

# A guide to formal peer review of teaching at UOW

... an additional option that academics can use for professional development or evaluation

## What is peer review of teaching?

Peer review of teaching involves a colleague providing feedback on teaching. It offers a valuable opportunity for both reviewer and reviewee to reflect on teaching.

Peer review need not be formal. Colleagues may sit in on each other's classes or a senior colleague may offer to observe a new staff member.

**Formal peer review** requires the use of UOW processes.

## Why peer review?

Evaluation of teaching is ideally based on a range of perspectives, including:

- student evaluation
- peer evaluation
- supervisor evaluation
- self evaluation.

Formal peer review is offered at UOW as an additional option to assist any academic to:

- develop their teaching, and/or
- collect evidence for probation, promotion or award applications.

## Is peer review required at UOW?

No. Peer review of teaching at UOW is **optional**.

## Peer review is just one source of evidence

<p><b>Learning outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student grasp of concepts</li> <li>• Student work</li> <li>• Marks/grades</li> </ul>	<p><b>Peers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer observation of teaching</li> <li>• Peer review of curriculum development</li> <li>• Other feedback and discussions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching philosophy</li> <li>• Reflection</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of teaching</li> <li>• Informal feedback</li> </ul> <p><i>Adapted from Brookfield, 1995 and Smith, 2008 (1)</i></p>

## What kinds of teaching activity can be reviewed?

Any teaching activity can be peer reviewed including face-to-face teaching, online teaching, clinical and field-based teaching, course or subject design and resource design.

## What types of formal peer review are available?

### *Peer observation of teaching*

Peer observation can be arranged for any observable teaching activity at UOW.

### *Peer review of educational / curriculum development*

Peer review of educational development will be available in the future, extending the current use by Academic Services Division academics.

Peer Review of Teaching	Formal Peer Review of Teaching
<p><b>Academics might use this when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seeking feedback and constructive suggestions to develop as a teacher</li> <li>• a group of colleagues wishes to encourage an environment of mutual support and feedback, as part of ongoing reflection on teaching practice</li> <li>• completing Unit 2 of the University Learning and Teaching course.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Academics might use this when:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collecting evidence for a probation or promotion application</li> <li>• collecting evidence for a teaching award</li> <li>• seeking feedback and constructive suggestions to develop as a teacher.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Peer review of teaching refers to an arrangement between colleagues.</i></p>	<p><i>Formal peer review of teaching is carried out under formal UOW processes.</i></p>

All forms of peer review of teaching are encouraged at UOW. Many academics are already familiar with peer review processes through the University Learning and Teaching (ULT) course.

## What is the process for formal peer observation of teaching?

*Before requesting a peer observation, attendance at a UOW workshop on peer review of teaching is highly recommended.*

1. Reviewee selects reviewer from UOW list and contacts to request a review.
2. Reviewer and reviewee meet and discuss teaching context and pro forma reviewee has selected. Both sign the Peer Observation Request Form and the reviewee returns it to CEDIR.
3. Reviewer observes class at agreed time and place and records notes on agreed focus areas from the pro forma.
4. Reviewer types up their *Observation Feedback*, provides a copy to the reviewee and meets with reviewee to discuss.
5. Reviewer writes their *Evaluation Summary* independently of the reviewee. Reviewer lodges the Evaluation Summary with CEDIR within two weeks of the observation. After lodgment, reviewer provides a copy to the reviewee.
6. Optional: for probation or promotion, reviewee decides on two peer review Evaluation Summaries (one internal and one external to the faculty) to be sent to the Committee. Reviewee writes reflective commentary on all evidence of teaching.
7. Peer review Evaluation Summaries if requested by the reviewee are sent to Committee with teacher evaluations and ULT completion report.

*Either person may decline or withdraw at any point in the process*

## Step 1 – Choosing & contacting reviewers

### Choosing reviewers

Only the academic to be reviewed can select the reviewers. Reviewers must be chosen from the list of accredited peer reviewers at [http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/peer\\_review/](http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/peer_review/). For use in probation/promotion applications, one must be internal to the teacher's faculty and one external to the teacher's faculty.

Selection is based on the teacher's perception that the reviewers:

- have considerable teaching expertise and the ability to share this with others
- will be able to give honest, constructive feedback
- will be helpful and positive
- will be fair and impartial
- can be trusted to keep confidentiality.

