

University
Centre
Somerset

Part of Bridgwater & Taunton College

HIGHER EDUCATION

PEER REVIEW AND OBSERVATION

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Reviewed by: HE Review Group
Updated: May 2017
Approved by: SMT
Date:
Date of next Review: May 2019

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to this policy

The College has, for many years, operated a well-established policy of observing and making judgments about the quality of teaching and learning. The approach was based on the criteria issued by Ofsted for a Further Education (FE) context. As the College's Higher Education (HE) has grown and matured over recent years there have been increasing discussions about the appropriateness of using this framework to make judgements about the quality of HE teaching and learning.

A key driver in the change is the emphasis placed by the UK Quality Code for higher education on the need to meet expectations of good quality provision within a HE context. The College went through a formal external review process in 2014, the Higher Education Review (HER). Whilst this process did not directly comment on the College's approach to observing teaching and learning it did note the need for the College to define enhancement clearly in a HE context. This policy is a strategic response to the HER report in providing a further means for enhancement of teaching and learning through a formalised process of Peer Review for HE.

1.2. Context

With significant changes in the national landscape of higher education in the form of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), there is a need to provide evidence to support the external quality monitoring of the College's teaching and learning. This, coupled with the increasing significance placed on the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF) being lauded as a possible benchmarking tool in measuring teaching excellence within the TEF, has informed the approach to this policy.

The College's university partners hold expectations regarding the level of professionalism within teaching and learning at the College. This policy has been developed with reference to each of the approaches taken by the College's current university partners and within the context of each of the individual partnership agreements held with them, to help support the College to meet those expectations.

1.3. Aims of this policy

This policy aims to:

- reflect current discourse within the higher education sector regarding peer review, peer observation and reflective practice to inform the practices, approaches and enhancement activities within the College's higher education provision.
- complement and support the advancement of the realisation of the College's ambitions as encapsulated within its strategic plan and its HE Strategy.
- empower its HE teaching teams to actively reflect on their current practice whilst informing the reflection on practice among their peers and thus contribute towards the college-wide enhancement agenda.
- incorporate the student voice to give a powerful and meaningful input into the teaching they experience and to further strengthen the partnership between the College and its students as partners in the teaching and learning process.

1.4. What is Peer Review?

Peer Review is a process that helps define higher education from further education through the use and process of reflective practice to inform improvements in teaching; 'providing formative feedback...can be one of the most powerful approaches to academic development' (MacKinnon, 2001). It is often seen as being distinct from the graded approach used within the College's FE provision that is often described as being 'seen in the prescriptive and formulaic nature of Ofsted criteria which present a 'recipe' for the perfect lesson – a recipe which many staff feel is at odds with their practice when engaged in HE teaching' (Gray, 2010).

Peer Review, whilst often focused on the use of observations, is a broader set of activities that inform and are then impacted by the process of peer observation. It is closely linked to the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education and, as such, is intertwined with other indicators and activities that impact upon that agenda.

A key feature of the enhancement of teaching and learning is the student voice. Student views are collected through many means but primarily a record is made through meetings and surveys.

Another key strand of activity is that of External Examining. Peers from another institution formally review assessment activities to help improve the practice of teaching, learning and assessment.

Whilst, within the wider context of higher education in the UK peer review can take these forms and is understood in varying ways, this policy seeks to make use of peer review but within the context of the College's strategic aims and culture.

1.5. Peer review and scholarly activity

Participation within a peer review process is a form of scholarly activity (as defined within the College's HE Scholarly Activity Policy). It therefore lends itself to being evidence that can be used when applying for recognition against the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) Professional Standards Framework (PSF) that demonstrates individual impact on teaching and learning within higher education.

The peer observation forms devised by the College are mapped to the PSF to help enable this process of reflection in order to support application for recognition. The College's commitment to supporting its staff in applying for recognition is given in more detail in the HE Scholarly Activity Policy.

2. POINTS OF REFERENCE

2.1. Internal points of reference

This policy and procedure should be read within the context of the following College documents:

- Teaching, Learning & Assessment Strategy 2015-2018
- Evaluation of Teaching, Learning & Assessment Policy and Procedures
- Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy
- HE Scholarly Activity Policy

2.2. External points of reference

This policy has been developed with due reference to key external documents, including: The UK Quality Code for higher education, with particular reference to Part B, Chapter B3 'Teaching and Learning' (September 2012). This chapter expects:

Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.'

