

**Teaching Observation Scheme Annual Report**

**Period of operation:** Academic session 2012-13

**Faculty:** SCS **Report compiled by: Phil Denton**

1. No. of staff observed: 53 (inc. PGCert) out of 137 (one-half of Faculty, biennial observation)

2. % of staff with a teaching role observed: 39% NB. Total staff number obtained from unique teaching staff listed in ModCat and this figure may be unreliable

3. No. of trained observers: 18 (includes 2 added in-year)

4. Features of good practice noted (comments from observers):

*Subject knowledge and preparation*

* Authoritative. Knew the subject and explained it clearly.
* Excellent preparation of materials
* Most of the lectures that I observed were well constructed, well prepared and delivered in an enthusiastic manner. I am sure that most of lectures that are delivered in the school are of a similar, but just wanted to record that fact here.

*Session structure and content*

* Very well structured session with balance in verbal and visual delivery punctuated with Q and A sessions that were strategically positioned.
* Clear set of aims outlined at the beginning of the session - and then a continual check throughout the session relative to the aims.
* Delivery of statistics in small group workshops and relating the general topic of statistics to the degree programme.
* Good use of examples illustrating points discussed
* Putting lecture into context of future career as a pharmacist
* Putting lecture into context of previous lectures
* Relating subject material to everyday life. This is easier for some topics and some levels of study than others, but it does help to show the relevance of the lecture to the students. Several of the lectures that I observed were able to achieve this.

*Delivery*

* Workshop session to enable students to see the links between their own laboratory results and application to professional practice, in the context of errors.
* Encouraged student involvement but this was easy in the session observed because it required opinions rather than factual knowledge.
* excellent student engagement
* Friendly but 'in control' delivery.
* Good rate of delivery and supported by clear PowerPoint slides.
* Good student interaction
* Involvement of students in session in a large lecture theatre setting
* (name): very interactive & supportive exam workshop for level 4 students
* Most of lectures that I observed were given to large groups of students. It is never easy to assess student learning in such circumstances, but attempts were made by asking questions etc.
* Practical class (level 4 - introductory module). This was a very busy class with around 80 students in the lab doing practical work. The students were split into groups of around 20 per academic. I was impressed by the way in which the academic managed to communicate the practical information to the group in a succinct, yet informative, manner. The lecturer concerned made excellent use of the resources to illustrate what the students should be observing and how they should record and interpret the data. I felt that if it wasn't for the excellent clarity of the commentary provided that some students may have been left confused as to what might be expected of them. At each stage of the practical the students were also questioned about the theoretical background to the experiments and organisms under investigation. The group size was appropriate but once again at the limit of manageability.
* Q&A sessions help to promote engagement and understanding. This worked well when there was something to interpret (e.g. a graph).
* Question and answer session to promote student learning
* The staff member asked students to make a show of hands to establish learning - very effective
* The use of structured tasks within sessions helped to promote student engagement. They also provided students with the opportunity to gain formative feedback on their own understanding.
* The use of worksheets that students use to follow through the key areas of the session
* Use of sticky sheets/instant posters for group work within a medium sized class (~40 students) though potentially suitable for larger classes.
* Level 5 Workshop. Use of magic whiteboards. The session was entitled: Competitive and non-competitive inhibitors. The academic provided the students with some basic principles relating to this topic. The class was split in to small groups and each group was given a problem. The problem related to competitive non-competitive inhibitor activity. I was amazed at how well the small groups set to work on trying to solve their own particular task. I liked this particular activity because the students had to work as a group and come up with some suggestions on how to design a new inhibitor for each enzyme. The group was at the limits of a manageable size (35ish).