### Contacting reviewers

Academics contact their reviewers directly, usually by email, to request a formal UOW peer review of teaching.

It is possible that the first choice of reviewer may not be available. Reviewers are entitled to decline, for example if they are too busy.

## Step 2 – The pre-observation meeting

### Prior to the meeting

The reviewee reflects on what they wish to gain from the review and chooses focus areas from the UOW pro forma. Focus areas may be omitted and/or added.

### What happens at the meeting?

- Discuss the teaching context. This could include teaching philosophy and approach, student backgrounds and motivation, whether the subject is team taught, etc.
- Discuss the class to be observed. This could include what the teacher is aiming to achieve, the learning resources to be used or any concepts students may find difficult.
- If the reviewer is from another faculty, a discussion about how students learn in the particular discipline would be useful.
- Discuss the aims of the peer observation. These may be fairly general, or the teacher may ask for specific feedback.
- Discuss the pro forma focus areas chosen by the reviewee.
- Reviewee and reviewer complete and sign a Peer Observation Request Form.

### Reviewee returns the form

After the pre-observation meeting, the reviewee sends CEDIR the completed Peer Observation Request Form.

## Step 3 – The observation

### What does the reviewee do?

- Explain that a visitor is in the room for staff development purposes. This is particularly important in small classes where the extra person is likely to be noticed by students.
- Conduct the class as usual.

### What does the reviewer do?

- Be unobtrusive.
- Observe the students as well as the teacher. It may be useful to try to think of yourself as a student to 'get a feel' for the learning environment.
- Take notes as needed.

### Ensuring confidentiality

- Only the person to be reviewed can request a peer review of teaching.
- Peer reviewers sign a clause stating they will not discuss the review with others.
- Results of peer reviews are confidential to the teacher reviewed and are only sent to the Probation/Promotion Committee on the teacher's request.
- Review reports are stored securely at CEDIR, as with teacher evaluations.

## Step 4 – Feedback and discussion

The usefulness of peer review of teaching as a staff development tool depends largely on the feedback and discussion stage.

### Writing up the feedback

Responsibilities of the reviewer:

- Type up the Observation Feedback as soon as possible, using the agreed pro forma.
- Aim for an honest appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.
- Write in a way that is both supportive and critical.
- For each area for improvement, offer a practical idea.

Some other points to bear in mind:

- There are many teaching styles; what works for you may not work for someone else.
- Consider the level of appointment. A new associate lecturer may not have the confidence of a professor.
- If there are numerous possible areas for improvement, focus on those that are most achievable and will make the most difference to students.

### Discussing the feedback

The reviewer provides the *Observation Feedback* section of the report to the teacher and offers to discuss the results. Both reviewer and reviewee will benefit from a full discussion of their perceptions of the teaching session.

At the post-review meeting:

- Begin with the teacher talking about their perceptions of the teaching experience, how well the aims of the class were met, etc.
- The reviewer discusses their observations, both the strengths and the areas for possible improvement.
- Together, the reviewee and reviewer explore ideas the teacher might try in the future.

### Discussing the next stage

- The reviewee indicates to the reviewer whether they would like an *Evaluation Summary* to be prepared and lodged with CEDIR.
- The reviewee may choose to ask a reviewer **not** to proceed with an Evaluation Summary. In this case, the reviewee emails CEDIR to close the formal review process.
- Discussion of the contents of the Evaluation Summary should be avoided, as reviewers must prepare this part of the report independently. No pressure should be placed on reviewers and no agreement made as to its contents.

### Reflection

After the meeting, the reviewee reflects on the feedback and how it may help their teaching. Having acted on some of the suggestions raised, the reviewee may request another review (using a new Request Form).

## UOW peer reviewees and reviewers

### What are the qualities of reviewees?

A reviewee can be any UOW teacher who actively seeks out ideas to improve their teaching. Reviewees are able to hear open and honest feedback while staying positive about themselves. They take responsibility for deciding which comments are useful.