A full list of references used is provided within the appendices.

3. ENGAGING IN PEER OBSERVATION

3.1. Expectations of staff engagement

The aspiration of the College, in order to work towards enhancement of teaching, is that all staff involved in teaching HE will be expected to participate within the peer review process by undertaking at least one peer observation each academic year and being subject to at least one peer observation each year.

The programme will be monitored by the Quality Team who will record the peer observations that are planned and have been completed centrally. The Quality Team will also hold records of each peer observation completed and compile top level reports for monitoring purposes based on this information (staff names will not be included) to inform enhancement activities.

Staff are encouraged to undertake peer observations with colleagues who are not immediately within their own subject area or department within the College. The Quality Team and the Enhancement Practitioners can assist in supporting dialogues between colleagues in different departments. By staff actively seeking to remove themselves from their 'comfort zone' it is hoped it will lead to new ideas being sparked, innovations being shared and the extension of the 'HE Community' and thus is itself an enhancement activity. It may spark cross-disciplinary links and opportunities for networking or shared endeavours that would otherwise be missed.

The outcomes from the peer review can then be used to inform discussions at the point of appraisals with management, where reflecting on teaching quality and practice is discussed.

3.2. Scope of observation activities

The College encourages peer observations to take place within the full breadth and variety of teaching settings and practices to give further opportunity for the observer to gain an insight into alternative approaches. Whilst many observations will probably take place within a conventional classroom environment, within a taught session, this is not the expectation of the College; although this is perfectly acceptable.

Observation activities may equally not just solely focus on the actual teaching element but wider in terms of the materials, lesson preparation and support provided to enable the learning process with students.

Staff are encouraged to undertake more than one observation each year and if they do so to try and incorporate variety into the observations they undertake whilst in the role of the observer.

4. THE PROCESS OF PEER OBSERVATION

4.1. Preparing for peer observation

Scheduling and arranging peer observations

The Quality Team will hold a record for the peer observations for the current academic cycle that will attempt to track all staff teaching in HE to ensure that they all have the opportunity to participate. It is envisaged that the Enhancement Practitioners (EPs) will act as a conduit to encourage engagement with the process and maintain an active dialogue with the Quality Team to help the College realise its aspiration of all HE teaching staff taking part in peer review.

Training and support

The College will provide training and support to enable and operationalise the peer observation process as it recognises that 'without resources to expedite the process...and to support any identified development needs, the process becomes meaningless' (Shortland, 2004). This will be facilitated via the College's EPs.

The role of the observer

The EPs will lead the training programme to support the eventual embedding of the peer observation process which will form part of their wider remit to support and provide a comprehensive programme of training at the College. Training will be available to support all HE staff and will be delivered on a rolling programme each academic year.

Within the College's Peer Observation model the observer plays three key roles:

- To offer reflections on the teaching and learning observed to inform enhancement to their colleague's teaching practice.
- To reflect on the teaching and learning observed to inform their own teaching practice.
- To form a judgement based on the criteria given by the College that can contribute to overall college level monitoring of teaching quality.

The observer is as much part of the peer review process as the person being observed. 'This is active self-development: an intra-personal process, which encourages awareness, experiment and the sharing and dissemination of good practice' (Cosh, 1998). Of these roles the latter is likely to cause consternation among teams in terms of their role in making a judgement and is slightly at odds with the purpose of a truly reflective peer review system.

However, the College still needs means by which to gauge the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches and a measurement by which to gauge this for teaching and learning is still felt to be needed. Judgements are to be made using similar language to the Teaching Excellence Framework and are not aligned to the Ofsted format. Judgements will be recorded centrally but will be kept anonymous and are not linked to pay, contracts or managerial decisions about individuals unless there is a significant negative pattern that warrants further investigation along with other factors that would also be considered in such cases.

The observer will use the forms devised by the College available within the appendices to inform the process of the review and record the findings and reflections resulting from it.

Practical considerations

Below is a checklist of the actions that need to be considered when preparing to undertake a peer observation:

- Have you identified a colleague to observe or to be observed by? If you need any assistance please contact the HE Quality Team who can facilitate contacts between different departments.
- Establish contact with each other and agree a mutually convenient approach to the observation that will benefit both of you.
- Agree in advance any specific pedagogical or organisational aspects that the observer will give a particular focus to, if appropriate.
- Ensure that students are advised of the purpose of the peer observation prior to the lesson commencing, ideally before the day of the lesson and that their feedback forms a critical part of the review process.
- Build in time to meet with students immediately after the session to gather their feedback
- Agree a suitable time slot (normally around 30mins) to meet again and discuss the feedback. This should be as soon after the observation as possible, but normally not more than a week.