*Learning technology*

* Visual use of PowerPoint material to engage the audience (i.e., limited use of text, integration of images etc...).
* (name): very visual lecture slides & good use of laser pointer/PowerPoint clicker to enable freedom to move around the lecture room.
* (name): very well illustrated lecture with excellent video clips of animal behaviours, followed by a quiz at the end.
* (name): Use of clickers in small groups rather than individually to encourage debate & discussion over the right answer in a revision session
* Use of document enlarger (visualiser)
* Use of Textwall

5. How will this good practice be disseminated?

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| Good practice identified | Dissemination |
| (name): very visual lecture slides & good use of laser pointer/powerpoint clicker to enable freedom to move around the lecture room. | Consider using TESS money to purchase portable clickers for all staff: Install dongles on all classroom PCs. Consult PLN and Education committee |
| Engagement in lectures:   * Video clips * Quizzes * Magic whiteboards | Staff sharing/development session offered to all SCS staff in Sept 2013 |

6. Areas for development

* It is incredibly difficult for new staff to attend the PGCert course because those delivering it refuse to run it on a Wednesday afternoon and we are unable keep Wednesday mornings (or any other part of the week) free of teaching.
* One key aspect should be to ensures that all slides are clear - and any additional material (worksheets, tasks) used in conjunction with the slides should be congruent
* No areas for staff development were noted in the sessions observed.
* One lecture was perhaps a bit complicated in terms of delivery via the PowerPoint slides, but was still comprehensible
* Use of clickers/ask the audience system for new (and old) staff
* Maintaining student engagement in large lectures
* None that is pressing although I have suggested that the session could be linked to assessment tasks either directly or indirectly
* Creative use of PowerPoint
* I recommended that one of the lecturers I observed buy a pointer for use during lecturers. This would enable the lecturer to have a greater degree of flexibility and mobility during lecturers. there were no other issues identified.
* Pace of delivery should be slowed down
* Encouraging staff to develop & incorporate interactivity into lectures - some great examples around but some staff would benefit from seeing some good practice
* key points in the lecture should be summarised during the lecture - not just at the end
* methods should be devised to ensure engagement is active and that students are performing relative to the aims

7. How will these development needs be addressed?

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| Areas for development | Addressed by… |
| * Creative use of PowerPoint * Interactivity in lectures | Staff sharing/development session offered to all SCS staff in Sept 2013 |
| * Scheduling of PGCert, “It is incredibly difficult for new staff to attend the PGCert course because those delivering it refuse to run it on a Wednesday afternoon and we are unable keep Wednesday mornings (or any other part of the week) free of teaching.” | Raised with AEU through this report. |

8. Any issues relating to the implementation of the scheme?

* I am mystified by the union's objection to line managers observing the teaching of those they manage. I receive praise (occasionally) and complaints about the teaching abilities of those I manage but I am not supposed to directly observe them teach. This seems to be an odd arrangement because I am effectively asked to respond to 'hearsay'.
* The key aspect to the TO is to ensure the person being observed is the lead person in the process such that they have clear aims that need to be observed. This makes the interaction between them and the observer functional
* More flexibility with observation of staff who only teach a relatively restricted range of classes such as teacher practitioners. If there are plans to include observation of work place supervision, how is this to be implemented?
* Make it clearer to all staff about how the 2 observation schemes interact as many are not fully aware of this. - provide a forum for observers from different schools within the faculty to feedback on how they operate the scheme in their school & discuss
* This scheme must be run from the start of semester 1 and not left until the end of semester 2. post grads who teach should be observed more often the more experienced staff and they should be asked to observe more experienced staff especially those for whom good practice has been identified
* Starting earlier in the academic year. I was observed in the last week of teaching.
* No - I think there is enough flexibility within it to allow for the diverse methods/approaches to the scheme that participants might require.
* I found the current scheme worked well, however more time should be allocated to this incredibly important task - both the observer and observed would benefit and this in turn would benefit the University.

