

Peer Supported Development (PSD)

Guidance for observers and observees

This guidance is designed to support colleagues undergoing Peer Supported Development as observer/reviewer and observee/reviewee. 'Observer/ee' applies both to the observation of teaching and the review of resources.

If you have any questions after reading this guidance, please [contact your faculty lead or our Academic and Learning enhancement Team](#).

What is PSD?

Peer Supported Development is a scheme for peer observation and review of teaching or other teaching-related activities (e.g. review of resources or assessment). The scheme is designed to facilitate productive feedback and dialogue between observer and observee, ensuring a constructive and developmental experience for both parties.

PSD has four steps:

1. Planning

The observee should decide what they would like feedback on: not just the session or activity, but any particular aspects on which they would like the observer to focus on. This may be related to current goals of a module or programme in relation to student success metrics like continuation, but it may also be related to personal goals such as enhancing their presentation skills. This may be informed by the reflection and review section of last year's Peer Supported Development, if undertaken.

2. Review & Feedback

The observer observes the session or reviews the activity, with reference to the observee's desired focus. While the observer should always respond to the observee's areas of focus, they may also pick up and discuss other issues. The observer produces feedback in accordance with relevant sections in Section 2 of the Planning and Review Form.

3. Discussion

The observee and observer meet to discuss the session or activity under observation. If the two partners are observing one another, we recommend two separate discussions, with one session as the focus of each discussion, to ensure that each session or activity is discussed fully. The feedback in Section 2 may be used as a prompt for discussion, but other themes may emerge.

4. Personal Reflection and Action Plan

This section is recorded in Section 3 of the Planning and Discussion Form. The observee should use the discussion and feedback to reflect on their strengths, areas for development, and the practical steps needed to enhance their practice further. When they next take part in Peer Supported Development, they can use their reflections from the previous year's PSD to inform their planning.

These four steps can be visualised as a cycle in which each year's Reflection/Action Plan informs the following year's Plan:



What are the benefits of PSD?

There are numerous recorded benefits of peer observation of teaching, and we believe these can also be transferred to peer feedback on non-teaching activities such as a review of resources.

Hendry et al's 2021 study found four key benefits of peer observation for teaching staff:

1. Enhancing teaching through review/feedback;
2. Enhancing teaching by reviewing others;
3. Development of reflective practice;
4. Confidence and collegiality.

Rawat et al (2022) compared the performance of students in two groups, one where the teachers engaged in peer observation and one (control) group where they did not. The

experimental group experienced higher results in the cumulative assessment, suggesting that peer observation benefits students as well as teachers.

When done well, PSD can be a great way to build collegial relationships and confidence, as colleagues are able to reflect on why they do what they do and their strengths as teachers. It also helps teachers take ownership of their own development and know their own areas of enhancement and interest. It can also help development through allowing staff to see how things might be done differently, even within the same School or subject area. Even the most experienced teachers can benefit from a fresh perspective or example of innovation.

Tips for observees

- ❖ Choose a session to be observed where you can use the feedback. For example, if you teach one session where you can change the plan and one where you cannot, try to pick the session in which you have more scope for change. You can still learn from feedback on sessions where you aren't in control, but the developmental benefits may be less direct.
- ❖ If you are asking a colleague to observe a recording, try to get one where the classroom and students are somewhat visible so that the observer can gain a sense of the atmosphere in the room. Recorded voice-overs can be reviewed for presentation quality and content, but you'll get more useful feedback on how effective your teaching actually is from an observation that includes the room itself, and students' voices if not their faces. A Panopto recording which captures the presenter is therefore more useful than a voiceover.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to take a risk. In fact, trying out something you're less familiar with, or haven't used as much with your students, can be a great situation for feedback and reflection.
- ❖ Let students know that you will be observed and what this is for, so they know why there is an unexpected addition to the classroom (and that it is not someone there to judge them).
- ❖ Don't be disheartened if a session doesn't go smoothly or well. The feedback will be useful (perhaps more so than if it went smoothly!), and a good observer will understand that things happen outside teachers' control.
- ❖ Be specific about what feedback you'd like and why. This will help your observer to tailor feedback to your needs, and also help shape your own reflection on what happened.
- ❖ It can feel very personal to receive feedback on our teaching, but try to separate the work from the self: [this page from the University of Waterloo Teaching Excellence Center has some excellent tips on receiving feedback](#).
- ❖ On the other end of the spectrum, you don't have to respond to all feedback with immediate change: this isn't a list of corrections that you must make to become

an 'ideal' teacher. Take your time to reflect on which aspects you will respond to, why they resonate with you, and how you want to respond.

- ❖ The final part – the reflection and action planning – is not simply 'closing the loop' but a major part of making the PSD process useful. Take the time to consider it, and revisit it throughout the year – for example, at appraisal time.

