# 

# Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE): Enhancing Teaching and Learning Quality

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*Peer-observation of teaching and learning activities should occur every year as part of the SHU Peer Review & Enhancement (PRE) requirement. All academic staff with student-facing roles are expected to engage in peer observation activities as an integral part of professional academic life.*

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## **Aims of Peer Observation of Teaching and learning activities**

The model of peer observation used at Sheffield Hallam Univeristy is one where the observation process should benefit both the observed and the observer. The focus of any observation of teaching and learning activities should be constructive criticism within a supportive environment (Lomas and Nicholls 2005) and any feedback should be provided against mutually agreed outcomes. It is also recommended that academic colleagues providing observation, should refer to the UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA, 2011) as an exernal reference point to inform pre and post observation dicussions.

Peer Observation of Teaching and learning activities should enable:

* discussion, sharing and mutual support between peers
* consideration of the student experience related to the activity observed
* the advancement and development of good practices in teaching, learning and assessment
* self-evaluation and reflection on practice
* evaluation of the interaction between students and the academic
* feedback on teaching and learning methods including new ideas or methods
* critical self-reflection

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## **Experiences of undertaking PRE**

Here are some quotes from our SHU colleagues about their recent PRE experiences:

Inviting someone from another teaching team to observe a session was incredibly enlightening and very helpful. The person observing was able to offer me new perspectives on my teaching delivery which built my confidence as well as enabling me to revisit some of my teaching practice. I had an idea to look at communication and we spoke about this and basically honed it down. It was very collaborative. They brought a wealth of their own experience which they generously shared during our discussion. I would definitely recommend this process to everyone.

*I chose a teaching activity that I enjoyed the least to focus on in this years PRE- delivering large lectures. I spent some time reflecting on this activity, thinking about why I found this challenging and realised it was the lack of interaction. I spoke to colleagues about their practices in large lectures, and read a few articles. I then asked a colleague from another course who I knew delivered lots of large lectures for the PRE activity. After my observation, I felt like I had really had an opportunity to really examine one teaching activity in detail, and work on this. I also had lots of fantastic feedback as to how to be more interactive in this space.*

I asked a colleague to observe me who I knew had developed similar resources for their module. It was a great opportunity to revisit my practice with a colleague and receive constructive feedback. The discussion was supportive and challenging by the end of the observation session, I had a clear plan of how I wanted to use resources in the module to compliment other activities, and how to make them as engaging as possible.

## Businesswomen listening in a meeting**Six stages of Peer Observation** There are several steps to a successful peer observation of teaching and learning activities:

1. What is being ‘observed’?
2. Who can observe?
3. Pre-observation discussion / sharing of information
4. The observation of the activity
5. Post-observation discussion
6. Recording the observation

### 1. What is being ‘observed’?

Student-facing teaching and learning activities happen in a range of physical and virtual environments. Peer Observation should happen with appropriate teaching methods for your disciplinary area. This could be face-to-face activities based in an on-campus teaching space, or online activities where students do not share the same physical space but interact in a virtual space.

Observation of your teaching practice is not the only activity you might use for PRE. Other activities might include developing student facing resources, redesigning inclusive assessments; designing innovative student workshops; curriculum design- the possibilities are endless! The requirement is that you will involve student facing teaching and learning activities, relevant to your own discipline or department. A good starting point is thinking about your own practice and any areas you feel you might need to develop, or through your PDR conversations.

### 2. Who can observe?

Observation of teaching and learning activities benefits both the observed academic, who gains insights from the presence of another person looking at what is going in in the teaching and learning environment; and the observing academic, who gains ideas and prompts for reflection on their own teaching. Indeed, an observation could be arranged so that the observer chooses to watch a colleague who has experience with a teaching approach that they themselves would like to develop. A course team may wish to develop a 'team review' approach, where a particular aspect of course design and teaching is focused on, developed together (including students), and culminates in peer observations (either within or outside of the team) and sharing of feedback (including student feedback).

The pairings of colleagues might be co-ordinated, and in some cases determined, by a suitable team leader or department leader; the arrangements are determined by your own department leadership team, or in some cases, college leadership team. Normally a single observer would be selected, but there may be circumstances where more than one observer might be appropriate. For example, a trio of peers may carry out a trio of observations where each colleague is observed by the other two colleagues at the same time.

Teaching and learning activity observations often occur between colleagues within the same teaching or course team, but there are benefits to working with peers outside of these teams. Observation can provide an opportunity for colleagues outside of teaching/course teams to learn from the different subject disciplines that we work within, and fresh perspectives can bring forth fresh ideas. The closeness of a teaching or course team, especially if they already have experience of seeing each other teach, can sometimes prevent the observation experience from being as useful as it could be. Examples include, if you are designing inclusive assessments, you may ask colleagues from Academic Diversity and Development to observe. If you want to use your lecture delivery as the observation, you may ask colleagues from other course teams where lecture delivery is more common. If you are working on curriculum design, you may ask your course team colleagues to observe.

