

# Observee Guide

## HELS Faculty Observations

2016/17 saw the launch of a new approach to teaching observations across the faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences. Our approach is based on an ethos of collaborative inquiry, critical reflection and prioritising professional dialogue.

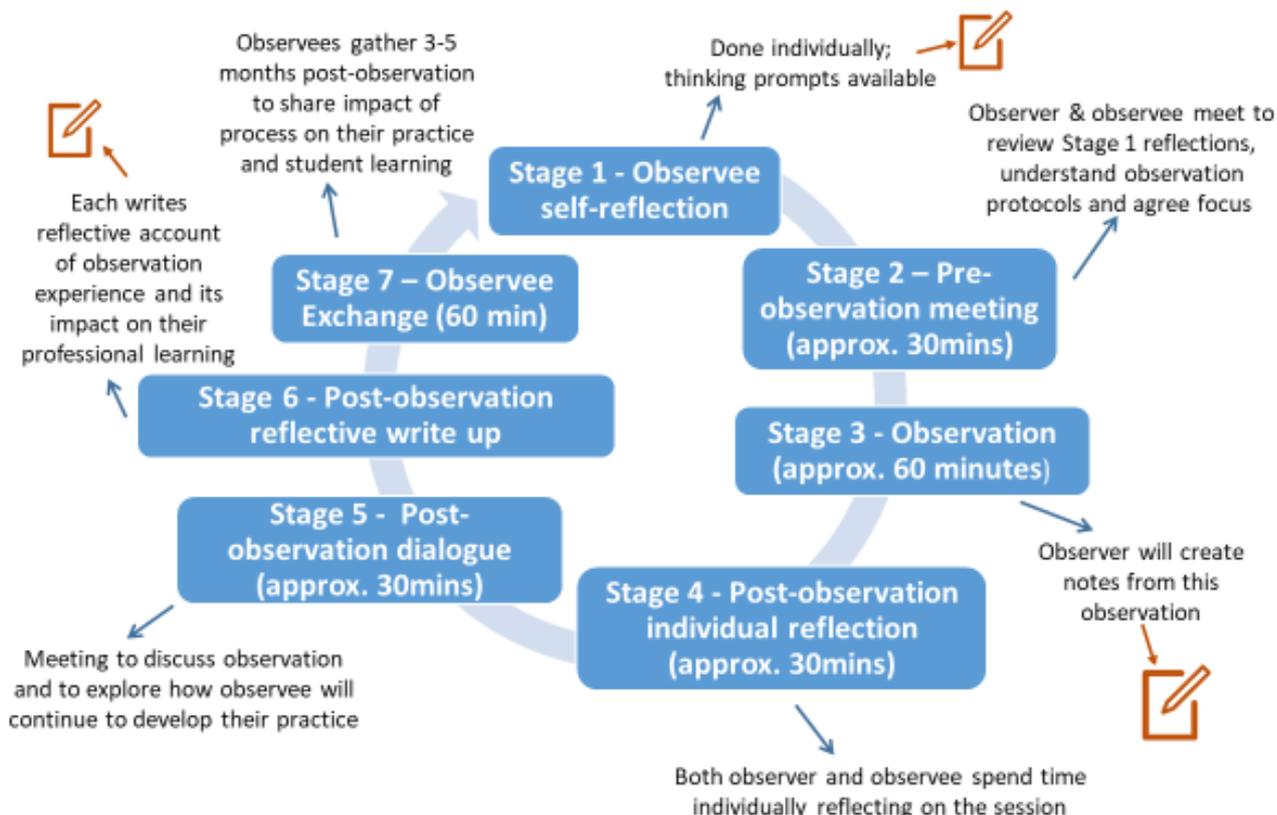
You have been selected to be part of the observation process this year as an observee. This guide will introduce you to the Observation Cycle and explain what will happen at the various stages.

Observers are volunteers from the Faculty who have offered to observe their peers in a supportive capacity. They have undergone training in non-judgemental observation techniques as well as peer coaching methods to support collaborative inquiry.

This guide includes an overview of the Observation Cycle (below), followed by a detailed explanation of each stage on the following pages.

To help gain an insight into practice across the faculty, we have received ethical approval to collect anonymised documentation generated by colleagues (observers and observees) during the observation cycle so that it can be analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns. Further information about the research can be found in [Appendix 1](#) on page 6.

### Stages of the HELS observation cycle



## Stage 1: Self-reflection on Teaching and Learning-- some thinking prompts

The Observation Cycle of the HELS Faculty puts you, the observee, at the heart of the process. This is an opportunity for you to think holistically about your practice, to identify your strengths and build upon them, and to examine areas for further professional learning.

