

Peer Review: Guidance for Directors & Subject Leads (not for wider circulation) v2

Background

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT) agreed the LJMU Teaching Quality Scheme in 2020 and it has three elements:

- *Observation of Teaching*: Organised by the TLA and suspended 2020-23
- *Peer Review*: Organised within Faculties, Appendix 1.
- *Student Evaluation*: Principally organised by TLA through various surveys but supplemented by local arrangements, e.g. mid-module evaluation.

Engagement with Peer Review is part of a lecturer's contracted duties, and falls within the "staff appraisal and development system."

'Talking about Teaching' is the Faculty's name for Peer Review, agreed by Faculty Education Committee to better convey the relaxed, collegiate nature of the scheme. In a similar spirit, it was agreed that this guidance document should be shared only with Subject Leads and Directors lest the scheme be viewed as being overly managerial. In summary:

Talking about Teaching is a formalised and substantive conversation between academics, dedicated to exploring an identified theme within educational practice that is not a part of their other scheduled obligations.

Version 1 of the scheme ran from 2020-22. Version 2 runs from the 2022/3 onward.

Operation of 'Talking about teaching'

For a particular academic year, activity will take place up until the end of May. Through agreement with SMTs in January 2023, Subject Leads' teams will participate through one of two distinct approaches:



Pathway A) The ADESE assigns staff within a School to pairs. Subject Leads are then invited to edit the proposals via SharePoint before they are shared with staff. A theme for discussions may be agreed and shared alongside the allocations.

Pathway B) Staff participate in teaching-related discussion events organised by the Subject Lead or School. Subsequent conversations in smaller groups on related themes are encouraged.

Staff participation is recorded via an online form, circulated each year by the ADESE. This will be used only to maintain an 'auditable record,' required by the Institution and for annual Faculty reporting. For Pathway B, participation information may alternatively be provided direct to the ADESE as a list of staff who attended teaching-related events. The ADESE will provide fortnightly updates to Subject Leads on the participation of their staff and they can note individual's participation in peer review during annual PDPR.

In some years, coffee vouchers will be available to support engagement with Peer Review. These will be distributed by the ADESE according to the agreed scheme:

Pathway A) Two vouchers given to the reviewer allocated as 'Partner 1' on SharePoint.

Pathway B) Vouchers given to the Subject Lead (one per team member) to support teaching-related discussion events or subsequent conversations on related themes.

Appendix 1 Teaching Quality Scheme (Excerpt)

“Teaching is an art, and as in the case of all arts, even its most gifted practitioners can improve their skills through a review of the fundamentals ... the issue is how this can best be accomplished.”

(Shaughnessy, 1994)

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Peer Review of Teaching is an educational enhancement activity (Chism 2007) based on principles of reflective practice. It enables individuals/groups/teams to reflect on practice guided by scholarly discussions with colleagues. Peer review activity is therefore reciprocal and embedded into normal working practice (Clegg 2003).

Peer review in the context of the Teaching Quality Scheme will be a collaborative process with a focus on reflection and enhancement. It is a standard expectation for all teaching staff to engage with the process on an annual basis. They will work with colleagues from the same or a cognate discipline to encourage dialogue around subject pedagogy. As such, it differs from the singular focus on teaching that characterises the Teaching Observation Scheme. Consequently, the focus of Peer Review encompasses a much wider range of academic practices. This could include, but is not limited to:

- Online learning activities
- Use of the VLE
- Assessment design
- Feedback practices
- Developing a new learning resource
- Personal/academic tutoring practices
- Teaching diverse student groups
- Extra-curricular student engagement practices (e.g. mentoring)
- Supporting student placements or work-based learning

This allows the scheme to be levelled at areas of personal interest, self-identified needs, or broader team requirements, and agreed locally in line with specific priority areas. Engagement in Peer Review will be noted in Appraisal, and feedback from the reviewer to the reviewee will inform scholarly discussion about academic practice. In addition, information on the nature of peer review activity will be provided to the Associate Dean Education. This will provide Faculty-level information on the occurrence of peer review and the range of activities covered. In this way, peer review outcomes may be used to inform the development of Faculty priorities for supporting Teaching and Learning, as well as contributing to the evidence base for evaluation of the Scheme.

There is no expectation for formal documentation of peer review. Nor is it expected that outcomes will be explicitly shared in the Appraisal process, although the Appraisee may elect to do so.

Proposed peer review pairings/groups

All academic staff should be included in the peer review activity including those staff enrolled on The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Pairs, groups, or teams of staff can work together to fulfil the requirements of the process. To reinforce dialogue and the sharing of practice, staff can be grouped within their own team or by specialist interest areas as determined by local need.

In order to differentiate between the *Peer Review* and *Teaching Observation* processes, and highlight the complementary nature of the two processes, **Table 2** below offers a direct comparison.

Table 2: Comparison of Teaching Observation and Peer Review (after Fletcher 2018).

	Teaching Observation	Peer Review*
Who is involved	Trained observers Individual teaching staff	Peers and colleagues
Purpose	Demonstrate teaching competency	Enhance teaching through dialogue, self and mutual reflection
Outcome	Feedback on teaching practice to inform staff development planning and identification of good practice	Analysis, reflection and discussion to inform enhancement teaching and learning
Relationship	Hierarchy of 'expertise'	Equality/mutuality
Confidentiality	Between observer and observee. Outcomes discussed in Appraisal	Between reviewer and reviewee. Engagement noted in Appraisal
Items reviewed	Teaching practice	Any aspect of course design or teaching, as chosen by reviewee

*Talking About Teaching within The Faculty of Science

REFERENCES

Chism, Nancy Van Note. "Why introducing or sustaining peer review of teaching is so hard, and what you can do about it." *The Department Chair* 18.2 (2007): 6-8.

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Fletcher, Jeffrey A. "Peer observation of teaching: A practical tool in higher education." *The Journal of Faculty Development* 32.1 (2018): 51-64.

Shaughnessy, Michael F. *Peer Review of Teaching*. (1994).