

HR Services

Employee Handbook

Peer Enhancement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment



1.1 UEL's current policy (UEL, 2004) regarding Peer Observation / Peer Review of Teaching acknowledges the importance of an institutional approach to peer review, and requires all academic colleagues to participate in this process twice per year. Academic staff are currently required to participate once per semester, to both 'observe' and 'be observed'.

1.2 Whilst the central premise of the current policy relates to observation of face-to face teaching, a subsequent email from the Director of Learning and Teaching (Robertson, 2005) approved the option of extending peer observations to include review of teaching materials including use of the VLE (WebCT at that time) for the second occasion.

1.3 Although some colleagues from Services (i.e. some within Library and Student Services) have participated in the current process and report it helpful, the current policy does not acknowledge or encourage their participation.

1.4 Five years on from the introduction of our 2004 policy, it is timely to review and update our approach.

1. Limitations within current policy

2.1 Whilst schemes that seek to facilitate peer enhancement in developing individual academic practice are broadly acknowledged to be desirable, UEL is not alone within the sector in recognising that engagement could be improved. Factors within our current policy that contribute to lower rates of participation and satisfaction are identified below:

- our current model tends to locate peers as judges rather than supportive colleagues. This is perceived as a 'policing' approach which inadequately facilitates reflective practice;
- a heavy focus on face-to-face teaching may be unnecessarily repetitive, especially for experienced colleagues;
- innovative approaches to the facilitation of learning and teaching and to the development of alternative assessment approaches, in particular, are poorly accommodated;
- there is no provision for non-academic colleagues who wish to participate in the process;
- authority and procedures for requiring and monitoring participation are ill defined;
- the frequency of required participation is high;
- the paperwork is lengthy;
- processes by which to identify and respond to staff development issues arising from peer review within Schools/Services are poorly defined, as are processes to identify and disseminate good practice within and between Schools/Services.

2. Proposed Revisions to Policy

3.1 A revised process is recommended which identifies from the outset a more collegial, supportive and reflective approach. This represents a composite of good practice currently in use at UEL, which has been further informed by practice within the HE sector. The proposals have been refined following pilot use within the School of Psychology; feedback shows positive responses, the process evidences reflection, engagement and ideas for staff development, and often requires less than the two hours allocated.

3.2. Key features are identified below:

- The process will be entitled "Peer Enhancement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment" (PE);
- The individual whose practice will be considered will be referred to as 'Staff member' and the person working with them as 'Peer'. These two will work in a partnership intended to enhance reflection and practice;
- Participation will remain mandatory for all academic colleagues with a role in teaching, and will be voluntary for non-academic colleagues whose role involves some teaching and /or supporting learning;
- One session per academic year is required which will consider aspects of both face-to-face teaching and learning materials. This will include:
 - face to face teaching (including seminars, tutorials, workshops, individual or group supervision, field trips etc);and a range of practice, including but not limited to the following examples:
 - development and provision of publicity and other materials designed to promote and inform e.g. module and/or programme guides including on-line, WebCT, CDROM, DVD, Podcast and paper based materials;
 - development and /or delivery of teaching materials (including use of VLE/ UELPlus / social networking, distance learning materials to promote learning etc);
 - development of approaches to formative and summative assessment tasks, and the provision or individual and generic feedback.

3.3. Four tasks will be undertaken as part of the PE process:

- i. A 'Staff member' identifies the activity/activities on which to focus, and agrees this with their 'Peer' (e.g. I wish to focus on the feedback I provide...);
- ii. Staff member and Peer agree the format for the PE Session, e.g:

- observing teaching and review of associated UEL Plus materials;

iii. Staff member and Peer meet to undertake the PE session. The PE Session will usually take up to two hours, including time spent in observing and/or reviewing, and subsequent discussion. To support the Staff member's development, the Peer is requested to:

- facilitate self reflection by the Staff member
- offer constructive feedback
- identify areas of good practice
- consider areas for further development;

In this regard, the use of questions such as those provided as examples below may be helpful:

- You identified 'x' as an issue, what are your impressions of how that went today?
- How did this session go compared to other similar times?
- Which areas /materials are particularly successful / challenging?
- Are you thinking of doing anything differently? What have you tried so far... ?

iv. Staff member and Peer will complete the PE Record (Appendix 1) and hand to Field / Team leader.

3.4 Allocation of Staff members and Peers will be according to an approach agreed annually by the School/Service Learning and Teaching Committee. These will fit agreed priorities within the School /Service Plan and Learning and Teaching Committee objectives, rather than occurring as an ad hoc arrangement.

3.4.1 Individual School/Service Learning and Teaching Committees may identify a theme for PE each year, to enable a broad focus on a specific topic or priority (e.g. inclusive learning and teaching, student progression, use of VLE sites, clarity of advice and guidance within handbooks). Alternatively, Schools and Services may agree to leave the choice of topic and focus according to individual's priorities (usually identified within a previous SDR or Peer Enhancement activity).

3.4.2 Allocation must be organised to deliver a fair and efficient system that facilitates maximum participation of full and part-time colleagues, and ensures the greatest benefit for each participant. This may involve allocation into pairs, triads or quadrads or agreeing that individuals will identify a colleague with particular experience in their area of focus. Staff member and Peers may reverse roles, or chose to work with a different colleague. Allocation may be undertaken by the Quality Leader, Leader in Learning and Teaching, Field or Team Leader, balancing consideration of:

- facilitating supported self-reflection and impartial, constructive feedback
- avoiding PE partnerships between colleagues with immediate working relationships (unless specifically indicated according to theme or topic)
- sharing discipline-specific / pedagogic / technical knowledge between colleagues.

3. Documentation

4.1 A light touch approach to recording of PE will be used. A Peer Enhancement Record (Appendix 1) identifies key points arising from participation in PE. This is to be handed to the Field Leader (academic) or Team leader (service) after a session. This identifies:

- Aspects of good practice suitable for dissemination
- Development needs identified.

When viewed together, all records provide an overview of the extent of participation, within a School or Service.

4. Individual Responsibility and Authority

5.1 Academic staff: Field Leaders will have responsibility to ensure participation of all academic colleagues, and will report activity within the Field Review and Enhancement process (REP Report) including identification of:

- numbers of colleagues participating
- areas of good practice worthy of dissemination.
- any developmental needs for groups of colleagues.

5.2 Service staff: will present their PE Records to Team Leaders who will identify the above features.

[Appendix 1 - Peer Enhancement Form](#)

Agreed by UMT June 2010