The first part of that cycle is your own self-reflection. Take time to think about your role, the aspects of your practice with which you are confident as well as what you want to develop; this stage is crucial to make the observation work for you. There are no tick boxes or checklists of expected behaviours—you have total freedom to do this self-reflection in the manner which works best for you, and to focus on the areas **you** identify. Furthermore, do not limit your reflections to your lecturing role: practice-based teaching, research supervision, tutorials, skills demonstration sessions and studio-based activity are some examples of practice which you may decide to bring into scope.

Most importantly, the reflection should not be limited to the session to be observed.

At the suggestion of previous observees, we have developed some questions which could act as a stimulus for your own thinking. By no means are you required to answer all (or any) of these prompts. Your self-reflection must be meaningful to you. Therefore, if these prompts might be useful, choose any which resonate, and feel free to make them more applicable to you. And, if you want to follow a completely different self-reflection process, then you are very welcome to do so.

### **Some thinking prompts for self-reflection on teaching and learning:**

- How would you describe your approach(es) to teaching?
- What are the key factors that shape/have shaped your approach(es) to teaching?
- Which aspects of your teaching do you feel relatively confident with and why?
- How do you ensure you build on the above strengths?
- Are there new things which you'd like to bring to your practice but haven't yet found the time/support/courage to do? Explore why you are interested in them but also what might be holding you back.
- Are there any areas of your practice where you lack confidence, or where you feel less effective than you'd like to be? Explore these and the feelings they bring up.
- How effective is your planning? Do you face any barriers to planning?
- How do you understand your student's needs? How do you adapt your practice to meet these needs? Which approaches have been effective? Would you like to explore this more?
- If you lecture together with colleagues, how effectively do you work together?
- How do you plan for your sessions?
- How do you determine the key aims/outcomes of your sessions? How do you know when they have been met?
- How do your sessions link to work students do outside university teaching?
- Are there any aspects of your practice where you feel the input of an observer would be useful, in order to reflect back what they have seen to aid your development? (You are encouraged to identify a particular area of focus for the observer—although you may also just ask for a more generalised observation if you choose). This question is one to explore more -in-depth with your observer at stage 2, but thinking about it now may be a good catalyst for your reflections.

Some examples of observees' self-reflections can be found in [Appendix 2](#) on page 7.

Those who wish to further explore models and approaches to reflection may enjoy reading Findlay's (2008) "Reflecting on 'Reflective practice'" found at this [link](#). A short excerpt:

Does [reflective practice] embody professional artistry, encourage critical self-aware evaluation and embrace transformation and change? Or is reflective practice bland and mechanical with practitioners disinclined to ask awkward questions... We need to continue to reflect critically on these questions. Then, reflective practice will fulfill its potential to help us "make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces" and offer us the "courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos" (Ghaye, 2000, p.7). (Findlay, 2008:20).

Please note that **your self-reflections need to be documented in some form and shared with your observer at least 3 days prior to the Stage 2 meeting** (see more information on this Stage below). If there are any elements of the self-reflection which you prefer to keep private for any reason, you are completely free to do. Simply edit the version you send to your observer and include only those things you wish to share. **At the same time, please also send an anonymised version of your reflections to Sherron Parkes** which will help inform our research on teaching and learning across the faculty.



**Documentation:**

Send a copy of your reflections to the observer *at least 3 days prior to your first meeting*, and also send an anonymised copy to Sherron Parkes with the file name **Stage 1 reflections**

## Stage 2: Pre-observation Meeting—establish rapport and choose focus

This initial meeting is an opportunity for you and your observer to get to know each other better. There are several important areas to explore:

1. Ensuring you, the observee, understand the Observation Cycle and feel comfortable with the observation process, and that you are fully aware of the collegial and non-judgemental ethos of this programme.
2. Discussion of your self-reflection (which should have been done in Stage 1 and sent to the observer with sufficient time for them to review it). This discussion in Stage 2 is a chance to explore issues and themes which have arisen through your reflective process, and an opportunity to expand on those reflections where appropriate.
3. Agreement of observation focus: The observation process should encourage you to reflect on your practice as a whole. Nonetheless, it is not possible to observe all aspects of your practice, therefore you may choose a specific teaching scenario where you feel the input from a supportive observer would be useful to you. You may want to try something new and receive some objective feedback to help you reflect on how it went. You may choose to focus on an area you would like to improve, or a specific skill where you lack confidence. It is important to remember that the observer is not there to judge the effectiveness of your teaching, but to provide you with another view of the event and to help stimulate your reflections on it. The observer may use an iPad and may take discreet photos—you should discuss this and ensure that their method is appropriate in the teaching environment they will observe.

