Peer-Supported Review of Education (PSRE)

**Scope**
This policy is for all who are involved in any education activity.

**Policy**
This paper provides a rationale for the current review of peer review and the outline of the proposed policy with guidance and forms included.

The policy and supporting documents has been discussed at School Learning and teaching committees and/or Boards of Studies.

**Actions**
Members of Education and Student Committee are asked to approve this policy to be submitted to Senate for adoption in 2016-2017.
Peer-Supported Review of Education: a proposed revised City University London policy on Peer Review of Teaching

I. Why review the existing CUL policy?

The existing CUL policy on peer review of teaching dates from 2010. Naturally, that policy envisaged periodic review and this is now certainly due. The present review is given added impetus however by the Government’s Green Paper on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF): it is known that at some point HE institutions will be asked to disclose how they evaluate teaching and there is an expectation that peer review be one approach used. It is therefore desirable to undertake a fundamental review of the existing policy with the aim of implementing a revised policy as necessary for academic year 2016/17, so allowing for evaluation and further amendment as appropriate prior to the likely imposition of a TEF metric of academic staff participation in this activity.

II. Review methodology

Enquiry of the Associate Deans for Education (ADEs) in all Schools across CUL revealed a generally very low level of academic staff participation in the scheme created by the existing policy, but with considerable variation across Schools. An extensive literature review of teaching observation practice was therefore undertaken to identify relevant theory and best practice in this activity. The websites of a number of colleges in the University of London and of other universities in the UK were also searched to identify relevant practice amongst peer institutions. A discussion was also held with a PhD candidate in this field.

Once a workable model had been devised in the light of this research and of ‘insider’ experience of the author, this was circulated for review to stakeholders comprising broadly ADEs and the Students’ Union VP Education. Three meetings of this stakeholder group have taken place, where existing policy and practice, the revised model and its proposed implementation have been discussed and the latter refined. The salient features of the proposed model were also included in a survey of CUL staff opinion on peer review of teaching, undertaken amongst the 51 CUL LEaD Fellows (staff with a particular interest in teaching excellence, as evidenced by FHEA membership, MAAP qualifications and similar), seeking their views on it: 41 responses were received, analysed and taken into account.

III. The proposed model of PSRE

The various models of peer review of teaching found in the literature and practice may be differentiated fundamentally according to (a) their purpose and (b) the implications of this purpose for power relations between the participants. Gosling (2009) defines and analyses three models: evaluative, developmental and collaborative. The literature is clear that the model with the greatest chance of being supported by staff is a collaborative one, as both evaluative and developmental models involve contestable judgments about what constitutes good teaching or improvement (Cosh, 1998); the voluntary nature of participation by staff is also thought to be important, as imposed participation may result in a focus on compliance – a ‘tick box’ approach - rather than on substantive improvement of one’s teaching practice (Shortland, 2004; Peel, 2005).

The existing CUL model is developmental, although its implementation in two departments has included a collaborative element.
The proposed model – see detailed description in policy document in the Appendix – is fundamentally collaborative, aiming to:

- promote reciprocal learning for developing education practice
- be non-judgmental and recognise parity of the parties
- be based on dialogue, and
- incorporate enquiry or investigation;

however, it incorporates a number of supplementary elements, explained at IV below.

Heads of departments and others in leadership roles will be asked to provide visible support for implementation of the policy, for example through participating in training, as evidence suggests that this increases staff participation in any scheme for peer review of teaching (Gosling, 2015).

IV. Benefits of the proposed model

As well as offering the documented benefits of a collaborative model, a number of additional features aim variously:

- to increase engagement and thus benefit for participants
- to enable staff to identify personal benefit in participating and thus indirectly to incite voluntary participation
- to allow the percentage of staff participating to be measured (almost certainly essential for future TEF metrics).

A key feature of the revised model is that each partner to the review event is asked to write a subsequent brief reflection on the event, drawing conclusions for his/her own education practice\(^1\) and to submit this to LEaD online via a dedicated webpage portal. Submissions will be anonymous but the School must be identified (see linked template at https://forms.city.ac.uk/forms/54931).

The discipline of writing a critical reflection inspired by the given prompts should inherently entail deeper engagement in the exercise and so greater benefit for the participant; over time, it should also facilitate the development of a scholarly perspective on education. In addition, all submitted reflections will be read by LEaD to identify common developmental themes for inclusion in the annual LEaD conference and potentially other learning and teaching events, so allowing the outcomes of the PSRE process to be seen to benefit all those engaged in education at CUL, not just the individual concerned. Further visible benefit for participants lies in the possibility of including a new section in one’s CUL standard academic CV, reflecting on one’s participation in PSRE, which may enrich or counterbalance other QA feedback already required to be included there. The addition to the CUL appraisal form of a box requiring the employee to identify merely whether or not s/he has participated in PSRE in that academic year, as relevant with date(s), will allow each department and thus ultimately each School to measure the percentage of academic staff who are participating.