Preparing to be observed

When you have agreed to be observed through the peer observation process there are a number of considerations you should be mindful of in advance of the observation taking place that are listed below:

- You may want to liaise with the observer in advance and send them documentation relating to the session/activities they are planning to observe
- Take time to consider if there are any particular areas of your practise that you would like specific feedback on and communicate this to the observer in advance of the observation

4.2. Student engagement in the peer observation

Students form a critical part of the peer observation process. Students should be notified ahead of the planned observation and given a short briefing about the process and what is expected from them following the observation (a short briefing guide is given within the appendices which can either be used as a point of reference or copied and distributed to the group).

Feedback from the students should be gathered immediately after the session and captured within the form.

4.3. Using the peer observation form

The form provided should be used to help guide the observer in the areas that they give consideration to and feedback on to the colleague being observed. Whilst there are specific criteria and aspects to the form it is not mandatory or expected that every criteria would be reported back on. It is useful to give a detailed but succinct level of feedback that can be used to map to the PSF criteria given.

Following the observation a coherent written summary should be made in the corresponding box on the front of the form and an overall judgement confirmed for the lesson/session/activity.

4.4. Guidance on giving feedback following the peer observation

Giving feedback

If giving the feedback then MacKinnon's guidance (2001) may be useful to bear in mind 'the feedback session should always begin by encouraging the teacher to review his or her own performance. This serves to encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation while providing consultants with the opportunity to learn more about the teacher's point of view.' Providing balanced, supportive but honest feedback that underpins the improvement of practice is the aim of this element of peer observation.

Ensuring that your colleague has the opportunity to reflect and to have guidance on those reflections is critical. Remember that this is a peer observation and as such neither of you are the expert on the topic or pedagogical approach(es) observed; please do not offer absolutes in terms of solutions. Giving guidance, reflections on your own practice and experiences is how this process is intended to work from the observers' point of view.

Receiving feedback

Receiving feedback is a chance for reflection upon the session that has just been observed and to pick up any points you may have specifically asked the observer to focus on ahead of the observation. You need to be open to the feedback given by your colleague, both good and areas they are highlighting for improvement; this is not a personal critique but a chance for you to make informed improvements to your practice that ultimately benefit you and your students. It is also an opportunity for you to help the observer reflect on their own practice and whether there is anything they can take from the observation to inform their own practice and approaches; trying to tease this out of them may be a useful exercise.