4. Agreement of time/date for both the observation (Stage 3) as well as for the follow-up meeting you have together in Stage 5.

### Stage 3: The Observation

Having agreed the time and date of the observation, it is up to you, the observee, to decide whether it is necessary to inform students of the observers' presence. In a large lecture, the observer may not be noticeable, but in smaller teaching situations it is important for the students to understand that they are not being observed.

There is no prescribed way for the observer to take notes. There is no checklist of behaviours to look for or forms to be filled in. The observer will do their best to remain as objective as possible and simply record what they see, removing judgement and evaluation. Their goal is to be a lens through which you can gain an additional viewpoint of what happened in the observed session.

The observation should last approximately 60 minutes. Discuss with your observer the details of how to enter and leave the observation space to minimise disruption to the students.

### Stage 4: Post-observation Reflection- by both observer and observee

Take some time after the session to review it for yourself, particularly in light of the focus agreed in Stage 2. Be also aware that the reflective process may inspire you to notice other aspects of your teaching which you hadn't previously been focussing on. Reflection is not always linear. Think about how this particular observed session relates to the whole of your teaching and what you might have learned so far.

You don't need to share these reflections with the observer and you may choose whether to document them.

### Stage 5: Post-observation Meeting- how will you develop your practice?

The observer will **not** offer a judgement of the perceived effectiveness of the session. Instead, they will share what they observed and explore this further with you. Remember that the observer is there as a supportive coach, but **YOU** are in charge of deciding how you want your own teaching to develop. There are two main things to achieve in the session:

1. The observer will share what they saw and use coaching questions to help stimulate your reflections on the session and your wider practice.
2. Setting objectives: Through dialogue, the observer will help you to decide how you will use the insights you have gained in the observation process to impact your teaching in the future. Rather than offer opinions, the observer will use coaching questions to stimulate your thinking. By the end of Stage 5 you should have an idea how to take things forward for yourself. Have you identified some new skills you would like to introduce/further develop? Have you decided to change the way you are doing something? Have you identified any support needs and available resources to meet those needs?

## Stage 6: Post-Observation Reflective Write-up

Both you and your observer will take individual time to reflect back on the whole cycle and decide what learning you will take away from it (observers report that their dialogue with observees has also had a positive impact on their own understanding of teaching). As the observee you should document the objectives you identified in the Stage 5 meeting, although you are free to adapt and enhance it here at Stage 6. Think not only about how you want to move your teaching forward but also the resources and support you might need to do so. Make a short plan about how you will achieve this and send it to your observer. There is no set template to follow but you can refer to [Appendix 3](#) on page 9 for some examples.



### Documentation:

Send a copy of your write up to the observer and also an anonymised copy to Sherron Parkes with the file name **Stage 6 Write up**

## Stage 7: Observee Exchange- collaborative inquiry

Several months after your observation, you will be invited to a focus group with other observees. The purpose of this is to share the insights you gained and the plans you made in Stage 6, and to discuss how this has impacted both on your teaching and on students' learning. The purpose of this is to ensure that the observation process doesn't become a closed, administrative practice where a box is ticked to say it's been done, without reverberating into your practice. We seek to foster an ethos of collaborative inquiry (Fullan and Hargreaves, 2016; DeLuca, Bolden and Chan, 2017) where teachers take ownership of their professional development and support each other through professional dialogue. It's an opportunity for you to have meaningful conversations about teaching and learning with your colleagues and to ensure that the observation process remains dynamic and relevant to you. By the end of this exchange you should have, together with your colleagues, reviewed the objectives you set out in Stage 6, considered the impact these have had, and refined your plan for continuing to develop your practice.

## References and further reading:

DeLuca, C., Bolden, B., & Chan, J. (2017). Systemic professional learning through collaborative inquiry: Examining teachers' perspectives. *Teaching and teacher education*, 67, 67-78

Findlay, L. (2008) Reflecting on Reflective Practice. Open University. Available from: [http://www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/sites/www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/files/files/ecms/web-content/Finlay-\(2008\)-Reflecting-on-reflective-practice-PBPL-paper-52.pdf](http://www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/sites/www.open.ac.uk/opencetl/files/files/ecms/web-content/Finlay-(2008)-Reflecting-on-reflective-practice-PBPL-paper-52.pdf)

Fullan, M. & Hargreaves, A. (2016) *Bringing the profession back in: Call to action*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Nieuwerburgh, C (2017) *An introduction to coaching skills: a practical guide*. Los Angeles: Sage.

