

# Regent College London

## Observation of Teaching Policy

### Introduction

1. Observation of teaching is widely practiced in higher education in the United Kingdom. It is important for both enhancing the quality of teaching, resulting in greater student satisfaction with their learning experience, and strengthening quality assurance processes. This Policy provides a clear, developmental path through which we can take pride in the innovative and high-quality teaching demonstrated throughout the College. It is also a way in which the academic community can continually improve, champion and recognise good practice amongst its staff. The Policy aims to create a framework for teaching staff to observe different teaching methods in practice and to share their own teaching practice with colleagues with the aim of placing consideration of the student experience at the heart of our endeavours.

### Aims and purpose

2. Teaching observation is a collaborative, developmental activity which has the potential to enhance teaching practice, and improve the quality of the student learning experience. Discussion of ideas and good practice is an essential aspect of peer observation which helps to develop reflection and innovation for both the observer and the observed.

3. The purpose of observations at Regent College is:

- to promote a culture in which good teaching is valued and to enhance teaching quality at the point of delivery by encouraging reflection on practice;
- to provide a supportive and constructive framework for all academic staff to monitor, reflect upon and improve the quality of their teaching;
- to enhance the quality of teaching by providing an effective framework for the identification and dissemination of good teaching practice;
- to enhance the quality of teaching by the identification of staff development needs and to inform the College in addressing those needs.

### Policy for Observation of Teaching

4. Observation of teaching is mandatory and should take place at least once a year for each member of academic staff with new staff observed twice in their first year, once in their first semester (see below). The Provost, Deputy Provosts and Deans of Schools are accountable for ensuring that the observation process is carried out this accountability will be handed on to a single named individual each year to manage the process. Observation will be of engagement with students, whether face-to-

face or remote teaching, supervision, supporting learning or any other teaching and learning related activity.

5. All new academic staff (whatever their contractual terms) will be observed at least once during their first three months at the College in addition to the normal yearly observation. The first observation for all new academic staff will be undertaken by the relevant Dean of School or their nominee (such as the relevant Programme Leader). Should there be a need to extend the probation period for any new academic staff, subsequent observations during the extended probation will also be carried out by the relevant Dean of School or their nominee. Upon successful completion of the probationary period the member of academic staff will be observed once more in their first year at the College by a peer.

6. Line managers are responsible for either carrying out the observations themselves or assigning an observer. The line manager must ensure that the observation is carried out.

7. The College requires that a record of all peer observation is kept..A centralised system has been developed to record all observations. This system must be used by all staff to track the observation process.

8. Each School is responsible for producing a summary report following observations of teaching. This summary report will identify cross-college good practice, areas for enhancement and staff development, and comment on the observation of teaching process. The latter will feed into any enhancement and changes to be made to this policy and pro-forma. The summary report should develop an action plan, which can be updated in future summary reports of observation of teaching.

9. A summary report on observation of teaching should be considered at the next Programme Committee or Course Board.

### **The observation process**

10. An observation of teaching schedule should be announced and agreed in advance with the members of academic staff to be observed. The process of observation of teaching falls into three phases:

- a. Pre-observation
- b. Observation
- c. Post-observation.

#### Pre-observation

11. Before any teaching observation takes place, the observer should hold a pre-observation meeting with the lecturer (or observee). This is important for setting the scene for the observation and clarifying any questions or issues. The observee should arrange a mutually convenient time for the observation, and the observer identifies focus areas for discussion and observation.

12. The observer and observee should confirm and/or agree the following:
  - where the observer should sit in the classroom (for face-to-face sessions);
  - 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;
  - when the feedback meeting will be held;
  - what will happen to the teaching observation record made by the observer.
13. The observee should:
  - provide the observer with relevant information about the module including the Module Guide, the learning objectives of the teaching session to be observed and any supporting material;
  - provide any relevant information about the student group who will be present.

