

Briefing

Peer Review & Enhancement

This briefing explains what Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE) is, why it is important, and what you need to do and some ideas for how you can get the most from it.

Links to further useful information and forms are provided at the end of the document.

What

Peer Review & Enhancement is an annual developmental process for all academic members of staff to review, reflect on and enhance their academic practice with the support of their peers.

It has two elements. The first is the peer observation of practice; the second, a joint enhancement activity. What you actually need to do is explained below.

Why

The aim of PRE, ultimately, is to create an opportunity for each member of teaching staff to reflect on and improve their practice with the support of one or more colleagues. It can be difficult, on your own, to identify and prioritise an aspect of practice for development. Working with a colleague in a mutually beneficial development relationship is an established way for university academics to develop.

The approach is more personalised than other forms of development staff are asked to undertake. It is likely to be more motivating and enjoyable, therefore, and lead to real and meaningful breakthroughs in your good practice.

PRE encourages a scholarly approach. For example, you and your partner may take the opportunity to evaluate an aspect of practice which you may go on to develop as a conference paper, case study of practice, or journal article. Whatever you decide to do, it is likely that you will explore and come to value an aspect of your own practice.

Professionals regularly reflect on practice. This is true for university teachers too and PRE creates some structure to help you establish a reflective habit alongside your peers.

PRE is an opportunity for developing evidence to support your application for Fellowship of the HEA, at any descriptor level, and to then remain in good standing professionally.

How

What you *need* to do

Departments are required to set out and communicate their Peer Review & Enhancement structures and processes, and to monitor, review and report on the scheme as part of their annual quality review processes.

All academic and learning support staff must agree and undertake a Peer Review & Enhancement activity each year by selecting from a range of methods, which they determine to be appropriate, to review, reflect on and develop their academic practice. PRE is normally structured around observation of practice - observing and being observed by a peer to support critical reflection on

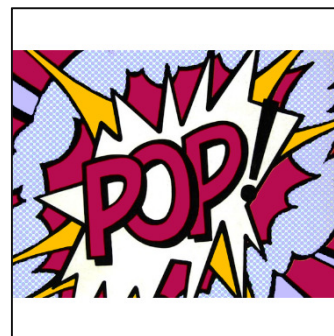
practice. Staff will also share significant outcomes of PRE activities for the benefit of course teams and the wider academic community.

You may receive guidance and support within your department on what is determined to be appropriate. It's always a good idea to talk this through – aligning your practice to your department's strategies obviously makes sense.

What you *can* do

PRE is an ideal way to receive feedback from a trusted peer on your face-to-face teaching with students, whether this is lecturing or facilitating active learning, running labs or studio-based learning. This is often referred to as Peer Observation of Teaching.

At Sheffield Hallam we recognise that academic practice is diverse – our teaching of students happens in many ways and we need to be agile and inventive sometimes in doing the right thing according to our teaching context. Getting feedback from peers in these situations can be particularly helpful and getting peer support on innovative teaching can also influence the development of high-quality course-focused practice. We might think more in terms of Peer Observation of Practice (POP!) therefore. Here are some examples.



Examples of review and enhancement activities:

- Improving my lecturing
- Designing and using assessment rubrics for briefing student assignments
- Engaging students in formative assessment effectively
- Managing a student-centred active learning session (SCALE UP)
- Developing and delivering a feedback strategy for my module or course
- Designing and delivering 'flipped learning' successfully
- Developing and running a programme for Academic Advising
- Running seminar groups as an Associate Lecturer
- Reviewing my Blackboard site
- Developing real-world case studies
- Designing and updating laboratory-based learning activities

Note that in some of these examples the observation straddles the design, planning and the running of the activity. The PRE policy does expect an observation of you 'in action' with your students. It is about how you manage that interaction.

FAQs

These FAQs provide guidance in support of the policy's implementation

How do I choose my partner?

This is determined within departments. Often staff will choose their own PRE partnerships. It is important that partners trust each other enough to talk about any aspect of practice.

Can I choose what is observed?