Peer observation of teaching is a process that can be embraced by experienced and inexperienced academics alike. Experienced colleagues can learn from new colleagues and vice versa. The process should allow the observed to question and analyse their teaching and learning approach and the ongoing development of their practice (Fullerton 2003). The experience of a staff member, either in relation to the time they have been at SHU or the time that they have been in an academic role, is not a factor in the success of their observation. Academics who are new to the role and/or the institution may feel limited by their lack of experience and inhibited in how to give observation feedback to a more experienced colleague - however, new academics should value the fresh perspective that they offer to others. Many experienced colleagues value and seek out feedback from those who are new to the organisation.

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### 3. Pre-Observation discussion

Once the observer or observers have been agreed they need to be provided with the necessary information to enable a successful peer observation. This is usually best achieved with face-to-face discussion and the provision of any relevant documentation (Fullerton 2003).

**The discussion should cover:**

* the location, date and time of the session to be observed and arrangement of a feedback session as soon after the observation as possible.
* the learning outcomes of the session and how it relates to the rest of the module/course.
* a summary of the planned teaching and learning activities;
* information about the student cohort
* any potential issues or areas of concern
* the way in which students will be informed about and involved in the observation if they are present.
* how student feedback about the activity will be sought.
* the elements of specific observer feedback that the observed wishes to receive.
* whether the observed colleague would like feedback on any aspect of the session, or just on the elements of specific feedback;
* a review of the tips and advice for observation (see What to Observe on page following this section).

**Documentation that should be provided:**

* Access to a Blackboard site that contains the module/course information where relevant
* Any relevant hand-outs or other student facing materials

An observation session of teaching and learning activities for PRE should normally last no more than 1 hour. If the activity is longer than this, agree a suitable 1-hour time period where the observation of the teaching and learning activity should be undertaken. This period is referred to here as the ‘observation’.

### 4. The observation

If you have chosen an observation of a teaching session for the PRE-activity- the observer should arrive in good time to be able to place themselves unobtrusively in the room. The attendance of either a known or unknown member of staff as observer into a session can cause unease with students if they are not aware of the purpose of their visit. The observed tutor should explain that there is an observer present and that they are there to assist in the professional development of the tutor and not to assess the students. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to students that staff are engaged in continuing their professional development in learning, teaching and assessment.

The observer should not become involved in the session as this will change the nature of the session and limit their ability to provide feedback (Gosling 2000; Siddiqui 2007). In certain limited circumstances it may be appropriate for the observer to ask students about work that they are doing.

If you have chosen a different sort of teaching and learning activity, choose the observation period at a time that is mutually convenient. Ensure the observer has had access to any related documentation/resources beforehand. Use this period to discuss the activity with your observer. Wherever possible, share with the observer any student feedback or any other related stakeholder feedback, you have received related to the teaching and learning activity.

It may be helpful to make notes during the session. If you are observing, you might use an observation pro-forma (an example is included as appendix 2) or simply a timeline of key activities / events during the session. The observer should be clear about the specific feedback required by the academic observed as agreed at the pre-observation discussion meeting. This will provide the basis of their follow-up and helps the observer to focus their observations. It is not normally necessary to provide feedback on every element of a teaching session. Feedback is usually about teaching and learning activities and not the content of the session - unless specific feedback on content has been requested (for example, an approach to a particular topic).

If you are being observed, you may wish to keep notes during the observation. This will be especially helpful if it involves development work you have undertaken for your PRE activity.

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### 5. Post-observation follow-up

The post-observation meeting should take place soon. If you have had a teaching activity observed, the follow up and feedback will usually occur immediately after the observation if possible or within a few days if not. The role of the observer is to promote reflection from the observed on their practice. This is best achieved by encouraging dialogue. This is the most crucial aspect of peer observation of teaching: only reflection and feedback lead to sustained improved teaching (Siddiqui 2007). The importance of carefully agreeing the areas for feedback and the approach to observation prior to the observation taking place, therefore, is key to supporting the post-observation feedback.   
If your observation was not a teaching activity, the follow up may naturally take place within the observed period, or you may decide it better to arrange for a later date if you want to further explore an aspect. For example, if you have created student facing digital resources for your teaching and learning activity, your observer might ask you to check the operating requirements with colleagues from the TEL team, before your follow up.