### Observation

14. 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 had difficulty with concepts, calculations, etc.
15. The observer should observe a significant part of the teaching session ensuring that either the start or end is observed. If an observer were present for the start of the teaching session it may be a good idea to observe the latter part of the session next time.
16. 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 questionnaires.
17. The observer should ensure the following for any observation of teaching:
  - sit in the location agreed at the pre-observation meeting (for face-to-face sessions);
  - be as discreet 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 invited to do so by students;
  - record details of the observation on the online pro-forma provided;
  - ensure that all parts of the teaching observation pro-forma are completed.
18. The observee 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 discussion;
  - conduct the session observed as normal without further reference to the observer;
  - no attempt is made to draw the observer into any class discussion or any other activity with students.

### Post-observation

19. After the observation has taken place, the participants should meet to identify strengths, areas of shared interest, enhancement ideas and examples of good practice which could be disseminated to other staff. It is good practice to hold this meeting as soon as possible after the observed session. 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 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.

20. 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 following the automated workflow of the online system.
21. 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.

### **The Observation of Teaching Report Form**

22. Observers of teaching must complete each section of the pro-forma (Appendix A). 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.

### **Brief guide for observee**

23. The aim of this policy is to create an opportunity for both you and the observer to discuss teaching and student learning by identifying effective practice and sharing concerns. The process should be developmental and not judgmental. The observee will have significant control of the process. Your

line manager will be responsible to ensure that your observer is allocated; you can select what class to be observed, the focus of the observation and the type of feedback you would like to receive. You can raise most of these topics at the pre-observation meeting that your observer will arrange with you. During that meeting, you are recommended to provide the observer with the session's learning outcomes and to be specific about areas in teaching you want them to focus on during the observation.

24. At the beginning of the observation, we recommend that your students are made aware of the presence of the observer (even in digital sessions). Whether your session has a small or large number of students attending, it is useful for them to know that the College has a process that encourages discussion amongst staff about teaching and learning. However, the observer should not engage with students during the session.

25. Soon after the observation, a post-observation meeting will take place with your observer. This part of the process tends to be the most valuable one for both you and the observer. You will have the opportunity to talk about your session, identify what you believe went well and why. You should also reflect on what you believe did not go as planned or as expected.

### **Receiving Feedback**

26. At the post-observation discussion, when the observer is offering feedback, you should try to:

- listen carefully and critically;
- trust the feedback received is for benefit and intended to improve your practice;
- be prepared to accept constructive criticism;
- ask for examples or ideas for other approaches that may be useful;
- remember that the observer has the advantage of observing you and to see your teaching through a different lens.

### **Moving forward**

27. The observer will return to the observee the completed Observation Form using the online workflow in the system. Check that the information in the form represents the discussion you had and keep it for your records. You may refer to it in the future as you continue to reflect on your teaching practice.

### **Guide for observers**

28. As the observer in the process, you must ensure that confidentiality and the creation of a non-judgmental environment is evident; your aim is to encourage the colleague you are observing to reflect on and talk about their teaching. The process should be formative, developmental and allow for personal reflection and exploration of practice. You should discuss the aims of the observation at the pre-observation meeting with the observee. It is also useful to encourage the observee to raise any aspects of their practice that they may want you to focus on during the observation.

### **During the observation**

29. You should refrain from participating in the session you are observing as this may change the focus of the activities undertaken and may reduce your capacity to comment objectively on the teaching processes used. It is also useful to remember that your observation is a snapshot of your colleague's teaching practice and your feedback should factor this in by allowing the observee to discuss the processes they used. This can be done in the post-observation discussion.

30. Some questions you may want to ask yourself during the observation of teaching to help you with your role may include:

- How well does the teaching match the intended learning outcomes?
- Are students invited to participate? How is this done?
- What processes are in place for students to engage with the session?
- Do students receive feedback? How is this done?
- Are students supported to be critical and reflect on their learning?
- Is the session signposted to previous content covered, or online resources and other related material?
- How did the observee and the students make use of digital technologies to meet the learning outcomes and develop skills (for both in-person and online lessons)?