Normally, you will decide what aspect of your practice is observed. You will be expected to indicate this to the person in your department who is responsible for monitoring engagement with PRE but you will never be asked to explain why you have chosen this or show the feedback you receive - that is confidential between you and your peer.

However, you and your peer can agree that it would be useful to share any of this detail at your discretion – but please do make sure you both agree! It can be very useful to others to hear about what you have found and why you felt it was important. Sharing the *outcomes* of PRE is an expectation of the process.

Can I choose the focus for enhancement?

Normally, you will decide what aspect of your practice you want to develop through PRE. In some circumstances you may need to ask your line manager for support and, depending on what you need, they may make a judgement that your request is not realistic or that it cannot be met. However, managers are expected to engage with PRE in a supportive way and will normally help you to come up with realistic development plans if needed.

How is my PRE monitored and is it confidential?

A key principle for PRE to work is that it is a confidential and trustful process.

Because it is mandatory for departments to support your PRE, it needs to be monitored. Records of engagement are maintained within the department therefore and line managers may choose to establish broad strategic development themes to frame PRE within the department - but the detail of your observation is for you and your PRE partner alone. The policy says,

“The *general outcomes* of the Peer Review & Enhancement process will inform part of the discussion at annual Appraisal and inform individual personal development planning and Faculty, Departmental and University plans.” This ensures you can identify further development opportunities as an outcome of PRE while it allows the department to develop its additional plans for arranging related development activities.

Do my partner and I have to enhance the same aspect of our practices?

It makes sense to have a common focus that leads to a collaborative enhancement activity. It is not required however, nor is it always feasible to arrange this.

Can my PRE partner come from another part of the University?

Yes. This can be a good way to spread good practice across the University. However, PRE is an excellent tool for promoting course-focused practice leading to greater consistency of the student experience, especially around aspects of innovative practice. Working together as course team members can really help to develop your student's satisfaction.

How much time should I spend on PRE?

PRE happens in your work time using some of the time all academics have assigned to Self-Managed Time (SMT), which is sometimes referred to as time for Personal Scholarly Activity (PSA).

As a rule of thumb, a typical observation of lecturing will require that you spend time planning the activity with your peer so they know what they are looking at and what they need to look for. You need to undertake the observed activity. Then your peer needs to talk through the written feedback they have produced. You will need to do the same for your partner. Following the review activities

you are expected to engage in an enhancement activity to develop aspects of your practice highlighted in the review.

You may need to discuss with your line manager about how much time you can dedicate to enhancement activities and over what period of time. Time for sharing what you have learnt with others in your subject group or elsewhere may also need to be planned.

Is it just about lecturing?

No. The policy expects you to select from a range of methods you use in the course of your academic practice, which you determine to be appropriate to review, reflect on and develop.

Academic practice is multidimensional. You *may* want to examine your approaches to lecturing - many people do. Or you might want to focus on how you give feedback, or how effectively you teach in an online environment. There are so many important aspects of teaching that can benefit from peer observation and support.

Further, within your chosen area of focus, you need to think carefully about what aspect of that practice is particularly important to you. Ask, "What's been nagging me?"

Can I ask my students to observe me?

Asking students for feedback, formally or informally, is a part of good practice. The feedback you receive may be used in PRE, but PRE itself involves peers in a buddy relationship. It is often about comparing and sharing practices and the relationship should feel equal. So, no, you must work with fellow academics.

Should I ask my line manager or a more senior colleague to observe me?

This is not normally advisable. However confident you are in your working relationship, you need to be absolutely sure you can trust each other enough to comment on or reveal things about your practice without fear of repercussion.

Can I work with peers who are more, or less, senior or experienced than me?

This is often recommended. People with more or less experience can often spot things that others can't – both in terms of learning from their peer and in terms of identifying factors for feedback and discussion.

Further information

Materials

including a fuller handbook and forms:

<https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talent/peer-review-and-enhancement>

Policy: <https://goo.gl/C7kHQj>



Course-focused Practice: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/cfp>
Teaching Essentials: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/teaching/>

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