During the post-observation follow up, the observer should begin by encouraging the observed academic to reflect on their experience of the session/activity. Following this, the observer should offer the positive points first and always end on a positive note. The discussion and reflection will support the observed academic in being able to identify their own action points. The observer can support the observed in how to address the action points that they have identified and can offer suggestions to achieve change. The initial focus at the post-observation meeting must be all about the observed, as described. Only when action points have been identified and discussed can the focus of the conversation broaden.  
The observer can now reflect on their own experience of the observation and what they can learn for their own teaching and learning practice. They should also reflect on their own provision of feedback and constructive criticism and their development as an observer (Siddiqui 2007). Making this part of the process ensures that a true shared approach is taken and ensures that the giving and receiving of feedback is less stressful (Fullerton 2003). Depending on the development issues that may be identified as part of the observation it may be beneficial for both parties to arrange a future follow-up, either to just review the actions identified or to carry out a second observation where development actions can be tried by the observed tutor with the support of the original observer. It may be necessary to seek advice and support from other staff; the observed person should lead on this and seek the advice they feel is appropriate to support meeting their action points. Staff responsible for LTA in departments or other departments within the university, could be approached for support.

The detail of the observation, pre-observation meeting, the observation itself and the post-observation follow-up meeting is confidential to both parties. The PRE activity is most successful when built upon a strong relationship of trust and honesty (Shortland 2007).

### 6. Making a record of the observation

If so desired a record of the observation can be completed. If you are being observed, you will need to send details of the observation session to your observer ahead of the date. Appendix 1 provides a template for this you might find useful. For the observer, you may wish to keep notes during the observation to help the follow up discussion and feedback (an example pro-forma is included as appendix 2), and these should be given to the observed academic following the activity. You might choose to keep your own reflective notes from the PRE process, which are always helpful for your own continuing professional development.

Once you have completed your PRE activity, you should contact your LTA lead for your department, to let them know this has been completed. No records or reflections need to be shared, but your LTA colleague might ask for an outline of the type of activity you chose. You should also let your line manager know you have completed PRE during your PDR. You may find it helpful to discuss your learning here too.

**Guidance for observers**

The features to be observed will vary according to the type of teaching and learning activity and for the discipline concerned. For a typical lecture session, observers will note:

* the appropriateness and achievement of objectives/learning outcomes;
* communication of objectives to learners and links to prior knowledge;
* structure of the session, e.g. an introduction, organisation into sections and a summary;
* delivery – including pace, audibility, visibility;
* communication with students – including signposting, interaction, questioning and activities;
* the engagement of students in the learning process.

For most types of small group teaching activities, such as tutorials and seminars an observer might note the:

* relationship of the session to the articulated objectives/learning outcomes;
* interaction of students with the tutor and each other;
* facilitation skills of the tutor, including engaging students, managing the group activity, questioning, listening, responding, prompting of critical and analytical thinking;
* involvement of all members of the group;
* encouragement of students;
* use of the teaching space;
* quality of formative feedback to students;
* provision for summing up and consolidating what has been learnt;
* ways in which students are helped to become aware of their own learning.

**Prompts for the observer to consider depending on the type of feedback requested by the observer - observers should not try to feedback on all the topics below!**

Structure and planning

* Was the relevance / point of the session made clear to the students?
* Were anticipated learning outcomes identified?
* Did the session begin and end on time?
* Was the structure of the session clear?
* Did the tutor relate the session to previous sessions and set it in an overall context?
* Did the session appear to be well-planned and organised?

Delivery / formative assessment

* Were the methods/approach taken suitable to achieve the learning outcomes?
* Were issues of equality and diversity considered? How?
* Did the pace and delivery seem appropriate for the students present?
* Were students invited to participate? Was the approach inclusive?
* Did the tutor check the students' understanding of the material/approach?
* What formative assessment activities were there?

Content

* Did the content seem accurate, up-to-date?
* Was the session pitched at the appropriate level for the students present?
* Did the content match the needs of the students?
* Did the content explore wider perspectives and consider equality and diversity?

Resources / accommodation

* Was technology enhanced learning used? Did this enhance learning?
* Were resources professional?
* Were other resources used, e.g. slides, video?
* Were they well-produced - did they consider readability?
* Were the seating arrangements appropriate?
* Did the tutor make good use of the space?

Overall style and ambience

* Did the tutor convey enthusiasm?
* Were they clear and audible?
* Was there good rapport with the students?
* Were students engaged?

(adapted from Gosling, 2000)

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## **Guidance for giving and receiving feedback**

The best approach is for the observing colleague is to **ask not tell**.

**Giving feedback**

* the observed should reflect first (see prompt questions below)
* the observer should then begin with feedback on the positive aspects of the observation, start by talking about something that was really good to build confidence
* focus on the behaviour/content that can be changed and not the person by using specific examples
* focus feedback on the agreed outcomes from the pre-observation meeting
* only provide the amount of feedback that the observed can make use of at that time
* make constructive and make positive suggestions
* use questions to guide discussion and enable reflection by the observed
* the observer should finish on a positive from the session

**Prompt Questions / statements**

* What do you think went well?
* I really liked it when you….
* I wondered what you thought when…
* If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?
* Did you achieve what you wanted to?
* What do you think the students gained from the session? How do you know?
* How did you feel about that?
* What effect did you feel it had when you said that?
* How do you think you could have involved the students more in that?
* What were you trying to achieve at that particular point?
* How can you address that?