### **Post-observation**

31. Following the observation, you should engage with the observee in a reflective feedback discussion at the earliest opportunity. Together with the observee, you can analyse the session you observed and try to focus on the question of 'Why' instead of only the 'How' in relation to the teaching methods used. When giving feedback, you should consider the following:

- always allow the observee to talk about their session before you give feedback;
- allow the observee to highlight issues and possible solutions first;
- feedback on its own does not give room for improvement – be specific about what in your view worked well or may need to change. Use evidence based on your practice or experience or how students responded during the session you observed;
- effective feedback should be focused on information that the observee can make use of and is based on evidence collected during the observation of their teaching

32. Discussions about observation should support the provision of individual evidence for recognition claims, including Advance HE fellowships where appropriate.

### **Guidance for observation record**

33. 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 (contextualise for digital delivery)?
- 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 to 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**

- Was the clarity, pace and delivery appropriate for the students? did the lecturer build rapport with the students?
- Did the lecturer respond adequately to 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 (primarily for face-to-face sessions but also applies to digital delivery)?

#### **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 (VLE) or elsewhere, for example, the internet?
- Was the classroom and layout of the classroom appropriate to support the learning objectives of the session (for face-to-face sessions)?

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

34. Each of the 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.

#### **Summary reports**

35. Each School will produce a summary report on the observations of teaching carried out in their respective Schools each academic year. These should be written according to the guidelines provided. The report should be considered at the next relevant Course Board or Programme Committee.

#### **Annual Monitoring Reports**

36. Annual monitoring reports should refer to outcomes of the observation of teaching, including both areas of good practice and areas for enhancement.

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

37. 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 series of development sessions will be offered to observers. This will be followed up with feedback and discussion sessions once observations have been made.

#### **Briefing sessions for teaching staff**



38. 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:

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

### Conclusion

39. 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 Provost and Deputy Provosts in consultation with Deans of Schools to identify enhancements to the policy and process of observation of teaching.

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## Observation form template (delivered as an online form)

This form needs to be completed by the Observer and discussed with the person who has been observed.

Name of the person observed (Observee)	
Department/School/Institute	
Observer's Name	
Date of Observation	
Module title	
Module code	
<b>Organisation and Structure of Session</b>	
Provide detailed comments on the structure of the session – if it was well organised, with clear structure and easy to follow. Did you, as the reviewer, understand the information and, when applicable, what you needed to undertake? Highlight areas of good examples and also where improvements are needed.	
<b>Content and Clarity</b>	
Please comment on how easy the teaching material was to follow, was the content always relevant to Learning and Teaching aims. Did you, as a reviewer, understand the information supplied and, when applicable, what you needed to undertake? Are there areas that need updating to make the information clearer and/or more relevant. Was the information presented clearly by the tutor?	
<b>Use of Technology</b>	

<p>Please comment on the use of technology in both online and face-to-face classes. What was used, was it used effectively and did it enhance learning? Where do areas need to be strengthened and how could this be implemented.</p>
<p><b>Student Engagement</b></p> <p>Comment on how engaged the students were in the session. Were students actively involved? If so, how? Was a productive working relationship between teacher and student evident? Were students encouraged to reflect on their learning? What were the student comments on this session.</p>
<p><b>Items for discussion in the debrief</b></p> <p><b>Highlight areas of good practice</b></p>
<p><b>Highlight areas that need further development</b> (include further description of any critical comments)</p>
<p><b>Response from the Observee</b></p> <p>The observee should respond to the comments provided by their observer. These comments should form the basis for an action plan for developing future academic practice. The following questions may be used to guide the responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you feel were the most important points to emerge from your interactions with the observer?</li> <li>• What changes, if any, will you make as a result of your engagements with your observer and your subsequent reflection?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ to the particular session</li> <li>○ to your teaching more generally</li> <li>○ any other comments about the observation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

We agree that this is a fair record of the Observation (to be signed following the debrief session and copies kept by observer and lecturer)

Signature of Observee	
Date	
Signature of Observer	
Date	