Using feedback

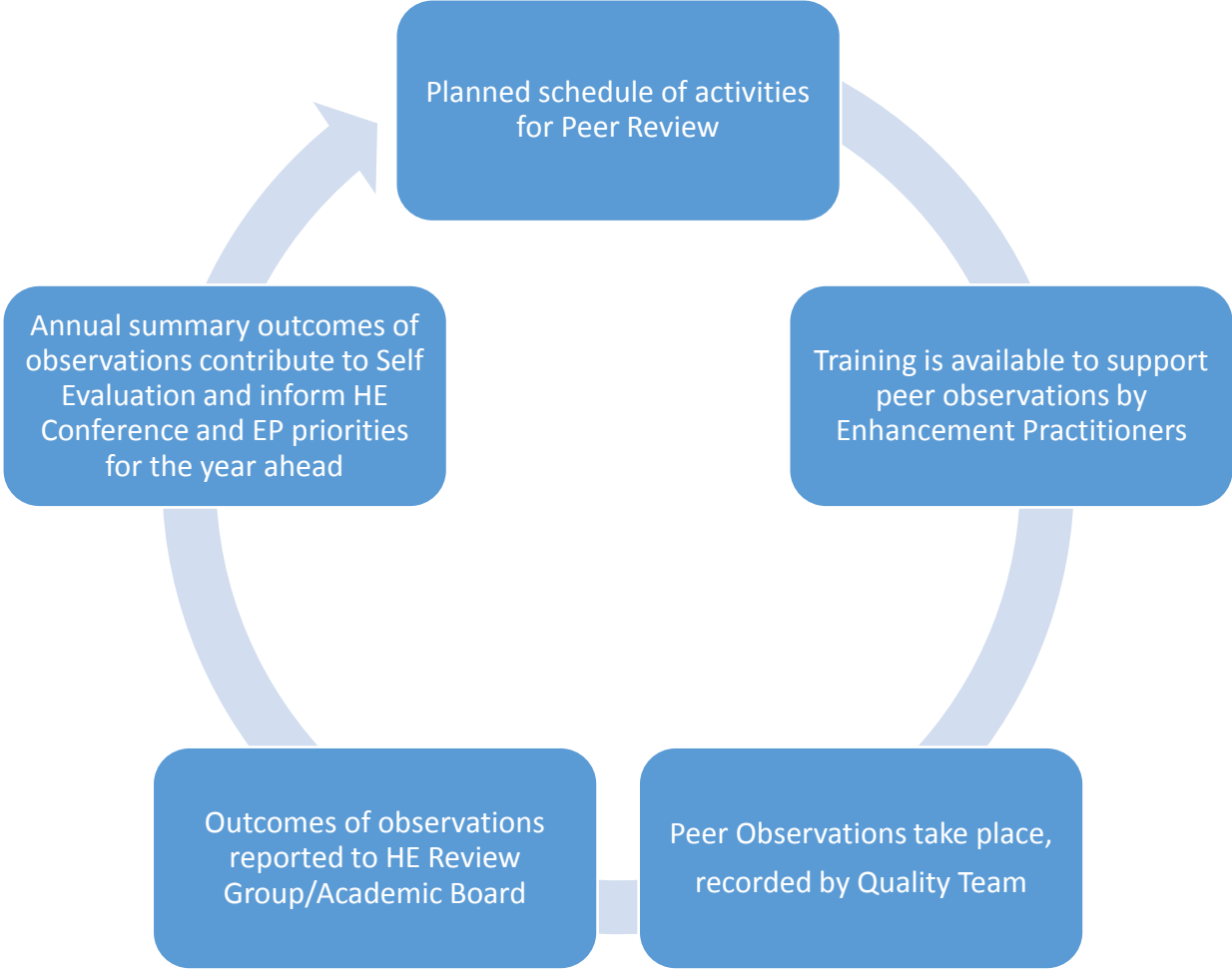
Feedback is not just limited to the action of giving and receiving it. Using the feedback to inform enhancement of your own teaching is the point of this exercise. That may be implicit in the observation process but, for the purposes of managerial necessity, it is important that it is documented in case it is needed as future institutional evidence of this activity taking place. Ideally it will form part of your professional development log and will count towards an application to the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) in the longer term, if you haven't already achieved it.

5. REVIEWING THE POLICY

This policy and procedure will be reviewed periodically and amended as deemed necessary by the HE Quality Team in consultation with stakeholders from across the College, it is anticipated it may go through several revisions early on to ensure it is meeting the needs of the College and works effectively operationally for all involved. The College's Senior Management Team (SMT) are responsible for approving the Policy and any major subsequent amendment.

6. APPENDICES

6.1. Peer Review and Observation Process Diagram



6.2. HE Peer Observation Form



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HE Peer Review Observation of Teaching and Learning Form

		Observation outcome	
		Please indicate the overall outcome and make a brief statement about why this is. Guidance on the outcomes is given overleaf.	
		Tick	Statement
Exceeds expectations			
Meets expectations			
Requires improvement to meet expectations			
Name of Lecturer			
Name of peer reviewer			
Job role of peer reviewer			
Date of observation			
Focus/topic of session being observed			
Student group Programme title, level and any other relevant details that help inform the summary you're providing			

Summary of the peer observation

Please succinctly note the key points you wish to highlight from this observation; you are aiming to give a balanced and constructive summary. Please complete this box last.

Characteristics of a session that 'exceeds expectations'

The session meets the expectations given below but exceeds them in a number of ways that are indicative of individual strengths and innovations. The observer and observee are expected to agree on whether any aspects of the session exceeded the expectations below during their reflective session. If a number of highlights are agreed upon these should be noted in the summary box at the start of the form. The College can then use this to further develop this policy and process about what teaching excellence means and how it can be recognised.

Characteristics of a session that 'meets expectations'

The sessions is **professional** within an **appropriately scholarly learning environment**. Students are being supported to **work towards becoming autonomous** and are **motivated and engaged**. **Academic standards are upheld** by the sessions being in alignment with the level descriptors and directed towards achievement of the learning outcomes.