O'Leary, M. & Wood, P. (2017) '[Performance over professional learning and the complexity puzzle: lesson observation in England's further education sector](#)', *Professional Development in Education*, Vol. 43(4), pp. 573-591.

# Appendix 1

## Researching and Understanding the Observation Cycle

The recent introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) has put the quality of university teaching firmly in the HE policy spotlight. Situated against the backdrop of the TEF and wider global interest in understanding and improving HE teaching and learning, the HE&LS faculty has developed an innovative, research-informed approach to observation over the last two years. Focusing on the use of observation as a form of collegial, educational inquiry rather than as an assessment of the teaching performance of staff, our approach seeks to capture evidence of authentic, situated teaching with a view to informing and bringing about collaborative improvement. To help gain an insight into practice across the faculty, it requires access to the documentation generated by colleagues (observers and observees) during the observation cycle so that it can be analysed to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Colleagues are assured that the purpose of this analysis is to develop a greater understanding of teaching across the faculty with a view to identifying existing strengths and those aspects of practice that would benefit from greater support collectively. This is NOT an exercise in targeting the practice of individual members of staff. In March 2017, the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee reviewed and approved this research element of the observation work. Staff are reminded again that their identities will remain protected at all times and all data will be anonymised.

## Appendix 2

### Stage 1: Observee Self-reflection examples

On page 2 you were given some thinking prompts which you might consider using during your self-reflection. These are not mandatory questions and you may want to use some-- or even none-- of them. Your reflections are yours to develop, but at the request of several colleagues, we have provided some sample self-reflections below as a stimulus.

The most important point we will continue to emphasise is the holistic nature of this reflection. Limiting yourself to the observed session wastes an opportunity to gain insights about your wider practice.

#### **Observee A**

I am new to the university and teaching in an academic setting, therefore I feel more confident teaching practical skills having been a teacher for XXX students previously. I am due to commence my PG Cert this year which I hope will enable me to understand the theory behind the different approaches to teaching in HE. My lectures at the moment tend to be powerpoint based and I aim to involve the students in the discussion as much as possible. At present, I have little knowledge of meeting the differing needs of students within individual sessions, however, I try to make myself available through individual tutorials and ensure the students are aware of how to arrange this.

In order to prepare for the sessions I update and edit the existing materials and discuss with experienced colleagues what techniques they have used successfully in the past. I am acutely aware that my teaching style needs to develop particularly in relation to encouraging students to answer/participate in class discussions. The aims and outcomes for each session are based upon [regulatory body] requirements and my own experience, I feel that it is important to tailor the sessions to these in order to ensure students are able to practice safely.

For this particular session, the measure of meeting the key outcomes is the production of 2 [outputs] from the students. I find it difficult to quantify the success of other sessions that do not involve a practical element, I hope to develop this skill as part of the PG Cert. I find student evaluation helpful and peer support has been invaluable in reviewing my skills. I also reflect upon the sessions informally and consider how to improve/change the session for the next delivery.

The lectures that I deliver are all part of... regulated courses, therefore the students will use the theory they have learned here at the university out in practice. Their practice is then assessed by a suitably qualified mentor within their [organisation].

I would like to be able to move around the classroom more whilst delivering a teaching session from powerpoint. At the moment the slides need to be moved on from the keys/mouse at the podium, it would be nice to be able to do this from anywhere in the classroom.

I feel that, as a teaching team, we have a good understanding of each other's strengths and tend to work instinctively within a session. I have been extremely well supported by experienced colleagues who continue to help me to develop.

## Observee B

### ***Critical areas of focus are:***

- ***Managing a large group***
  - limited experience of teaching large groups (90+)
  - [group to be observed is] vocal with some students often disruptive in class.
  - students enter session late hence disrupt flow of session
  
- ***Engaging whole group***
  - Haven't previously taught the subject area hence I feel vulnerable
  - Want to come across as confident and credible from outset as will be teaching this group across the semester
  - Want students to 'look forward' to my sessions
  - Want to use range of activities to deliver content
  
- ***Time management / pace of session***
  - Aware of speaking quickly when nervous or being observed
  - Aware I repeat certain words
  - Want to come across as clear and audible
  - Want to ensure delivery of content is paced appropriately

## Appendix 3

### Stage 6: Observee Post-Observation Reflection Examples

**There is no template for evaluating the observation and deciding how it will inform your practice.** Your reflections can take any form appropriate to you. Nonetheless, we recognise some of our colleagues find the blank page approach challenging and would appreciate some stimulus in this area. Therefore, on the following pages you will find 3 examples of different observees' reflections.

