

Academic Policy Statement APS19: Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Middlesex University is committed to developing the standards and quality of its education. It is also committed to investing in its staff by providing opportunities for training and development to enable them to respond positively to the changing needs of our students.
- 1.2. A key enhancement to this scheme is the inclusion of colleagues from further education (FE) and partner schools as part of the range of opportunities for undertaking peer-observations where appropriate and by mutual agreement with interested institutions and interested staff at MU. The purpose is to inform and develop our understanding of different approaches to learning and teaching, and work with colleagues in FE and partner schools to support students as they transition to higher education.
- 1.3. Student feedback in the peer observation process can provide valuable insights for enhancing teaching and learning and is therefore encouraged, but not required.
- 1.4. The aim of this policy is to contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching practice by developing a culture of peer observation for all academic staff, including full time, fractional and part-time hourly-paid (working an average of 80 hours a year), technicians, technical tutors and other staff leading and/or supporting teaching and learning sessions, with further opportunities for development available from working in partnership with our FE colleagues, partner schools and students.
- 1.5. To support the implementation of this policy, refer to *Guidance for the Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice* and the *Learning and Teaching Practice Observation Proforma*. For Peer Teaching Observations the use of two online forms is expected (in addition to the *Peer Learning and Teaching Practice Observation Proforma*). Section A and Section B online forms will capture electronically the detail of the Peer Teaching Observation (A) and the anonymised feedback (B).

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1. There are three different types of observations. Whilst the overall purpose is developmental, the function of each of these observations is different:
 - A:** Observations for probation/progression/promotion
 - B:** Peer observations for continuing academic professional development
 - C:** Session observations for the PGCert HE/Academic Professional Apprenticeship
- 2.2. Observations can include teaching sessions, technology enhanced teaching and

assessment feedback. Teaching sessions can include a large lecture, small group seminar, one-to-one tutorial, research supervision session, field trip, laboratory workshop or studio-based work, on-line group-work, learning sessions taking place within a workplace/practice setting/placement. It can also include discussion of assessment practices or plans for other innovations. It can take place in any medium e.g., as an online session, a CPD seminar or a public engagement event.

- 2.3. There is a set of online forms and Word proforma specific for Peer Teaching Observations and a Word proforma for all other types of Teaching Observation.
- 2.4. It is important that the feedback from observations and subsequent discussions are supportive, positive, constructive, collegiate and, remain confidential as far as possible (i.e., not discussed by the observer with peers unless part of the formal process, or as agreed with the person observed).

A: Observations for probation/progression/promotion

- 2.5. As part of the probationary report for new members of staff, two observations must take place to assess the performance of the new member of staff.
- 2.6. Observations are also required for progression through the lecturer to senior lecturer scale and for all academic promotion purposes (except to Senior Manager).
- 2.7. The completed observation proforma will be provided by the person being observed to their line manager (e.g., Head of Department) or nominee, which will form part of the report to their line manager (e.g., Academic Dean and/or Academic Dean of Faculty as appropriate). See also 3.8

B: Peer observations for continuing development of academic professional practice

- 2.8. The purpose of peer observation is developmental and intended to enable academic staff to become better practitioners. Peer observation is expected to be beneficial for the person observing (i.e., the observer) and the person being observed (i.e., the observee), and facilitate sharing of good practice across the University.
- 2.9. Observations are a supportive way to enhance the quality of teaching and student learning as the process includes opportunities for
 - meaningful exchanges on learning and teaching practice for the benefit of learners
 - facilitating critical reflection in both the observer and the person who is observed
 - learning from colleagues who adopt different approaches and/or work in different contexts etc
 - challenging our assumptions about effective teaching and student learning
 - sharing best practice, knowledge and expertise
- 2.10. The aim of the observation and reflective encounter is to provide a valuable positive

learning experience for both the person being observed and the observer. This relies on a professional trusted relationship between the person being observed and the person observing.

- 2.11. Peer-observations cycles may focus a particular theme across the Department/School/Faculty. This will be agreed locally (within the Department/School/Faculty) prior to observations being arranged.
- 2.12. Staff are encouraged to use peer observation to identify individual teaching-related development needs e.g., the observee may decide which aspect of their practice to focus on and receive feedback from the observer (e.g., something in development, or a problematic area they would like feedback on). This can result in staff trying out new ideas, reaffirming what is being done or modifying existing practices.
- 2.13. Both observer and observee may wish to discuss the use of observation as an example of continuing professional development in their annual I Clear Review discussion with their line manager or nominee, respecting the limits of confidentiality agreed between the observer and observee.
- 2.14. Using the relevant section of the proforma, good practice and development needs can be agreed between the observer and observee and signed by both parties and each retain a copy.
- 2.15. An anonymised summary (Section B online form) will be sent to the Head of Department (or nominee), in addition to Section A, by the observer, for collation to inform departmental/faculty staff development planning. The collated summary Sections A and B can be included in the Educational Monitoring and Enhancement process, for sharing good practice within the Department and across the Faculty and University.