- **Relationships** within the group **are facilitated** with students demonstrating mutual respect.
- It is evident that **students are motivated; with most students in attendance**. Students are **engaging** with the sessions and **show some readiness to share ideas** within the learning environment.
- Teaching is aligned to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in terms of the **level of the teaching being appropriate and enabling students to work towards meeting the learning outcomes** detailed within the approved course documentation.
- **There is some evidence that research and scholarly activity undertaken by the lecturer informs the sessions**. Teaching is supported by **subject relevant, evidence-based** materials.
- **The teaching materials and approach demonstrate consistently accurate and appropriate levels of good academic practice**. For example slides with quotes are referenced in line with expected standards, such as Harvard Referencing.
- **Students are encouraged to become independent learners**.
- **The dialogue from the lecturer demonstrates formative feedback** that supports learning.
- Teaching contributes to supporting **interpersonal and professional behaviours** and other transferable skills that contribute towards **graduate attributes**.

Planning Meeting

Before the observation please meet with the lecturer who you are planning to observe and discuss the plan for sessions and complete the following:

<p>Why is the observation taking place? What is the purpose of the peer observation? What are the observer and observee hoping to achieve through this and what is in the intended impact?</p>	
<p>Evaluate the quality of the session plans; possibly including course documentation, how well it links to the learning outcomes and level of study.</p> <p>What teaching theory/pedagogical approaches are going to be used? How is scholarly activity of the lecturer going to inform the session?</p> <p>Are there opportunities for recognising equality of opportunity and diversity for learners?</p> <p>Request to see the Scheme of Work – does it make explicit links back to the module/unit intended learning outcomes (ILOs)? How well are students being enabled to meet the ILOs?</p> <p><i>(This maps to 'Areas of Activity' A1 and A5 'Core Knowledge' K2 and potentially 'Professional Values' V1, V2, V3 and V4 within the Professional Standards Framework)</i></p>	

The Peer Observation

Please complete this during/after the peer observation.

Areas of Activity: Teaching and learning

This section maps to the 'Areas of Activity' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (A1-A5)

Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to the quality/effectiveness of the following:

- ✓ Teaching approach and feedback to learners as part of the session
- ✓ Learning environment; physical and how the group/lecturer interact
- ✓ How students are supported during, and if relevant, outside of the session
- ✓ Evidence of use of scholarly activity to inform teaching; are students made aware of it?

Core Knowledge: The subject matter, assessment and quality

This section maps to the 'Core Knowledge' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (K1-K6)

Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to the following:

- ✓ The subject material; relevance, quality and appropriateness to the level of study
- ✓ Appropriateness of the methods of teaching to the subject area and level of study
- ✓ Engagement of students in the session; how well do they appear to be learning?
- ✓ The use of appropriate technologies to enhance the learning and the value it adds to the session
- ✓ Methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching within the session

Professional Values: Approach and context

This section maps to the 'Professional Values' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (V1-V4)

Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to:

- ✓ Respect of individual needs of learners and diversity of the student body; how does their approach demonstrate this?
- ✓ Evidence of pedagogical approaches used and their effectiveness
- ✓ Use of evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and CPD that overtly inform the session
- ✓ Acknowledgement of the wide context in which the students operate; regarding the broader subject base and/or as citizens in a wider community

Reflective Practice

Immediately after the observation has taken place, please take time to meet with the students and note their reflections on the session.

Student feedback

This maps to the Professional Standards Framework, Core Knowledge (K5).

Please ensure you make time to discuss how the sessions went with the students present.

Please provide a summary of their comments regarding the session. If you need to prompt here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Do they feel that the sessions are helping with their own learning and independent study?
- ✓ Do they know what is expected of them before, during and after the session?
- ✓ Is this a typical session?
- ✓ Are they aware of other skills that might have been supported through the session today; other than just the subject knowledge – e.g. communication, team working, leadership, planning, organisational skills, or industry specific skills
- ✓ Are they normally able to access the materials from the sessions via the VLE?

Overall Statement:

Good Practice or areas for improvement summary:

Please meet with the lecturer shortly after the sessions and give them some feedback on the session and to gain their reflections on how it went.

Reflections by the lecturer on their practice

Please take some time to reflect with the lecturer on the session you have observed.

Please note any reflections they (the lecturer) may have as a result of receiving the feedback from you. Please particularly note any reflections that might lead to enhancement of the quality of their teaching as a result of the feedback you have given.

This maps to Core Knowledge (K6) within the Professional Standards Framework.

