

**Teaching Observation**

**Observers Handbook**

**2019-2020**

# Introduction

***In light of the changes expected in the auditing and monitoring of quality within Higher Education, the gathering importance of TEF and the expectation that staff will be qualified within the UK Professional Standards Framework and maintain their CPD, the University of West London has introduced a unified, annual teaching observation policy.***

Whilst the information gathered from teaching observation will be used to help inform appraisals and various external reports, it **MUST** be developmental in nature if we are to recognise and record outstanding performances, to enhance the practice of individuals and ensure our student’s success.

This handbook gives you a brief guide to the process and should be read in conjunction with the workshop delivered by the ExPERT Academy.

# Terminology

Observer – one who is carrying out the observation, usually a member of the School/College senior management team who has received formal training from the ExPERT Academy

Participant – the individual being observed.

# Who is observed?

**All staff who teach** will be observed each year through the teaching observation scheme unless

1. They are registered on the Academic Professional Apprenticeship programme

The APA is extremely detailed and so will meet the needs of the annual observation.

# Who does the observing?

*The Vice Chancellors Executive Group decided that this should be led by the senior management team of each School/College.*

For teaching observation, it makes sense that this observer should be someone who knows the candidate and their subject area. Part of the role of the observer will be:

* ***to ensure that the candidate is keeping their subject matter up to date and at the forefront of the discipline concerned***.

# Who allocates participants?

Ultimately this is the decision of the Head of School/College as to who is allocated which participants. However, each school/college may take a different approach to this process and provided it makes sense locally, that is perfectly acceptable.

# Contact with your participants

As soon as you have been advised as to who your participants are, you should contact them to arrange a pre-observation meeting. If you don’t know the individual or their performance very well, you should use this opportunity to get to know them better and to perhaps understand the challenges they face in the classroom.

The first meeting should be for about an hour and you should agree which session(s) you will observe ( the participant may want advice about an activity, or to showcase some innovations). You should also understand who their students are, how many times they have delivered the class etc. You **MUST** complete an online form- [**Teaching Observation initial meeting**](https://uwl.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/teaching-observation-initial-meeting-2019-2020) and the required information is requested through this form.

You should also try to understand more about the participant are they:

* strong researchers who do not focus on teaching,
* hourly paid contractors,
* teaching subjects outside their immediate area of expertise.
* have they had any support and would they appreciate it or benefit from it.

This is your opportunity to really make a difference to the student experience but you won’t change someone’s practice overnight just by being critical and so meetings should be based on trust and be developmental and supportive. Try using appreciative inquiry and active listening during this meeting to really get to know the individual and the challenges they may face or the outstanding practice they demonstrate.

Once you’ve agreed the session to observe, you also need to book at least an hour immediately after the session to do the debrief. Sometimes this is really difficult but if necessary, ***change the observed session*** because doing the ***debrief whilst everything is fresh in everyone’s minds is really important!!***

# Observation

Use your knowledge of the participant, the courses on which they teach etc., as well as your preliminary discussion to help you focus your approach to the classroom observation.

Use the [**online** **Observation form**](https://uwl.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/teaching-observation-form-2019-2020)during the observation. It is preferable to do this online but you may download a copy in advance. By completing the first couple of fields and clicking ‘save until later’ you will be emailed a link to this form, to which you may then transcribe your notes from the observation immediately afterwards). When completed, you should click ‘***save till later’***, ***download*** a copy and ***share*** with the participant to inform your debriefing discussions.

Most of our students’ dissatisfactions with learning and teaching will be solved by their academic staff showing emotional intelligence, so if you are pushed for time, concentrate on the participants attitude to students, how they perceive them and interact with them.

You only need to observe 1 hour, but we encourage you to stay longer to ensure you can comment on all relevant aspects of their practice.