V. Approval and implementation; evaluation

Following approval of the policy by Learning & Teaching Committees and Boards of Studies in all Schools, staff training in the policy will be devised by School ADEs in conjunction with LEaD. The policy will then be submitted for approval to the Student and Education Committee and Senate, with an intended implementation date of September 2016.

\(^{1}\) Prompts provided on the template for this include how, why and when the participant will change his/her education practice as a result; and what other steps s/he will take, for example to satisfy personal development needs such as reading, planning, consultation and training.
Evaluation will be undertaken by LEaD in Summer 2017.

References


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Policy on Peer-Supported Review of Education (PSRE) with attached Guidance and Templates

CUL Policy on Peer-Supported Review of Education

Rationale

Peer-supported review of education is a collaboratively developmental activity which focuses on improving/developing/sharing aspects of performance through non-judgmental peer input or advice. The review focuses on practice (i.e. what is observed) rather than on the individual; and each partner to the reviewed event reflects on the review to draw conclusions for improvement of his/her own practice.

The benefits of this process are that there can be:
- recognition of aspects of teaching and/or assessing that are working well
- identification by individual staff/teams of their development needs
- dissemination of good practice and expertise amongst colleagues through dialogue on education practice
- evolution of a mutually-supportive environment for the development of education skills and a focus on teaching excellence.

In addition staff may use evidence from their review when applying for promotion.

Model

Staff who have engaged previously in peer review of teaching know that an observer may learn as much from such an event for his/her own teaching, as s/he contributes to the observee’s future practice. The present model of PSRE recognises this, being an explicitly collaborative process engaged in equally by both partners in the review, with a view to enhancing the education practice of each partner.

Scope

The focus of peer observation of teaching is often only on face-to-face classroom activity. However this does not take into account the complexity of a modern lecturer’s role, which includes much input outside the seminar/lecture room such as:

- designing and planning learning and assessment activities
- providing transferable and timely feedback to students on their performance
- developing responsive learning environments in which students can (individually or in teams) work effectively and with flexibility
- managing online, flexible and distance learning

There are a range of activities within each area that might be explored: guidance is available in appendix A as to behaviours/activities that may be commented upon. Further guidance is available from LEaD on request.

Managing the Process

Guidance for Schools is provided here [link to PSRE webpage]; Schools may also publish additional guidance on local implementation. PSRE applies to all staff involved in activities facilitating students’ learning ie including hourly paid/visiting staff and research students as well as lecturers at all levels of seniority. Staff training will be available.
It is recommended that Schools (through a designated manager) identify pairs for this process early in each academic year to ensure that staff are able to plan their review(s) throughout the year. However, recognising that staff may wish to obtain peer support from someone with specific expertise, managers should respond positively to any reasoned request from staff to use a specified substitute review partner.

Timing

In order for this process to be developmental it should not be viewed as a one-off event, but, as an on-going process which may involve a series of reviews throughout the year. It is expected that all academic staff would engage in at least one review annually.

Process

1. **Briefing**
   This is a very important stage. Both partners should decide on the scope and manner of the review and record this: see optional template at Appendix B Form 1. It is essential that both review partners have a clear idea of which aspects of the education-related work/practice are to be reviewed and how. Where a face-to-face education event (ie seminar or lecture) is chosen for review, the observing partner should be provided at this briefing stage with all necessary information and documents. In relation to all review events, a clear brief should be provided at this stage as to which areas to concentrate on in the review, and the nature of the outcomes sought. A date should be fixed for the event to be reviewed and for the de-briefing discussion.

2. **Reviewing**
   - **Seminar/lectures**: the review should be of sufficient duration (normally, the whole seminar/lecture). The observing partner should approach the task as ‘objectively’ as possible, focusing on ‘facts’ (e.g. description of behaviours), bearing in mind that judgmental evaluation is not what is required. The review should adopt the perspective agreed in the briefing session. An optional template for the reviewing partner’s use during the review may be found at Appendix B Form 2.
   - **Review of documents, processes, online material, etc**: all relevant documents/links should be made available to the review partner at least two weeks before the de-briefing session (see below) takes place. It is likely that review of documents etc will take place by each partner individually in his/her own time (although depending on the nature of the task, this may be done jointly).

Peer-supported review may be based on a collection of evidence, so available student feedback or other forms of evidence on the reviewed event/artefact may be considered also.