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### Receiving feedback

* ensure that the type of feedback is agreed in advanced
* be ready to accept honest feedback and constructive criticism
* be ready to be self-reflective
* attempt to find solutions to address less effective practice
* ask for examples and ideas for other ways of doing things
* develop your own action plan from the feedback received

(Adapted from Fullerton, 2003 p232-233)

# Appendix 1: Observation of Teaching and Learning activities Pro-Forma (optional use)

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## **Observation Details and Planning:**

To be completed by academic being observed.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name |  |
| Name of colleague observing |  |
| Date and time of observation |  |
| Type of Teaching and Learning activity (i.e. lecture) |  |
| Course/Module related |  |
| Context for why this activity chosen |  |
| Student engagement with activity |  |
| Aims/planned learning outcomes of activity |  |
| Learning Materials? |  |
| How does the activity fit in with the module/course? |  |
| Are there any specific issues to take into account? |  |
| What are the particular elements that feedback is required on? |  |
| Should feedback be provided on any aspect of the session or restricted only to the agreed elements above? |  |
| Date and time of feedback and reflection discussion? |  |

# Appendix 2: Activity Observation Pro-Forma (optional use)

This could be used by the observer as a guide to assist the taking of notes during the observation period and conducting the discussion and reflection after the observation. You may wish to give this to the colleague you are observing for their development. See also guidance above.

What feedback has the observed individual specifically asked for:

What were the positive elements in the learning and teaching activity?

*Apprenticeship Specifics (delete if not applicable)*

* Can the observer identify any specific work based learning principles deployed or methods and skills used in the session /practice and ask the academic to positively embed those?
* How was the tutor able to work with learners to look at development in specific areas or learning outcomes, or knowledge, skills and behaviours as measured from the learner's starting -point?
* Did the feedback include discussion of new targets to develop and action plans to develop within the apprenticeship and for future career direction?

What could be improved or developed?

*Apprenticeship Specifics (delete if not applicable):*

* Consider feedback on the extent to which the academic provided opportunity to learn or gain feedback on the development of English and Maths Skills within curriculum.
* Did the theme of equality and diversity emerge at all and were opportunities used to examine any issues within or around the session / practice
* Did the discussion lead to any opportunities to discuss British Values, potentially in a global context and how were these themes taken up?

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# Appendix 3: UKPSF (HEA, 2011)

**Areas of Activity**

A1 Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study

A2 Teach and/or support learning

A3 Assess and give feedback to learners

A4 Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance

A5 Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices

**Core Knowledge**

K1 The subject material

K2 Appropriate methods for teaching, learning and assessing in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme

K3 How students learn, both generally and within their subject/ disciplinary area(s)

K4 The use and value of appropriate learning technologies

K5 Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching

K6 The implications of quality assurance and quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching

**Professional Values**

V1 Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities

V2 Promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners

V3 Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development

V4 Acknowledge the wider context in which higher education operates recognising the implications for professional practice

# Appendix 4: BTE Implementation: Department based approach

Departmental Peer Observation Planning Group:

* Chair: DHoD
* Membership: T&L Lead, SGLs

DHoD / T&L Lead to report to relevant Departmental Quality Board / Departmental Leadership Team and T&L Delivery Group key milestones.

**Important Note:** Throughout this document, the terms “observe” or “observation” are often used. Please interpret these terms as participation in an activity, not always as a literal observation.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Steps** | **Deadline** |
| 1. Allocation and notification of trio team members (three members of staff from across subject group, department, college as appropriate) A, B, C (or alternative arrangements)  A Observes B  B Observes C  C Observes A  Other local arrangements (e.g. pairs, etc.) may be used if this suits better the local context. Discuss and agree with departmental T&L lead as appropriate. | by mid-November 2022 |
| 2. Trio team members (or pairs, etc.) meet to agree plan.  Individuals complete Observation of Teaching Pro-Forma (see Appendix 2) if they feel this will support activity. Otherwise, use local means. | by November - December 2022 |
| 3. Confirm Peer Observation complete via dedicated PRE recording forms – see column on the right | by end of May 2023  Computing - <https://forms.office.com/r/Pw6Km21Bct>  Engineering and Maths - <https://forms.office.com/r/36TtfjxxFW>  Finance, Accounting and Business Systems - <https://forms.office.com/r/svid8NHBrg>  Management - <https://forms.office.com/r/adc51rgMXD>  Service Sector Management - <https://forms.office.com/r/0RL7nE3FHa> |
| 4. Individual staff to share reflections and agree staff development at their PDR meetings. | by June – September 2023 |