9. Suggestions for improving the scheme

* The 'examples of good practice' are invariably going to be repeated each year. I am, however, very wary of the term 'innovative practice' because this usually means chasing after whatever is the latest trendy practice just to show how 'on message' one is.
* It is a bit early to evaluate but seems to be OK. The staff i observed said they found the feedback helpful. Staff who do the observations should get an allowance of at least 5 hours per observee; in my experience time to set up the session, discuss in advance, do the obs, write up the draft report, discuss with observee and write final report takes at least this length of time. To put in less effort to complete it fully means the system becomes meaningless, so staff need to see the Uni takes it seriously enough to allow them time to do the job properly.
* The participation, co-operation and response from the staff that I observed were fine. The lectures that I observed were of a very high standard and the enthusiasm and professionalism of staff was excellent. It was reassuring to see the fine quality of teaching being delivered to our students in the school.
* This form is fairly onerous to complete & I found the face to face discussions much more useful.
* Sorry I don't have much to contribute for this questionnaire as I was not the most active participant. Happy to do more in the next cycle.
* I found this process interesting and informative. Generally the standard of teaching I observed was high.
* There was nothing particularly innovative in the session I observed but it was very fresh coming from a new member of staff who had clearly invested quality time in the preparation. Therefore I think it is commendable that you have used the term "Best Practice" rather than some alternative such as "Innovative Practice" - the former can capture the latter whilst still valuing traditional practice that is effective (especially when a combination of traditional practices converge to produce an effective learning session - such as I witnessed with this new member of staff)

10. Suggestions for improving the feedback template

* Perhaps include some response from observees to get a different point of view. This was the response of 11 observed staff from one School in SCS:

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| There seem to be multiple schemes. |
| Forms were not readily available in Word format - PDFs are not easily used. |
| A reciprocal observation scheme has some benefits. |
| Due to the member of staff who undertook my observation being very busy it took over a month to get my feedback (given only in paper format). In addition to this there was no organised pre-observation meeting before the teaching event. |
| I had my observation in January and have not had any feedback from it yet. (This has been chased-up) |
| I have no objection to this teaching observation scheme, although I do not really see the difference between this and the peer review scheme. |
| The teaching observation scheme, like many other initiatives, has been implemented on us by the Faculty system. It appears to have been devised (like most other initiatives from the Faculty) by administrators who have never taught a student in their life. Therefore, yes, it is a good idea, but it is time consuming and I have not yet seen a single strand of evidence that anything worthwhile comes out of it - other than another scheme to keep academic staff busy and stressed. The scheme is little explained and many / most academic staff do not understand it. Many / most staff feel threatened by having to undergo observation from a senior colleague. It does nothing to support teaching, encourage teachers or create a community spirit in <my School>. This was a positive experience overall. It alerted me to a couple of things that I had not realised previously and that will modify the way that I teach in future. |
| Useful exercise, i got some insightful feedback |
| Useful feedback was provided in terms of the formatting of PowerPoint slides. Approach to active learning was commended in terms of the level of student engagement it seemed to promote. Done positively, it should encourage sustained exchange and adoption of new ideas. A mechanism for ensuring that best practice, where observed, can be shared rapidly with other staff would be welcome. |
| Useful to some extent but I talk to several staff regularly about teaching approaches anyway |

* Perhaps include peer review activity also as not reported institutionally elsewhere. For SCS in 2012/13 this was:

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| School | Structure | Outcomes |
| NSP | Via allocated groups of 3. % Involvement to be confirmed by TLA coordinator. | 47 reports in total, out of 100 (allowing for sabbaticals, retirements & mat leave) |
| PBS | Via allocated peer review pairs. % Involvement determined by online survey in May/June. | Expected 32 x 2 = 64 observations  Actual = 42 observation (66%)  54 staff involved as either reviewer or reviewee (84%). |
| SPS | Via peer review pairs. % Involvement to be confirmed by TLA coordinator. | 49% of staff were reviewed  45% were reviewers |

Philip Denton, Faculty Associate Dean (Education), 9.9.2013