3. **De-briefing**
   Confidentiality must be guaranteed (except where something occurs that could place the University at risk of legal proceedings – for example, abuse or discrimination - in which case the reviewer should seek advice from their line manager). Since the review is a supportive partnership aimed at benefiting the practice of each partner, both partners should adopt a questioning, non-judgmental approach, thus generating discussion of points arising from the review. Discussions should centre on the matters identified in the briefing, although each partner may also raise other aspects that are appropriate for debate in this context. Both partners should remember that their focus is on stimulating and supporting the review by the other of his/her own education practice.
4. Reflective record

Either at the end of the de-briefing or shortly afterwards, each partner to the review should write a brief paragraph recording his/her reflective thoughts and conclusions for his/her own future education practice (including details of any enhancements s/he will make and/or other steps s/he will take) and send a copy of this electronically to LEaD via the [PSRE portal on the dedicated webpage/the link in Appendix B, Form 3]. Returns filed in this way will be anonymous. The reflective records will be reviewed by LEaD to identify transferable learning points which will feed into a future CUL teaching and learning event.

An optional template for the individual’s own record is available in Appendix B Form 3.

Monitoring

When participating in annual appraisal, you should confirm to your appraiser that you have participated in peer review, together with the date(s). Entirely at your option, if you would like to discuss any aspect of the review (e.g. particular strengths or areas for development), you may include this in your appraisal form.

The appraiser does not need to be given your reflective record of the review.

At your option, you may include details of your PSRE in your standard academic CV in a box designated for this purpose. (This should be copied and pasted from the template available here [link to CUL standard academic CV template].)

Professional and School Requirements; Issues of Concern

For some departments/Schools, there may be professional body or other School policy requirements that senior staff are engaged in reviewing education practice. Separate, explicit arrangements for this should be made where relevant.

Likewise, if concerns have been raised about an individual’s education practice (e.g. through student evaluations), then additional review arrangements may be required by managers.
APPENDIX A

Guidance on Areas for Peer-Supported Review

The guidance outlined is broad so that it can suit a range of activities including, face-to-face contact, designing, planning and management of learning and assessment activities etc. It is, however, indicative only: other elements may be defined for review, as relevant to teaching excellence in the review context.

**Face-to-Face Class Activity**

- Lecturer arrived on time, students arriving late/unprepared dealt with appropriately
- Objectives and context and structure of session clearly stated
- Students involved in learning activities as early as possible in session
- Issues raised by students dealt with appropriately and student questions received appropriate responses
- Links between present session and other parts of the programme made clear
- Level of class appropriate (e.g. clearly post-graduate if masters or professional programme)
- Lecturer audible, appropriate balance between control and flexibility, session led at an appropriate pace
- Good rapport established with the students, lecturer addressed students by name
- Sensitivity to the different cultural backgrounds of the students and any special needs
- Lecturer communicated enthusiasm to students, making appropriate attempts to motivate them
- Effective management of the group dynamic, appropriate level of student participation/performance
- Key points summarised at end of session, students told what preparation is needed for any relevant later session(s)
- Session finished on time

**Design, planning and management of learning and assessment activities**

- Session organisation (opening, closing, signposting, structuring)
- Preparation (content, handouts, planning of activities, etc)
- Learning outcomes for session (explicit, achievable, achieved)
- Time management (also allocation of time to various activities)
- Appropriate teaching methods/approaches
- Use of resources/teaching materials (extent, types, effectiveness, etc)
- Alignment of learning activities in which students are engaged, with learning outcomes; activities appropriate to the level (e.g. UG or PG)
- Instructional material is well designed and packaged
- Appropriate instructions are available for each task
- Critical thinking is facilitated through activities such as journal writing, interactive reading, discussion, constructive feedback
- Learner feedback is integrated into the teaching process

**Providing useful and timely feedback to students on their performance**

- Alignment with learning outcomes and teaching methods
- Account taken of student workload (and assessment activities spread out appropriately)
- Use of a variety of assessment instruments
• Actively discouraging plagiarism
• Inclusivity (e.g. dealing with disability/racial awareness)
• Content of oral/written feedback given to students (tutor feedback is substantial
  not just ticks in boxes; constructive and transferable)
• Timing of feedback to students (work returned to students as quickly as possible)
• Support for students prior to assessment
• Nature of assessment tasks, Marking criteria, Grading scheme
• Availability of self-assessment

Developing responsive learning environments in which teams and students can
work effectively and with flexibility
• Ground rules exist for framing engagement of learners
• Student responses (participation, attention, note-taking, etc)
• Guidance to students on learning activities
• Communicating with international students
• Effective support provided to students
• Dealing with specific issues raised by students
• Investigating support networks available to students
• Review and enhancement of group work
• Adequate time and support provided for student to tackle tasks
• Adequate guidance / understanding of management of the learning process
• Communication is easy with provision for reasonably prompt response
• Communication and collaboration amongst all students is fostered, monitored and
  positively encouraged
• Adequate attention paid to diversity and different learning styles