The most important thing to remember is that this process is designed to be reflective of your practice as a whole and not a dissection of a single episodic event. Therefore, please consider the observation in light of how the insights gained will impact your practice post-observation.

#### **Observee C**

[Observer] was very supportive and felt the session met its key aims and was well planned with effective classroom management. [Observer] also pointed out that I had emphasised and given more detailed examples relevant to the topics, to make the content ... relevant to the students. We had concerns that some students had not acted on any of the instructions to make notes and supplement the slides given. We also discussed some of the wider issues and concerns about how we might tackle student's use of devices. One useful idea I felt from [observer] was to sign posting for student's at the beginning of the session when and where it will be acceptable for them to use them.

I felt the observation was a positive experience and even though I was more nervous than anticipated about being observed it went well. It gave me confidence to have a peer from a similar discipline think the learning and activity was fit for purpose. It also allowed me time to reflect on both the strengths and weaknesses of my session preparation, and space to think about what had happened and how I might change things at a later date. I hope the reflections throughout the process stages 1, 4-5 show some of this development process.

Some discussion was also had about producing student resources and the time and availability to do this. I also expressed concerns that sometime I had produced resources for Moodle such as videos or sophisticated links to files from images, that I didn't do regularly enough so felt deskilled. I know this is an ongoing personal development issue that I want to work on producing resources using new packages such as Wordwall and access faculty sessions to be aware of any new and upcoming learning resources.

## Observee D

At the start of the session I felt relaxed and confident and both [the lecturer with whom I was team teaching] and I chatted to students. I was aware that the tables were in groups. This is problematic for a lecture styles session as students have fed back this is uncomfortable when looking at powerpoints. I decided not to move the tables as the practical part of the session would be better facilitated with group tables. During the lecture [delivered by other lecturer] I found it difficult not to chip in at various points. I was anxious that all elements were covered. On reflection I realise that this is not a bad thing and that this can enhance the student experience. Although I do feel it is part of my difficulty in letting go of teaching due to my own personality. Reflecting back, I do feel that we should have identified clearly before the session how we were going to facilitate the group work. It worked well as we both naturally went to different groups, but it could have been chaotic.

Following the taught session I 'took 'over the session and explained the group work and [the] quiz.

*Were you on time as planned?*

The timings had been vaguely discussed prior to the session and I feel we were about right. The lesson plan I had was a previous one and I had not shared it with [my colleague]. Reflecting back this would have been an appropriate time to have a break [between the lecture and group work]. During the practical element I noted students were becoming unsettled. I am aware that a student's attention span is about 15 to 20 minutes so should have factored in a break.

*Did you have a strategy to ensure\encourage responses from all students?*

I didn't have an identified strategy to ensure feedback from students. Reflecting back I can see that I do not always elicit responses from all students. It is easy to let the confident students answer whilst quieter students get 'missed'.

I felt and measured the success of the session in that each student had produced two [outputs]. I don't feel any part of the session didn't go as planned. The quiz questions were answered well and measured this by the responses the students gave. I would use this format again but would do a more structured way of answering to ensure that all students were able to engage. I do feel it encouraged better learning as it gave students the opportunity to practice navigating the [standards] a safe supportive environment. This a skill that will be required in their future practice ... I also feel that this reflection has confirmed that this session is best delivered by joint teaching. It would have been interesting to see the student's perspective of the teaching session and whether their experience and feelings were the same as the three academics involved in this process. I feel that the opportunity to reflect upon my teaching has highlighted both good areas and also those area which I can develop.

My plan to move forward with my development is:

- Ensure I revisit learning aims and objectives prior to session
- Ensure teaching plans are current and identify clear time frames
- Look at the pedagogy for development/design of quiz and exam questions--how this can inform my current practice
- Ensure appropriate breaks are factored into sessions
- Look at using joint teaching where resources allow
- Be more proactive in gaining student feedback on my teaching.

## **Observee E**

### ***Follow Up Actions/issues to consider:***

- Look into how consistent approaches regarding dyslexia friendly strategies can be applied.
- Seek and support the development of fora within the School of [X] for sharing learning/CPD developed through [X] role to ensure that the team have an understanding of current issues and their implications.
- Seek a consistent approach to dealing with lateness.
- Be more explicit about how the strategies I use could be deployed in [practice].
- Continue to develop and embed manageable and efficient strategies to use formative assessment information to enhance the effectiveness of how sessions are tailored to meet the needs of individuals and maximise their progress.
- Consider how Moodle discussion forums and Twitter etc. could be used to enhance the engagement and motivation of trainees in relation to key issues.
- Be more proactive/aware in varying my position in the classroom when leading discussions