HIGHER EDUCATION

PEER REVIEW POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to this policy

The College has for many years operated well-established policies to sustain and improve the quality of teaching and learning. The College's Higher Education (HE) provision has established and matured over recent years, increasing the need for a framework. The framework will ensure impactful and focused conclusions, further stimulating continual improvement of the quality of HE teaching and learning.

A key driver within this policy, is the emphasis placed by the UK Quality Code for higher education (QAA), Office for Students (OfS), Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (EIF); on the need to exceed expectations of good quality provision within an HE context. This policy ensures a strategic response 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, even in the form of provision types including Higher Apprenticeships and Institute of Technologies (IoT), there is a need to provide evidence to support the external quality monitoring of the College's teaching and learning. In 2018, the College was awarded a TEF silver award in recognition of high-quality teaching, learning and outcomes for students, further increasing the College's desire to enhance excellence.

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 and excel within those expectations.

1.3. Aims of this policy

This policy aims to:
- Promote excellence within the higher education sector in regarding peer review and the advancement of reflective practice to inform the methods, approaches and enhancement activities for the College's higher education provision.
- Complement and support the advancement of the realisation of the College's ambitions as encapsulated within strategic plans and the HE Strategy.
- Empower HE teaching teams to impactfully reflect on their current practice, whilst informing the reflection of practice among their peers and thus contribute towards the college-wide enhancement agenda.
- Incorporate student voice to give a powerful and meaningful input into students' learning experiences, further strengthening partnerships between the College and its students as partners within the teaching and learning process.

1.4. What is Peer Review?

Peer Review enables the advancement of teaching practice. The use and process of reflective practice informs improvements in teaching; 'providing formative feedback…can be one of the most powerful approaches to academic development' (MacKinnon, 2001).

Peer Review differs from the College's established developmental observation process for the primary reason that the peer review process is focused on specific pedagogical or organisational aspects. Peer Review facilitates the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education and, as such, is interconnected with further values and behaviours that impact upon this key agenda.

A key feature of the enhancement of teaching and learning is student voice. Student views are collected through multiple methods including through meetings and surveys. An example includes the Programme Committee Meetings (PCM) focused within Autumn and Spring terms, which are further utilised to strengthen the area's annual Self Evaluation Document (SED).

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

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 review 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
- 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 reference to key external documents, including:
The revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education (March 2018).

> *The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.*

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

3. ENGAGING IN PEER REVIEW

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 contribute within the peer review process by undertaking at least one peer review each academic year and being subject to at least one peer review each year.

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

Staff are encouraged to undertake peer review with colleagues who are not immediately within their own subject area or department within the College. The Quality Team and HE Community of Practice (HECoP) can assist in supporting dialogues between colleagues in different departments. By staff actively seeking to remove themselves from their 'comfort zone' new ideas will be simulated, innovations shared, further developing the 'HE Community' and thus is itself an enhancement activity. It may spark cross-curricular links and opportunities for networking or shared activities 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 peer review activities

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

Peer Review 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 peer review each year and if they do so to try and incorporate variety into the reviews they undertake whilst in the role of the reviewer.

4. THE PROCESS OF PEER REVIEW

4.1. Preparing for peer review

Scheduling and arranging peer reviews
The Quality Team will hold a record of the peer reviews for the current academic cycle that will track all staff teaching in HE to ensure that they all have the opportunity to participate. It is envisaged that the HE Community of Practice (HECoP) 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 review 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 HECoP.

The role of the reviewer

The HECoP will lead the training programme to support the eventual embedding of the peer review 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 Review model the reviewer performs three key roles:

- To offer reflections on teaching and learning to further inform enhancement to their colleagues' teaching practice.
- To reflect on the teaching and learning reviewed to inform their own teaching practice.
- To form a conclusion based on the criteria given by the College, to contribute to the overall college level monitoring of teaching quality.

The reviewer's role is an integral part of the peer review process. 'This is active self-development: an intra-personal process, which encourages awareness, experiment and the sharing and dissemination of good practice' (Cosh, 1998). The College is required to gauge the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches and this is a measurement by which to gauge current teaching and learning. 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 reviewer 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 review:

- Have you identified a colleague to peer review or to be peer reviewed 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 peer review that will benefit all parties.
- Agree in advance any specific pedagogical or organisational aspects that the peer review will give a particular focus to, if appropriate.
- Ensure that students are advised of the purpose of the peer review prior to the activity 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 review as possible, but normally not more than a week.

