classes; practical and creative work etc. It could include a review of teaching materials, eLearning approaches, or a discussion with the teacher/learning facilitator, as well as observation. Observation maybe extended to assessment, moderation, academic tutoring, research and advanced scholarship activities and other aspects of 'academic practice' that impact on students' learning.

## **GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM OF PEER REVIEW**

All systems of peer review are context-specific, and require a system of peer review appropriate to needs. In agreeing the establishment of a system of peer review, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee stressed that any system of peer review/peer observation should not be seen as part of a policing/disciplinary process. It should be seen as developmental for those staff involved in the process of peer review/observation; for the department or subject which shares the good practice which is identified in the process; and for the institution, as the good practice is disseminated throughout. These guidelines highlight questions which subjects or areas may find helpful to consider when reviewing and developing their own system of peer review.

### **How have peer review systems been typically established?**

Many subjects/areas established a time-limited working group of staff from within the subject/area to work through these guidelines, to consult with colleagues, and to propose a suitable system of peer review for the area to adopt. Colleagues in some small departments/areas have co-operated with other small subjects (or larger subjects) within their faculty to plan a common approach. Some have checked what systems academic peers in other HEIs have found successful; others have used a 'critical friend' from outside the subject/area to discuss ideas with. Advice from the Teaching and Learning Development Unit has also been solicited and such support for work in this area and provision of resources and guidance is ongoing.

### **What models of the peer review process are there?**

There are several models of organising a peer review system. Probably one of the most popular is to pair staff up so that the couple observe each other's practice. One advantage of this model is that staff gets to know each other's approaches more thoroughly, and a process of "collaborative reflection" can take place. Some schemes keep the same pairs over a number of academic years; whilst other schemes create new pairs each year. There are advantages of pairing staff with similar academic interests; on the other hand it can also be more challenging to pair staff with dissimilar interests, and ask them, to for example, concentrate on the generic aspects of teaching skills.

Another model is to develop a "round robin" system of review. Here individual A observes B; B observes C; C observes D; and D observes A. etc. In this instance no reciprocal review takes place between pairs. The advocates of this system argue that the pair system outlined above can be too cosy and mutually reinforcing. In this round robin system, each member has the chance of working with all the other members of staff over a period of years, and can therefore observe a wider range of approaches.

There will be other variants of systems which you may design for local, bespoke contexts, fit for purpose of the stated aims of the Peer Review policy.

### **Are there any general ideas on good practice which need to be adopted whichever model of peer review is operated?**

There is general agreement that whichever model is adopted the actual process of review comprises three major elements.

Martin and Double (1998) label these stages – pre-observation meeting; observation; and a feedback meeting. A number of models and pro formae are available from the

TLDU. It must be stressed that these are offered as exemplars, and subjects/areas may wish to develop their own checklists or pro-forma.

### **How may the process of peer review be recorded?**

There are at least two issues to consider here. First there is the question of agreeing a form of record to be completed during or at the end of the activity being reviewed (e.g. lecture, small group, handbook review etc). Second there has to be agreement on what records are actually kept of the process of peer review. This agreement should cover who keeps any review sheets completed at the time (usually the person being observed/reviewed); and what permanent record is maintained. To try to reduce paperwork, and to avoid over-bureaucratisation, many schemes require a simple record to be maintained. This may record that the review actually took place on certain dates, that certain issues of good practice were identified which could be shared with colleagues, and that the person being reviewed was going to consider certain suggestions made by the reviewer. It is helpful if items of good practice are forwarded to the TLDU, and TLACs through the Associate Deans with responsibilities for teaching and learning and for systematic quality enhancement.

### **How may we share the examples of good practice identified in peer review with other members of our subject/area and with the wider institution?**

Examples of good practice may be shared in a number of different ways. Some subjects at Edge Hill have an annual half-day for this purpose, when members of the subject staff talk to others about their practice, and the whole staff group discuss teaching issues. Examples of good practice may be shared with a wider audience using the TLDU website for instance, or the subject might like to organise a teaching issues workshop over a lunchtime to share their practice with others. Journals, which focus on teaching issues within a subject or discipline, provide the possibility of sharing good practice with the wider academic community. Similarly good practice examples can be incorporated in your subject/area web pages.

### **How may we carry out peer review effectively?**

There are a number of ways in which staff development can help prepare for the process of peer review. You can prepare by reading both print-based and electronic-material that is available on the process. You can request subject/area specific development sessions on peer observation to be organised for you by the Teaching and Learning Development Unit. You could arrange for more experienced members of staff to mentor less experienced staff in the process of peer observation.

### **Further advice and information**

If you require further advice or information about the process of peer review/ observation, please contact Mark Schofield, in the Teaching and Learning Development Unit on 01695 584101 or [schom@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:schom@edgehill.ac.uk) or visit the TLDU web site.

Mark Schofield, February 2008