### What are the qualities of accredited UOW reviewers?

Accredited peer reviewers of teaching are members of the UOW community with recognised teaching achievements who have been nominated by Deans and appointed by the DV-C(A&I). They have the following attributes and qualities:

- teaching achievements in the Faculty
- recognition for teaching achievements, eg teaching roles, grants or awards
- teaching expertise and judgment
- commitment to maintain confidentiality
- sensitivity to the different contexts and career needs of others

- ability to maintain an open and friendly approach, focussed on the other person's journey rather than their own expertise, and
- ability to give honest feedback in constructive and positive ways.

### How are reviewers accredited?

Accreditation for peer observation of teaching is gained through attending a two-hour workshop on formal peer observation of teaching, followed by a peer observation exercise. Academics who have previously undertaken peer observation within Unit 2 of the University Learning and Teaching Course are exempt from the exercise.

### What do reviewers gain?

Acting as a peer reviewer is a formal UOW teaching leadership role, and could be cited as evidence in teaching award or promotion applications.

Most reviewers comment that they enjoy the experience of discussing teaching with a colleague, and gain ideas for their own teaching by observing others.

## Step 5 – Formal report

### Writing the Evaluation Summary

- The reviewer should comment on both the reviewee's strengths and any areas for improvement. Reviewers are writing a fair and objective peer review (not a reference).
- The reviewer should not feel responsible for the reviewee's future. The reviewee can choose not to use the report.
- A reviewer may need to contact a reviewee to clarify points, but they should not discuss the contents of the Evaluation Summary.
- One page is ideal for an Evaluation Summary, two pages maximum.

### Lodging the report

- Please send the Evaluation Summary to the CEDIR Peer Observation of Teaching Coordinator within two weeks of conducting the review.
- Please provide a copy of the Evaluation Summary to the reviewee after lodgment.

## Step 6 – Using reports in applications

### How do I include peer reviews in my probation/promotion application?

- Select two peer review reports you wish to include. One reviewer must be internal to your faculty and one external to the faculty.
- Contact CEDIR and ask for the reports you have selected to be sent to the committee.
- Write about the results as part of the reflection statement on all teaching evidence.

### Is formal peer review data valid?

All forms of evaluation have strengths and weaknesses. To achieve a credible form of evidence, formal UOW peer review has these features:

- reviewers are selected based on their recognised teaching expertise and judgment
- reviewers are trained
- reviewee and reviewer clarify aims and context before the observation
- UOW pro formas are provided
- either person may decline or withdraw at any point in the process
- a reviewee who believes a report isn't credible can choose not to put it forward.

Peer reviews of teaching are not considered alone, but together with a range of evidence.

### Can peer reviews be substituted for student evaluations?

Generally, no. In some limited circumstances, formal peer reviews of teaching may provide a substitute for UOW Teacher Evaluations (student surveys). This can be negotiated if an academic has teaching responsibilities but has no classes, or too few classes, in which to collect surveys. Currently this applies to Academic Services Division and some Graduate School of Medicine academics.

People in other areas who, because of the nature of their role, genuinely can't carry out sufficient evaluations may apply to their Dean and the Chair of the Promotions or Probations Committee to substitute peer reviews. It should be noted that the existing option to extend probation for employees who, through no fault of their own, have been unable to obtain the sufficient number of teacher evaluations, remains unchanged.

Please note: having left it too late to organise teacher evaluations is not a valid reason to substitute peer reviews.

## Step 7 – Committee receives reports

At the teacher's request, CEDIR forwards the following documents to the committee:

- selected teacher evaluations (four to six)
- (optional) two selected Evaluation Summaries from peer reviews of teaching (one internal and one external to faculty)
- ULT completion report.

### How will the committee interpret peer review information?

The committee will consider the peer review Evaluation Summaries together with all the evidence supplied. They will weigh up student surveys, teaching achievements, peer reviews, the reflection statement, referee reports and other evidence.

(1) S D Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1995; C D Smith, 'Building Effectiveness in Teaching through Targeted Evaluation and Response: Connecting Evaluation to Teaching Improvement in Higher Education', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol 33 no 5, 2008, pp 517-33.

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### For more information

For request forms, templates and reviewer names, see [http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/peer\\_review/](http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/peer_review/)  
For general enquiries and lodgments, please contact Julie Sikora, CEDIR, x 4369 [cedir@uow.edu.au](mailto:cedir@uow.edu.au)  
To discuss peer review of teaching at UOW, please contact Maureen Bell x 3946 [mbell@uow.edu.au](mailto:mbell@uow.edu.au)