

## Suggestions for Peer Review of Teaching

Providing constructive and critical comments on a colleague's teaching and course development should be regarded as a fundamental part of the responsibility of an academic staff member. Essentially, it involves the exercise of academic judgement in the improvement of teaching and learning and thus is a matter which should be largely free from standardisation or regulation.

The approach to peer review suggested here is based upon the principles of:

- collegiality
- openness
- negotiation

The approach assumes that peer review statements will not be confidential documents but shared between reviewer and colleague. By establishing a dialogue between the two parties as respected colleagues it is possible to develop critical yet constructive accounts without the need for hidden or restricted statements.

The review process should be conducted over a period of weeks and not as a 'one off' observation of a colleague's class. This allows for the development of a consolidated report drawing upon the ideas of both staff members.

### ***Some suggested procedures***

A meeting should be arranged between both parties well in advance of the time in which the peer review is required. This is the responsibility of the staff member being reviewed. The outcome of the meeting should be an agreed set of criteria by which to conduct the review. The criteria should be developed through negotiation. The staff member being reviewed should present details of the aspects he or she would like taken into consideration, especially perceived strengths of teaching. The reviewer should indicate the aspects he or she considers are important in such a review. These could include:

- philosophy and approach to teaching
- presentation skills
- group work and facilitator skills
- course material and resources
- assessment methods
- curriculum and staff development
- aims, objectives and content
- coordination rules

The resultant criteria should represent the views of both participants.

It is important that the staff member being reviewed is given an opportunity to discuss and explain his or her philosophy of teaching and learning. A well-developed philosophy goes hand in hand with good teaching. It also gives the opportunity for the staff member to present the reasons for the teaching and learning methods used and changes made. In addition it provides a chance to explain how their teaching may be constrained by decisions beyond an individual's control or to indicate where experimental or trial approaches have been undertaken with their attendant risks.

The staff member being reviewed should have opportunities to present details of materials and resources used. A well-organised teaching portfolio of course outlines, booklets, reading

lists, assessment methods, print and non print resources and student evaluations can assist in these discussions.

It is important to observe a staff member teaching but it requires more than one session. There should be an attempt to sample the range of teaching activities in which the staff member is engaged (lectures, tutorials, practicals, bedside teaching). If there is time, it may be preferable to observe activities more than once, to account for 'observer' or 'Hawthorne' effects. It is useful to provide feedback to staff immediately after the session. Again, this feedback could be given accordingly to jointly established criteria.

The reviewer should prepare an interim report to negotiate with the colleague. This does not give the staff member being reviewed the right of veto over the report, but allows the findings to be discussed, interpreted and explanations given for the statements made. Often misconceptions can be clarified in this way. Any difficulties between the two parties can usually be resolved provided a collegial relationship has been established. If differences cannot be reconciled this will need to be indicated in the report, although this is likely to detract from the report's overall value. In principle, both reviewer and colleague should be satisfied that the report is accurate, fair, highlighting the strengths of the staff member's teaching and provides constructive criticism where appropriate.

All that remains is to write the final report. This should be structured according to the criteria agreed between the two parties. Again, there should be negotiation of the final report.

## ***Conclusion***

This is just one approach to peer review. It is hoped that it will provide assistance for those undertaking reviews or being reviewed. It is also hoped that it will stimulate further debate and reflection on the issue.

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