Tips for observers

- ❖ Follow the observee's requested focus(es) of feedback. You can comment on other things, but giving feedback on the development areas they identified sets the stage for a more productive process.
- ❖ If observing live, be unobtrusive in the session, but sit among or near the students so you can gain a sense of the atmosphere and what students are doing. This is often the most useful aspect of observer feedback, as it gives a perspective the teacher cannot access.
- ❖ Ensure feedback is collegial and constructive. This is not a summative assessment that can be passed or failed. Even the best sessions will have something to improve or think about for the future, and every observation should identify some strengths. The role of the observer is that of 'critical friend'.
- ❖ Understand that things happen in sessions that are out of the teacher's control – for example, technical issues – and reflect this in the feedback. For instance, you might praise a teacher's smooth handling of a technical glitch rather than focusing on the glitch itself.
- ❖ If you are making a constructive or critical comment, try to always include a way forward. For example, rather than saying 'slides were too text-heavy', you could say 'The slides are quite text-heavy: try replacing some of the sentences with keywords and/or using diagrams to explain processes'.
- ❖ Questions can be a good way to raise an issue for reflection without offering judgement. For example, 'I noticed students struggled to settle down – why do you think that is?'
- ❖ Feel free to share your own experience and/or any resources you have found useful in suggesting ways the observee can move forward in their development.
- ❖ Share with the observee any ways that you will use their practice to enhance your own – so the development process feels mutual.
- ❖ In the post-observation discussion, try to start by asking the observee how they thought the session went – to set the tone for a truly joint discussion.
- ❖ If you have seen an example of innovation or good practice, you could suggest to the observee that they (or both of you) share this with the school or faculty.

The post-observation discussion (tips for you both)

- ❖ Don't skip the final discussion! This is often the most useful part of the review, as it allows you to unpack and explore the most interesting aspects that were raised.
- ❖ Try to find a space that is private, especially if you will be discussing individual students.
- ❖ We recommend a time of about 30 minutes for this.
- ❖ A good way to start the discussion is for the observer to ask the observee how they felt the session went. This sets a reflective tone and allows the observee's perspective and experience to inform the subsequent discussion.
- ❖ Remember that this should be a mutual reflection: it is not just for the observer to tell the observee what 'went well'.
- ❖ Differences in experience are valuable, but can lead to different perspectives, so be mindful that your partner, whether observer or observee, may have a different experience on a particular issue than you: both are valid.
- ❖ It's important to acknowledge that some issues may have more than one right answer or lack a clear solution. This does not mean that there is no way forward, just that the right way forward may differ depending on the context.
- ❖ The observee should try to finish by setting some concrete goals for development or change (of self, practice or resources). If you return to the goal in a year's time, will you be able to say whether you achieved it?

How might PSD fit with my other development and practice?

- ❖ You could use PSD as part of your evaluation strategy. For example, you might try out a new resource, teaching technique, assessment or support strategy – and then use your peer observer's feedback as additional information on how this went. This can be very useful to compare with student feedback.
- ❖ For observers, PSD can be a great way to refresh your teaching practice, enabling you to see how colleagues approach common issues or showing you innovative resources, techniques or pedagogies.
- ❖ PSD can also be a great way to link up with colleagues and give/receive mutual support around teaching and learning.
- ❖ Feedback from PSD can be used as evidence for a GOLD Associate or Fellowship application, especially to evidence 'effective practice'.
- ❖ If you are applying for GOLD Senior Fellowship or even promotion, PSD could be part of how you demonstrate the support you give to others, or the influence you have, in teaching and learning.
- ❖ PSD can help you to set goals for your personal development, which may then feed into broader development discussions such as appraisal.

- ❖ It can also help you set and evaluate goals for your module or programme. For example, if a programme has lower scores for a particular student success metric (NSS, continuation, graduate outcomes & BAME Awarding Gap), the programme team could complete PSD with this in mind, asking observers to focus on this issue. You could even organise mutual observations with a team or colleague who has had particular success in this area. This can also be a way for members of a programme team to exchange experience and expertise, laying the groundwork for a cohesive approach.

How will my data be used in PSD?

Two forms of information are collected through the standard PSD process, and they are used differently.

The first is the detailed Planning and Discussion Form, in which observees identify development needs and reflections, and observers give feedback. This should be kept confidential between the observer and observee, unless both agree to share a certain aspect (e.g. an example of good practice).

The second is the collection of participation data, to allow Faculties to review levels of participation. This allows us to gain insights into how broadly PSD is used across the institution: our focus is on overall levels rather than tracking individuals, as we want to ensure it meets your needs.

We collect names of observee and observer, date and type of session, and the school of both, with an optional form for the observee to add any thoughts they would like to share. This should be filled in by the observee/observer.

This data is available to each Faculty's Associate Dean for Student Success and/or their nominee. The PSD scheme itself does not mandate participation, but Faculties may require certain colleagues to participate; please contact your Associate Dean for Student Success if you have any questions on this.

References

Hendry, G.D., Georgiou, H., Lloyd, H., Tzioumis, V., Herkes, S. and Sharma, M.D., 2021. 'It's hard to grow when you're stuck on your own': Enhancing teaching through a peer observation and review of teaching program. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 26(1), pp.54-68.

Rawat, D., Salankar, N. and Kapoor, M., 2022. Peer-observation: An intensive study and its impact on the teaching-learning process. *Journal of engineering education transformations*, pp.165-174.