We suggest that at the start of the teaching session you introduce yourself to the class and explain your presence there: for example: ***‘Good morning everyone I’m XXXXX and I’m here today to share your learning experiences’.***

# Debriefing discussion

The debriefing and discussion session should be arranged immediately after the teaching session observed. This should be taken into consideration when arranging the observation in the first place.

When undertaking a debriefing, remember to start (using an appreciative inquiry approach) by asking how the session felt to the participant, how they thought it went and what were the highlights and the low points. Use this information to further explore areas that, from what you have seen, the participant may need further support and development or where you feel the participant demonstrates outstanding skill. Use your observation form to prompt the conversation.

**Remember**, by asking the right questions, you should be able to help your participant identify their own excellent practice or where there are areas for development. Also remember that no-one is perfect and everyone has room for improvement if they are to be excellent practitioners.

Where the class observed was straightforward, expand the conversation to the participants aspirations for their career and discuss other areas such as the use of technology, designing courses/assessment and providing feedback. **Help them think about their practice holistically.**

During the debriefing, start with finding praiseworthy elements of practice and use debriefing techniques to get the participant to consider what might be improved. For example if you start with:

*Well the students seemed to be totally disengaged with the session, do you think that’s your fault?*

However true this statement is, it will create resentment and the recipient will shut down.

If you start with :

*I saw that you were concerned with the level of student engagement, what else do you think you might do to improve this?*

You leave the door open for discussion and it is acknowledging their own engagement.

During your conversation, where applicable, you should try to understand why your participant is experiencing challenges in the classroom and suggest ways in which these might be overcome. You should also explore aspects of their practice that you consider innovative.

After you have covered all the issues raised, you should agree a development plan with the participant and complete the online form-[**Teaching Observation Developmental Engagement Plan**](https://uwl.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/teaching-observation-developmental-engagement-plan-2019-). ***We do not expect to receive forms which suggest no excellent practice was observed or no developmental support is needed.***

You should include commendations (where the appraisal guide indicates they exceed expectations), conditions (where the appraisal guide indicates they need development) and recommendations (where they meet expectations but could still improve).

Where a participant has many conditions, you may deem that a further classroom observation needs to be undertaken once they have completed their development.

The dates should be agreed during the debriefing meeting.

Having completed the online form, download a copy and provide to the participant and their line manager to inform their appraisal.

# When things go wrong

Not everyone is going to want to engage in teaching observation, but it is rapidly becoming a process which is likely to be mandated by OfS/QAA and Advance HE in various situations. This means that sometimes, you may be the arbiter of challenging and confronting situations.

***What do I do if my participant will not engage with me.***

All participants are required to engage with the process and if they do not, this should be reported to the Head of School/College and it becomes a performance management issue.

Where issues arise, you should maintain copies of any correspondence with the participant (date and time, records of emails, phone calls) to demonstrate their lack of response. Depending on the nature of the difficulty, the participant may be reassigned to another member of the observation team.

***What do I do if there is a clash of personality between myself and my participant***

As a member of your school executive you should be experienced at managing difficult situations/people. If not and you require further training, you should contact your HR representative for support. It is important to remember that although you are the senior colleague, taking an appreciative enquiry approach, using active listening, focussing on the participant, acute observation, clear communication, awareness of unconscious bias may help defuse difficult situations.. However, there will always be the potential, particularly where an individual does not wish to engage with the programme, for a dysfunctional relationship.

You should be able to determine this after the first meeting and where this is the case you should contact your Head of School/College in the first instance to discuss the situation. Where necessary, the participant will be reassigned.

 ***My participant agreed a developmental plan but has yet to engage with it, what do I do?***

Where the developmental plan was designed to overcome serious deficiencies in practice and a second observation is required, you should refer this to your Head of School or the individual’s line manager if that is not you.

Where the participant was required to engage with the developmental plan and reflect on their learning and practice as a result, this will be followed up through the appraisal process and, if absolutely necessary, the performance management process will be followed with support from HR.