Reflections by the observer on their own practice

Please take some time to reflect on the session you have observed today.

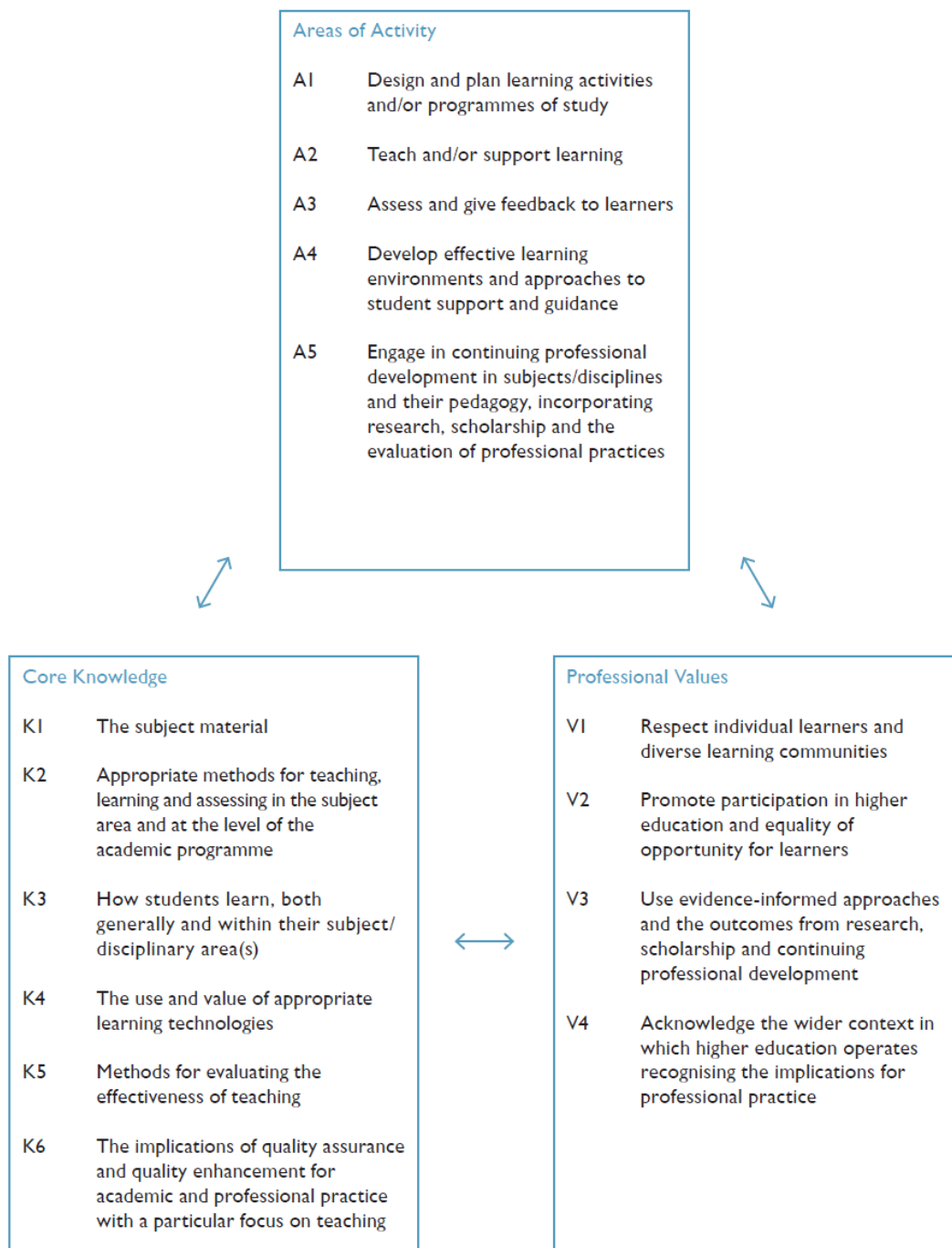
What have you learnt as a result of observing the session that might help inform your own practice?

This maps to Core Knowledge (K6) within the Professional Standards Framework.

Please submit your completed form to quality@bridgwater.ac.uk or as a hardcopy in the internal post to Ben Houlihan, Head of Quality and Teaching Development

Professional Standards Framework (PSF) ¹

Dimensions of the Framework



¹ HEA, *UK Professional Standards Framework 2011*, available from: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/recognition-accreditation/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf> [9.12.2015]

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