

# Guidance for the Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice

1. **What is observation of learning and teaching practice?**
   1. Observations of learning and teaching practice involve one colleague observing another while the latter is teaching/engaged in facilitating student learning.
   2. The observer provides feedback directly to the person observed regarding the learning session as part of a developmental, reflective encounter.
   3. The colleague may be a senior or more experienced member of staff, or a peer at the same or different educational institution (e.g., a colleague from a FE college or partner school). This depends on the purpose of the observation (see [Academic Policy Statement APS19](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf)) [Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf))).
   4. Effective peer observations rely on a professional trusted relationship between the person being observed and the person observing.

# What is the purpose of observations?

* 1. Teaching observations in higher education, and across educational providers, serve a number of purposes. Observations can be undertaken as part of a peer-observation cycle for good practice development or as part of a formal process (e.g., for probation, promotion, progression or the PGCert HE/Academic Professional Apprenticeship programme. See [Academic Policy Statement APS19](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf)) [Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf)).
  2. Peer-observation cycles may focus on a particular theme (e.g., developing active practice-based learning in large lectures, enhancing assessment feedback sessions, managing behaviours, etc.). This will be agreed within the Department/School/Faculty prior to observations being arranged.
  3. While there are benefits to reciprocal peer observations and observing/being observed by our local peers, opportunities for understanding teaching in different contexts and challenging our assumptions about learning at different levels can be gained from working with colleagues across departments/faculties, as well as with colleagues from FE colleges and partner schools, and inviting student feedback. Such peer observation processes require agreement and forward planning with those involved.

# What are the aims and benefits of observations?

* 1. The aim of any observation, regardless of the purpose, is developmental.
  2. 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
     + discussing a range of options for further enhancement
  3. 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.

# How can I prepare for an observation?

* 1. All parties need to be adequately prepared to be involved in observations. This may take a variety of forms.
  2. Prior to the observation, both parties need to meet/discuss the aims of the session, the learning outcomes and session plan, and provide any materials that the students shall receive for the session (including the module handbook, where appropriate).
  3. To benefit from the process, the observation needs to cover an entire session but may be, for example, the first hour of a two-hour session. This needs to be agreed prior to the observation.
  4. For the person being observed, being prepared for the pre-meeting includes having a completed [proforma](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations) and other relevant documents e.g., lesson plan, providing a clear summary of what the session aims to achieve and why, and perhaps offering important context details that affect the session and identifying areas of interest for feedback.
  5. For the observer, being prepared for the pre-meeting includes checking you have an accurate understanding of the arrangements for the observation session and what feedback the person being observed would like you to focus on. (For staff within higher education this may relate to particular aspects of the [UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf) identified in the [proforma](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations).)
  6. Depending on the type of teaching and learning session, e-learning materials and/or formative assessment materials etc. will also need to be reviewed by the observer.

# What happens during an observation?

* 1. The observer must arrive before the session begins. If the session is online, joining instructions should be shared by the observee in advance. It may be appropriate and convenient for both parties if it is a recording of the session that is observed. It is recommended that observed online live, synchronous sessions are recorded. This provides a valuable feedback resource.
  2. In a teaching session the observer may be introduced to the learners. This decision rests with the person being observed.
  3. During the teaching session observation the observer must follow preparation guidance for undertaking an observation, and refrain from disrupting the session (while being supportive if a health and safety concern arises).
  4. The observation [proforma](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations) can be completed by the observer during or immediately after the session. It has been designed so it can be used for all types of teaching observation (e.g., probation, progression, promotion, peer- observations and with the PGCertHE and APA provision) and all forms of learning and teaching activities, and a range of contexts, using the relevant sections (e.g. on-campus, in person teaching session, technology enhanced learning (TEL) session, live online session, review of My Learning module site, assessment and feedback activities).

(Also, for example, and only after agreement between the observer and the observee, it may be useful to capture the teaching and learning via video recording rather than just text-based info. This can be helpful for practice- based sessions (from dance/theatre up to sports, nursing etc.). This would need to be carefully considered, discussed and agreed beforehand. This recording\* should be only used to inform the aftermath discussion, kept confidential and even deleted after the discussion, OR if the observee wishes so, they could use it for other purposes and even share it with students etc.).

With a move to blended learning and in line with the TEL Framework the recommendation is to record all online teaching sessions and share them with students. It may be that the observee chooses one of these sessions to be observed. In this case, there is no need to delete the recording after the post- observation discussion. The recording can also be used as a powerful feedback tool.

* 1. In additional to traditional taught sessions (in-person/live online) there is the option to observe and provide feedback on e.g. the structure, content, scaffolding, activities and interactive elements of a My Learning module site. The observee also has the option of requesting feedback on their module assessment including the associated feedback (language, rubrics, feedforward). The prompts in Sections C & D should be followed.
  2. Where agreed with the person being observed, student feedback may form part of the observation (Section F). Student Voice Leaders will be made aware of this and appropriately prepared during their initial training provided by the Student Union.

# What happens after an observation?

* 1. After an observation, both parties agree to meet and discuss what they have each learnt from the process. Ideally this can take place immediately after the observation, and no later than one week after the observation.
  2. During this meeting both parties discuss their reflections on the session, agree on strengths, good practice and areas for development where

relevant, complete the relevant section(s) of the [proforma.](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations)

* 1. For HE colleagues, feedback can be referenced to the [UK Professional](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf) [Standards Framework (UKPSF)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf) which is directly relevant to staff development (Middlesex University Recognition Scheme/PGCert HE/Academic Professional Apprenticeship) and promotion etc.
  2. To develop reflective practice, it can be beneficial for the observee to begin the discussion by reflecting on the session first and to identify good practice as well as exploring areas of difficulty in depth, and suggestions for development.
  3. It is important that 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 other peers unless agreed with the person observed).
  4. Both parties, (observer and observee) retain a copy of the completed [proforma](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations).
  5. The completed [proforma](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations) can be processed as documented in the [Academic](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf)) [Policy Statement APS19 Observation of Learning and Teaching Practice](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/169401/teaching-observations-policy-aps-19.pdf)).
  6. For peer-observations, anonymised strengths, areas for development and good practice which can be disseminated are to be summarised in the [Section](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations) [B online form](https://www.intra.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/services/centre-for-academic-practice-enhancement/teaching-observations) and submitted by the observer to the Head of Department/Deputy Dean or other senior colleague (or nominee) normally within one week of the observation.
  7. This information can be collated and discussed within the Educational Monitoring and Enhancement process, and with the relevant Deputy Dean and Academic Dean.

# Follow-up actions

* 1. The following actions are recommended following observations:
* The Head of Department/Deputy Dean or other senior colleague (or nominee) may identify staff development needs to facilitate appropriate enhancement activities.
* Examples of good practice and strengths can be highlighted and discussed with colleagues to facilitate sharing of good practice.