

Maynooth University Observation/Review of Teaching Guidelines

Please note: This document and process is based on the approach employed in University of Reading. The document draws heavily from the University of Reading, Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, Programme Handbook 2012-13

The Observation/Review of Teaching Process involves four stages:

1. Scoping and logistics
2. Initial briefing
3. Observation
4. Debriefing

1. Scoping and logistics

The first stage, scoping and logistics, can be completed in person, by email or on the phone where colleagues agree on a suitable session for observation. Most people like to select a session they feel comfortable and confident with, but the maximum benefit from observation may be to select a session which is new, difficult or in need of a change. Normally an observation should last for about an hour, so a longer practical class may need to be 'sampled'.

Both people should be available for a discussion of about an hour soon after the observation takes place.

2. Initial briefing

The initial briefing is essentially a conversation that will establish ground rules, set the scene, focus the observer and decide practical issues.

Examples of items to be discussed at the initial briefing include:

- Objectives of the selected session
- Issues that the colleague would particularly like feedback on
- Any new or experimental parts of the session where feedback would be valuable
- Where the observer will sit, or whether it is appropriate to wander around (in a practical session it may be useful for the observer to talk to students)
- How the observation will be explained to students
- How the observer will record information
- When you will meet to debrief after the session
- How you will each provide feedback

Note: Students are likely to notice the presence of another member of staff in the session and observers will inevitably make notes about the students' involvement as an integral part of the observation. Therefore, it is a good idea for the colleague to

introduce the observer to the students and explain about the observation process. Thereafter, the observation should have no impact upon the session.

3. The observation

There are four stages in the teaching process which can be identified in any session which is likely to be observed:

- Planning prior to the session
- Introducing the session
- Delivering and developing the session
- Conclusion

At the pre-session initial briefing you may have agreed a particular focus for the observation, but within the hour, the observer can also make some useful general comments on these stages.

Some possible prompts follow:

Planning the session:

- How does the plan relate to previous sessions?
- Are there clear aims and learning outcomes?
- How does the session fit in the overall module?
- Are resources (technology, handouts, tasks) available at the appropriate points?

Introducing the session to the students:

- Is it clear to the students how this session relates to previous work?
- Does the introduction give the students a clear overview of how the session will develop?

Delivering and developing the plans:

- Is the communication of ideas relevant, clear and coherent?
- Is there opportunity for the students to clarify their understanding?
- How is this handled?
- What strategies are used to gain attention, to refocus and to ensure attention is maintained?
- Are students motivated?
- Are teaching methods appropriate to the tasks?
- Are there opportunities for the students to think, question and feedback?
- What modes of delivery are used? Is there a reliance on one mode?
- In the learning environment an inclusive one? How is this achieved?

Concluding the session:

- Is the session drawn to a satisfactory conclusion?
- Is there a summary of the main ideas or a review of the point reached so far?
- Does the conclusion look forward to the next session or encourage further action?

4. The debriefing

Detail will be easiest to recall if the de-brief follows on soon after the session. It is often best to let the observed person have first comment on how they felt the session went. It may then be appropriate to go through the observer's notes. The observer can help the observed by taking the discussion through these stages:

Description - what happened?

Feelings - how did you feel? what were your reactions?

Evaluation - what was effective? what was less effective? what might this mean or imply?

Analysis - why do you think this happened? what was really going on? what sense can you make of the situation?

Conclusion - what else might you have done? how might you tackle it next time?

Form

There is a form which is used to guide this process. The form is divided into three parts.

Part 1 - Teaching Observation Record - is for the teacher. In Part 1 the teacher records some information about the class in advance of the evaluation. This can form the basis of the pre-observation discussion with the observer.

Part 2 – Teaching Observation – Observer Feedback – is for the observer. In Part 2 the observer records the notes they have taken during the class.

Part 3 – Teacher's Reflection - is for the teacher. This part of the form serves two purposes: as a prompt for reflection on the discussion following the observation and to record action points.

Updated September 2022