Preparing to be peer reviewed

When you have agreed to be reviewed through the peer review process, there are a number of considerations you should be mindful of in advance of the activity taking place that are listed below:
- You may want to liaise with the reviewer in advance and send them documentation relating to the session/activities they are planning to review.
- 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 reviewer in advance of the review.

4.2. Student engagement in the peer review

Students form a critical part of the peer review process. Students should be notified ahead of the planned review and given a short briefing about the process and what is expected from them following the review (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 review form

The form provided should be used to help guide the reviewer in the areas that they give consideration to, and feedback on, to the colleague being reviewed. Whilst there are specific criteria and aspects to the form, it is not mandatory or expected that every criterion 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 review, 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 review

Giving feedback

If giving 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 review.

Ensuring that your colleague has the opportunity to reflect and to have guidance on those reflections is critical. Remember that this is a peer review and as such neither of you are the expert on the topic or pedagogical approach(es) reviewed; 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 reviewers' point of view.

Receiving feedback

Receiving feedback is a chance for reflection upon the session that has just been reviewed and to pick up any points you may have specifically asked the reviewer to focus on ahead of the review. 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 reviewer reflect on their own practice and whether there is anything they can take from the review to inform their own practice and approaches; trying to tease this out of them may be a useful exercise.
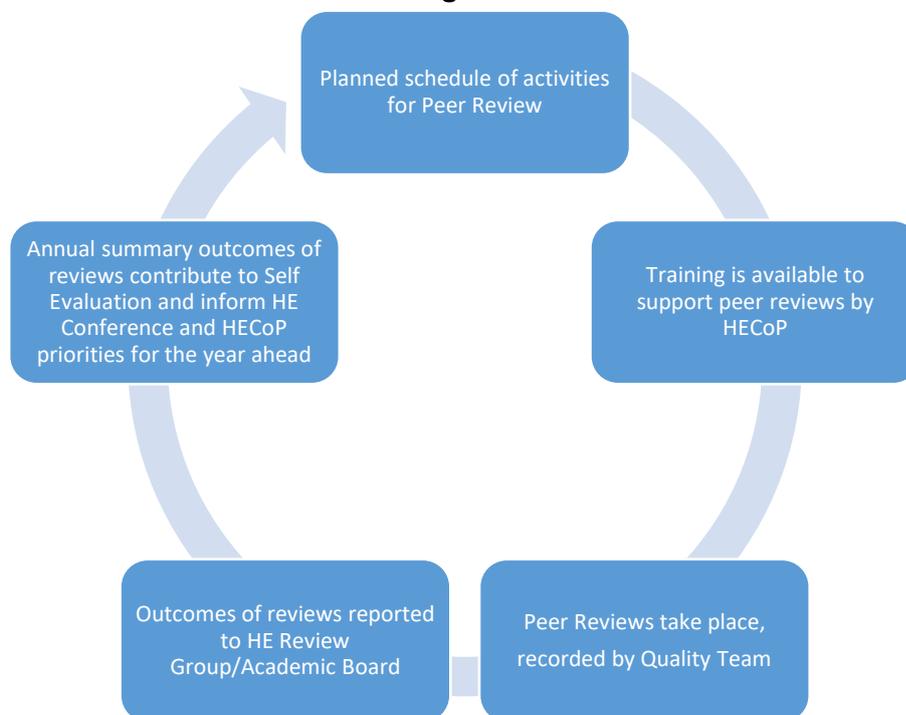
Using feedback
Feedback is not just limited to the action of giving and receiving it. Using the feedback to inform enhancement of your own teaching is the point of this exercise. That may be implicit in the peer review process but, for the purposes of managerial necessity, it is important that it is 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 that 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.
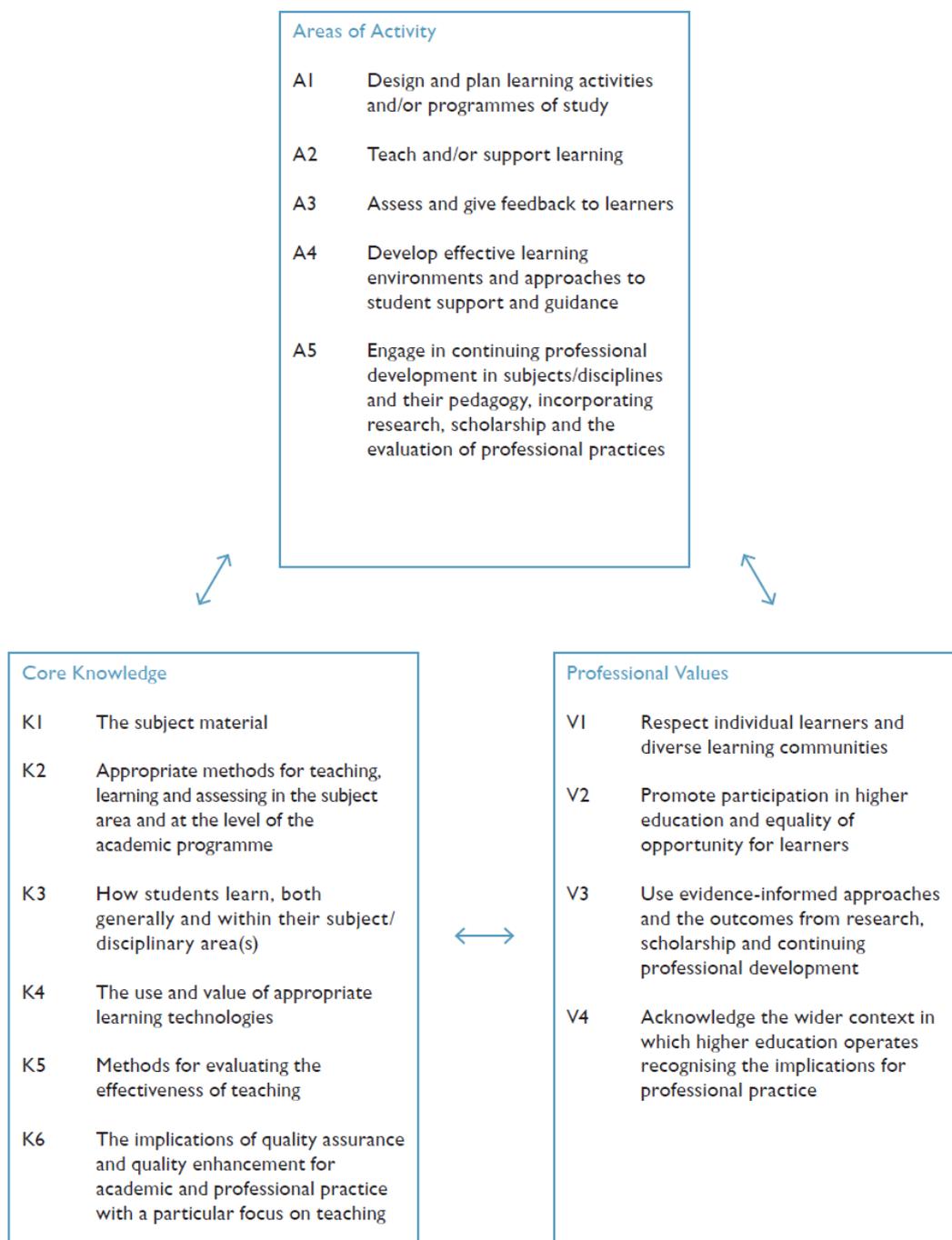
6. APPENDICES

6.1. Peer Review and Review Process Diagram

Professional Standards Framework (PSF) [1]

Dimensions of the Framework

Areas of Activity

A1   Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study

A2   Teach and/or support learning

A3   Assess and give feedback to learners

A4   Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance

A5   Engage in continuing professional development in subjects/disciplines and their pedagogy, incorporating research, scholarship and the evaluation of professional practices

Core Knowledge

K1   The subject material

K2   Appropriate methods for teaching, learning and assessing in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme

K3   How students learn, both generally and within their subject/disciplinary area(s)

K4   The use and value of appropriate learning technologies

K5   Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of teaching

K6   The implications of quality assurance and quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching

Professional Values

V1   Respect individual learners and diverse learning communities

V2   Promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners

V3   Use evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and continuing professional development

V4   Acknowledge the wider context in which higher education operates recognising the implications for professional practice

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

7. REFERENCES

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