

Observation of teaching and Learning – Notes for Guidance

Introduction

There is now widespread recognition that the observation of learning and teaching represents an important element in the development of teaching staff and in the internal quality assurance process of higher education institutions. It has been used for a wide variety of purposes, for professional reasons and in response to external pressures, and its use in any particular institution needs to be clearly stated.

The Purpose of Observation at LSHTM

1. The principal purpose of observation of learning and teaching will be to support the development of staff and increase dissemination of good practice. It will also be used for internal quality assurance purposes.
2. The specific contents of the teaching observations will not be used in the monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching, or for the purposes of probation and promotion decisions. There are no plans to use the observation of learning and teaching for accreditation or diagnostic purposes, except for those attending the PATHE or other Certificate courses where reports of teaching observations are required in the assessment.
3. Both the observer and the observee can learn from the observation of learning and teaching, and provision for this has been made in the feedback process.

The Process of Observation

1. Staff are invited to form themselves into pairs, since the basis of the scheme is the 'buddy' system, in which any two colleagues agree to observe each other's teaching. Staff are free to choose their own 'buddy'. Staff are also free to observe a different colleague from the person who observes them.
2. Each pair should arrange between themselves the teaching sessions to be observed, at any time during the academic year.
3. On a day prior to the teaching session, observers should familiarise themselves with the process of observation, the features to be observed and the form to be used for feedback purposes.
4. The pair should meet prior to the start of the teaching session. The observee should furnish the observer with the aims and learning outcomes for the teaching session.

5. During the teaching session, observers should observe both the activities of the teacher and the activities and learning of the students. They should complete the relevant form as the session progresses.
6. At the end of the session, (or a day later) the observer and observee should meet, to discuss how the session went and how it could be improved, based on the written observations of the observer.
7. On completion of the feedback session the observer should send an e-mail message to the Personnel Department indicating that a learning and teaching observation session has taken place.
8. The e-mail messages will be used only for the purpose of monitoring the extent to which it has been taken up.

Framework Documents for Observers

The range of teaching activities that might potentially be observed is substantial, and it is unlikely that a single observation sheet will be suitable for all eventualities.

A range of tried and tested framework documents is therefore available in the School, and staff are free to choose the most suitable one from this selection. The list of documents available is attached as Annex 1. Copies of the forms are available from Teaching Administrators.

Participants on PATHE can use the observation form recommended by the Institute of Education or a different form. However, as many of these forms were designed for observation on teaching and not of learning, where forms only address teaching skills and actions an extra item should be added regarding whether the learning outcomes of the session were achieved.

Completion of the Forms

Observers should note down their comments on the forms as the teaching activity proceeds, rather than after the event. This should then be used as the basis of the discussion with the teacher immediately afterwards.

The completed form should then be retained by the observee for the purposes of training needs and personal development.