

**School of Computing and Mathematics**  
**Educational Development**  
**Project: "Teaching Observations"**

**Proposal for Operation**  
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## **1 Rationale**

The peer observation project is part of the overall objective of developing a Centre for Excellence in the teaching of computing and mathematics in the School. The objective is part of the Annual Development Plan that was presented to the Executive for 1999/2000, and is one of the objectives of the Educational Development Group for 1999/2000, and as such has gone to SMG for approval.

The purpose of the peer observation project is to share excellence in teaching and teaching practice. The peer observation project goes hand in hand with the staff cells project as a means of sharing best practice across the school.

At present this peer observation project is aimed at the ISE and SCS divisions in the School. Maths division already have their observation under way as part of the QAA preparation. After the QAA visit the three divisions will pull together as one project.

It is hoped that the peer observation project will help to develop the culture of individual reflective practice and also develop a culture of collaborative reflective practice.

It should be emphasised that this project is for the benefit of academic staff in their continued professional development and the purpose is to help staff develop deeper insights into their teaching practice.

The purpose of this project is not to flag up faults. There is no concept of a member of staff doing anything wrong. The purpose of the observations is to provide material for discussion and will be used as the basis for reflection on existing practice in a constructive and non-threatening development environment.

The ownership of the observation rests with the observed member of staff. It is the observed academic who chooses and initiates the sessions to be observed and who is responsible for the pre and post observation discussions. (See section 4).

## **2 Potential Staff Concerns**

The whole process of peer observation relies on trust. The observed sessions are for the benefit of the observed academic and any discussion, material or record is the property of the observed academic, and is confidential to that academic.

All members of staff have something to learn from each other. Everyone has different experiences and different skills. New members of staff have as much to offer as established members of staff.

The concept of right and wrong is not part of this project. There is in fact no concept of right and wrong. The point of peer observations is to collect material for reflection on existing practice and to develop that practice in the light of discussions with peers.

### **3 Preparation Workshops**

Opportunities will be made available for staff to wishing to undertake training on the peer observation process, including pre-observation discussion on aims and objectives and post-observation de-briefing, as well as the actual observation activities.

In the first instance anyone wishing to undertake training in peer observation should contact the Director of Educational Development.

### **4 Operation of Peer Observation**

#### a) Choosing your peers.

There are a number of options in how to establish the peer observation groups, random selection, dictated selection, or self selection. At this stage it is recommended that peer groups are self selected.

#### b) Who is a peer?

As with previous point there are a number of options. Again at this stage it is important to have a peer (or peers) who are comfortable working with each other, either within the subject specialism, or outwith the subject specialism.

#### c) Peer group size.

It is suggested that the peer group size is two or three, as it is expected that there will be a reciprocal arrangement in observations.

#### d) Reciprocal arrangements

The reciprocal arrangement will mean that the observed academic in one session will become the observer of the academic who observed them in another session.

#### e) Initiating the observed session

It is important that the academic who initiates the session is the academic to be observed. They will be responsible for organising the pre, post and actual observation.

#### e) Pre-observation preparation

Experience has shown that it is worthwhile having a short discussion before the session to establish ground-rules and session objectives, discuss teaching plans, discuss place in teaching scheme.

- f) The session.

Observer should be as unobtrusive as possible. Experience has indicated that is useful to explain to students what is happening.

- g) Recording the session.

It is useful to make notes during the session, and perhaps use an observation form, for recording session details. It is important to remember that the form remains the property of the observed academic and will not be held centrally. The only detail to be held centrally is the fact that the observation took place. Details of observed, observer and session should be e-mailed to Director of Educational Development.

A potential observation recording form is included in appendix 1.

The QAA standard form is available at the following web address.

<http://celt.ntu.ac.uk/se/proforma.html>

- h) Post session debrief

It is useful if the observer and the observed have a brief discussion to go through the observed session. Experience has shown that the best way to organise this session is for the observed academic to lead the discussion with their impressions of the observed session.

## **NOTE**

It is important to remember that there is no judgement as to what is right or wrong. The whole process of observation and discussion is to provide the observed academic with material for their own reflective practice.

## **5 Exceptions to this Project**

Whilst members of the Lecturer's Academy are more than welcome to participate in this project, and indeed they are encouraged to do so, the conditions of this project are slightly different to the observations outlined in the conditions for the Lecturer's Academy. The observations for the Lecturer's Academy will run in parallel with this peer observation project.

## Appendix 1 Observation Form

### Teaching Observations

Faculty	Engineering Science and Technology
Department	School of Computing and Mathematics

Date	
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### Participants

Presenter	
Observer(s)	
Student Observer(s)	

### Student Group

Course	
Year	
Venue & comments	
Type of Session	
Duration	
Observation techniques	

### Aims

Stated aims of the session	
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### Overall Comments

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## Observation Criteria

Punctuality	
Session introduction	
Audibility	
Visibility of materials	
Methods used to attract and keep attention e.g. use of questions	
Were you 'enthused' by the session?	
What was the general level of student interest?	
Aspects particularly inspirational	
Aspects lacking in inspiration	
Methods used to facilitate student participation	
Methods were used to check on understanding	
Were the stated aims achieved?	
How was the session concluded?	

**Material**

<i>Handouts</i>	
When were they issued? Support for taught session	
Readability	
<i>Illustrations and examples</i>	
When were they used?	
What format was used	
<i>Use of audio-visual aids</i>	