C: Session observations for the PG Cert Higher Education and Academic Professional Apprenticeship

- 2.16. Observations form an important part of the PG Cert Higher Education programme and the Academic Professional Apprenticeship. The purpose is developmental.
- 2.17. Observations take place over the period of the provision and are organized within the provision.

3. Responsibilities

A: Observations for probation, progression and promotion

- 3.1 The Academic Dean has overall responsibility for ensuring that observations take place for
 - probation
 - progression
 - academic staff promotions (excluding to Senior Manager)
- 3.2 The Academic Dean will delegate responsibility for organising observations to meet these

purposes to Heads of Departments. The Head of Department shall inform observees when an observation is required and, where appropriate, who shall be the observer.

- 3.3** Observations for probation/progression/promotion are undertaken by the relevant line manager (e.g., Head of Department) or a designated senior and more experienced academic than the person being observed.

B: Peer observations for continuing development of academic professional practice

- 3.4** The Head of Department or nominee has responsibility for ensuring that peer observations take place annually for all academic staff. These may be arranged within Departments, within Schools/Faculties, and/or across Faculties with the support of Deputy Deans. Peer Teaching Observations are captured electronically using Section A online form.
- 3.5** The Head of Department (or nominee) is responsible for ensuring peer observations are planned in an equitable and transparent manner, with the agreement of staff involved.
- 3.6** While there are benefits to reciprocal peer observations, opportunities for learning from peer feedback can be gained from working with different colleagues, within and across departments/faculties, as well as with colleagues from FE colleges and partner schools and inviting student feedback. Such arrangements for peer observations will be agreed and planned in advance with those involved.

C: Session observation for the PGCert HE/Academic Professional Apprenticeship

- 3.7** The programme leader is responsible for organizing observations for participants on the PG Cert Higher Education or Academic Professional Apprenticeship. The participant will discuss this with their Head of Department, where appropriate, whether an observation from their programme may meet the purpose of the annual peer observation process.
- 3.8** Where appropriate, and by mutual agreement between the individual and the Head of Department, one completed summative teaching observation from the Middlesex University PGCertHE or Academic Professional Apprenticeship provision may be used to meet the purpose of probation requirements.

4. Confidentiality

- 4.1.** The relevant section of the proforma must be signed by both parties.
- 4.2.** Completed observation proformas for the purpose of:
- probation,
 - progressing
 - academic staff promotions (excluding to Senior Manager)
- must be sent to the line manager i.e., normally the Head of Department (and may be seen by others, such as the Executive Dean, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, where relevant), hence there are limits to confidentiality.

- 4.3.** Details of peer observations remain confidential, as far as possible, between the parties involved unless the observed member of staff decides otherwise. For example, the observee may wish to share the feedback form with their appraiser or line manager or include it in their portfolio during a promotions round. Summarized anonymous feedback from peer observations will be used to inform departmental staff development needs and share good practice. The observer may also wish to discuss insights from the observation process, respecting the limits of confidentiality agreed with the person observed. It is not appropriate for an observer to discuss an observation with peers unless agreed with the person observed.
- 4.4.** Session observations for the PG Cert Higher Education and Academic Professional Apprenticeship are confidential to the participant and programme tutor. A participant may choose to include them in support of an application for progression or promotion or share them with their appraiser.

5. Frequency

- 5.1 Observations for probation shall be according to the relevant policy.
- 5.2 Observations for progression/promotion are to be undertaken in-line with the relevant policy.
- 5.3 Peer observations are organized each academic year. Staff can expect to participate in peer observation (as an observer and as an observee) at least once per academic year.

6. Preparation

- 6.1 Both parties need to ensure they are prepared for observations through appropriate staff development.
- 6.2 Prior to the observation both parties need to discuss and agree arrangements and share relevant information in preparation for the observation.
- 6.3 It is good practice for the person being observed to prepare a lesson plan (or learning session plan) which can be discussed with the observer before the start of the session.

7. Associated Documents

- Session Observation Proforma/Peer Observation Proforma
- Peer Teaching Observations Sections A & B online forms
- Lesson Plan Templates
- Guidance for Observing Learning and Teaching Sessions

8. Associated Policies

- Academic Probation Policy
- Progression – Academic Promotion – criteria and procedures for Grade 7 and 8
- Academic Promotion for all other grades
- Appraisal Policy – Academic Staff
- Recruitment and Selection Guidance
- Coaching and Mentoring Policy
- PG Cert HE/Academic Professional Apprenticeship

Revision history	<i>Revisions to this policy were considered and approved by Learning and Teaching Committee, and endorsed by Academic Board on 18 February 2020. Minor updates to titles, terminology and forms were approved by Chair's action on 15 November 2022. This policy is due for review in March 2025.</i>
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