Managing online, flexible and distance learning
• Navigation is easy
• Connections between flexible components and the overall programme are made
  clear
• Keeping on-line discussions targeted and stimulating debate when student
  contribution lapses
• Organisational skills (agenda for discussion/activities, objectives,
  timetable, procedural rules, managing interactions)
• Encouraging reflection and creativity in students
• Strategies are in place to compensate for the lack of ‘tone’ in on-line exchanges
  (tone of voice, facial expressions, humour, etc)
• Material is made available on how to communicate successfully via distance learning
• The programme is fully functional (e.g. all links work, images appear as planned,
  classes appear on line as scheduled)
• Assessment design is appropriate to this mode of delivery (e.g. relies on
  discussions, interpretation, comparison tasks to encourage deep learning)
• Working relationship established between distance learners and the tutor
APPENDIX B – Optional Templates

Form 1 – PSRE Pre Meeting Record (for use only by parties to the review)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Reviewee Partner</th>
<th>Department/School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Reviewing Partner</td>
<td>Department/School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Pre Meeting</td>
<td>Session/activity to be reviewed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be completed by Reviewee after discussion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify what is to be reviewed (class room, online, assessment activity, documents) and why, with an indication of what you would like the reviewer to concentrate on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas you would like feedback on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This might include, for example, your style of communication with students or your management of a specified situation (see guidance notes [link here] for further prompts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above outline has been agreed as the focus of the review.

Agreed date and time of review:______________________________________________________________

Reviewing Partner: Signature:________________________ Date:________________________

Reviewee Partner: Signature:________________________ Date:________________________
Form 2 - Suggested template for Reviewer's notes during Review

The prompts outlined below are broad in order to suit a range of activities including face-to-face contact, designing, planning and management of learning and assessment activities. They are, however, indicative only: other elements may have been defined for review, as relevant to teaching excellence in the review context.

*Introduction*
Were the objectives of the session/materials made clear to students? Were the anticipated learning outcomes identified? Was the structure of the session/materials clear? (For face-to-face delivery) did the class begin on time?

*Planning and Organisation*
Was the session/were the materials related expressly by the tutor to previous sessions and set in the overall context of the Unit/Module? Was the structure of the session/materials set out at the beginning? Did the session/the materials appear to be well-planned and organised?

*Methods/Approach*
Were the methods/approach taken suitable to achieve the learning objectives set? What alternative approaches could have been taken?
**Delivery and Pace**
Did the pace and delivery seem appropriate for the student audience? Were any aspects, in your view, dealt with too briefly/with too much elaboration? Did the session/materials seem rushed/too drawn out?

**Content**
Where you feel qualified to make comment, did the content seem accurate, up-to-date? Were examples given? Was the session/materials pitched at the appropriate level for the student audience? Did the content match their needs?

**Student Participation**
Were students invited to participate? How was participation managed (re materials, to be managed)? Did it appear to be carefully planned? Did participation enable the tutor to check the students' understanding of the content/approach?
Use of Learning Resources
Were powerpoints/videos/other visual aids used? Were they produced to a professional standard and free from error? Were they clear and in a suitable font size? Did the students receive hand-outs? Were they well-produced? Did the resources contribute to the session or detract from it?

Use of Accommodation (face-to-face sessions only)
Was the accommodation suitable for the session? Were the seating arrangements appropriate? Did there appear to be any Health and Safety issues?

Overall style and ambience
(For face-to-face/online delivery) Did the tutor appear confident in delivery? Did s/he convey enthusiasm? Was s/he clear and audible? Did the tutor have good presentation skills? (Face-to-face delivery) Did the session seem to "go well"? Was there good rapport with the students? Were students attentive/bored? Did they seem to engage with the session? Was there good eye contact with students? Did the tutor seem sensitive to the "mood" of the students?
Summary
Summarise the main points which you wish to feed back to the reviewee. Identify key strengths and any areas that need attention.

Summarise points which occur to you during the review, in relation to improving your own education practice

Adapted from Gosling, D. (undated) Notes for ESCalate Regional Networking Seminars
Form 3 – Reflective Record of Peer-Supported Review of Education

TO BE COMPLETED SEPARATELY ONLINE BY EACH PARTNER TO THE REVIEW AND SUBMITTED TO LEaD here: https://forms.city.ac.uk/forms/54931

You may wish to save a copy of your reflective record below, for your future reference and use: