University of Birmingham

Guidelines for Peer Observation of Teaching

1. All academics involved in teaching are observed and observe on a regular and systematic basis;

Each full-time member of teaching staff should be observed at least once every two years. Other staff involved in teaching should where possible be observed at least once every three years.

New non-probationary teaching staff should be observed at least once in their first year of appointment.

Separate arrangements must be made for the observation of probationary teaching staff. PDP targets must include a commitment from the School to observation by the mentor.

All staff involved in teaching should be involved in the observation of other teaching staff at least once in every two or three years, as appropriate. The intention is that the observer role would be primarily exercised by academic staff on lecturer grade or above and research staff who do a substantial amount of teaching. This may include staff who are not full-time, but not normally staff on fractional contracts and staff with Honorary status who are paid by the hour. Within these broad guidelines, Schools should feel free to implement a system for observing teaching that suits their particular needs and staffing profile.

It should not be possible for any academic involved in teaching to avoid peer observation of teaching, although it is recognised that special arrangements may sometimes be required for Visiting Lecturers, Clinical Teachers, team teaching and those delivering distance learning modules.

2. Enhancement of an individual's teaching performance is always the primary purpose of peer observation of teaching

The process should be such that the observer has an opportunity to identify good practice from the observee, and that particularly good practice can be disseminated in the Department/School or beyond.

Self-evaluation and formative feedback are normally confidential to the observer and observee.

Observation should primarily consider the delivery of teaching, rather than the content.

3. It is ultimately the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that the School has a peer observation of teaching process in place and that it is properly implemented

Peer observation of teaching may be carried out at the level of the School, Department or other academic unit, but the ultimate responsibility lies with the Head of School.

Schools should make every effort to develop and implement a peer observation of teaching process that encourages the observee to reflect on his or her teaching.

All forms of teaching activity should be subject to observation.

The process should ensure that Heads of School are alerted to any instances where peer observation has not been completed or where there are separate indicators of weak teaching (e.g. direct student feedback or Staff Student Committee comment), without the need for the Head to see the confidential reports on the observation.

4. Peer observation of teaching is not a substitute for other methods of teaching quality assurance

Information should also be extracted from student questionnaires, Staff Student Committees and any other available means of evaluating teaching performance.

5. The use of the normal peer observation of teaching process for appraisal or promotion is strictly disallowed

Information from an individual's teaching observation should be restricted to specified staff which should not normally include a person with line-management responsibility for that individual.