



University of Essex



Peer Review of Teaching Policy

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Updated: December 2023
Review date: July 2025

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1. Overview

- 1.1 The aim of this policy is to outline and explain the minimum requirements for Peer Review of Teaching and to be clear about the responsibilities of everyone involved in the process: Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate; Heads of Department; Directors of Education; and academic staff engaged in teaching. The University of Essex Peer Review of Teaching Policy contributes to institutional confidence in reflective teaching practice and teaching quality, and supports delivery of our Education Strategy.
- 1.2 Every member of academic staff engaged in teaching takes part in a peer review development conversation at least once every year, and is observed delivering teaching at least once every two years. This includes those colleagues involved in the delivery of apprenticeships, who are encouraged to observe and liaise with other colleagues involved in such delivery.

2. Our Approach to Peer Review of Teaching

- 2.1 Our approach to Peer Review of Teaching is developmental and collaborative. It provides a way for every academic colleague to ask for feedback on any aspect of their teaching. It encourages academic staff to align their Peer Review with School or Departmental priority areas, promotes the sharing of good practices, and signals where additional support may be needed and how it can be accessed by individuals or teams.
- 2.2 The annual focus for Peer Review within a School or Department is agreed at the beginning of the academic year between Faculty and Department education leadership roles such as Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate, Heads of Department and Directors of Education. This focus is informed by education priorities outlined in each Departmental Annual Review of Courses and in year feedback, priorities agreed in the Education Action Plan, reflections or actions related to student feedback captured through national survey results, and Student Union agreed priority areas. Education leadership teams discuss the priority focus of Peer Review with all academics engaged with teaching in their School or Department.
- 2.3 The School or Department take a risk-based approach to determine the frequency of peer review. New modules, modules taught by inexperienced educators (defined as two years or less experience), and modules which may have received poor student feedback in the past are examples of modules where there is higher risk and where more frequent peer review beyond the annual requirement is expected; while lower risk activities will require annual peer review.

- 2.4 A set of criteria are used for every peer observation of teaching delivery as agreed by the School or Department. These are specific to the teaching context, session format and type of content (e.g. lecture, class, seminar, fieldwork, laboratory). Directed feedback helps to focus the time, energy, and expertise to maximum effect and makes it possible to distil shared themes and actions. The use of a consistent template also helps reviewers to capture feedback which can be followed up by the Director of Education as needed.
- 2.5 Specific details for peer review within the wider departmental focus can always be agreed by the colleagues taking part to ensure the feedback is tailored, constructive and immediately actionable. For example, a focus may be identified as student engagement, but the specific peer development conversation might be how to manage difficult conversations in the classroom.
- 2.6 A summary of the actions proposed and/or taken because of peer review is shared annually with the Faculty Education Committee. These could include instances of good practice, where additional resources or support could be requested, or how support accessed through the Education Development Framework could be enhanced.
- 2.7 The [Educator Development Framework](#) coordinates centrally managed professional development opportunities. To support peer review, Education Coaching is available to departments on an individual or group basis and is offered as a development space for teachers to reflect on their practice with peers, understand why and how they would like to develop new approaches, and build the confidence to put these changes into action. This type of coaching contributes to a Department/School culture of reflective practice and continuing professional development with the potential to engage with colleagues beyond their immediate area (for example, cross-faculty). Colleagues can engage with Education Coaching by developing a profile and/ or exploring the [Peer Mentoring Database](#). Education coaching can be facilitated locally, or centrally by Organisational Development on request.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all academic staff engaged with teaching and the following education leadership roles: Faculty Dean Undergraduate and Postgraduate, Head of Department and Director of Education. Please be aware that this policy does not form part of your contract of employment, and the University may update it at any time.

4. Roles and responsibilities

All academics engaged in teaching

4.1 As members of a learning community all colleagues who teach are open to receiving feedback and providing constructive feedback to others as part of their continuing professional development. In addition to this professional commitment all academics who teach will take part in peer review by engaging proactively with:

- Peer development conversations at least once every year about an aspect of teaching practice. These can take place following peer observation or as a separate conversation, in pairs or in groups within the department or cross-faculty based on a specific theme.
- Observations of teaching delivery at least once every two years. This observation includes sharing the session plan and supporting resources, and will normally be focused on a priority theme for peer review set by the department.

4.2 All newly appointed academic colleagues will engage with a teaching observation in the first 4-5 weeks of teaching but as a minimum in the first three months. This observation includes sharing the session plan and supporting resources.

Assistant Lecturers

4.3 All Assistant Lecturers will engage with a teaching observation every year. This will include sharing the session plan and any supporting resources in addition to observing the teaching delivery.

4.4 All newly appointed Assistant Lecturers will engage with a teaching observation and receive feedback on their teaching in the first 4-5 weeks of teaching. This will include consideration of the session plan and any supporting resources as well as the teaching delivery.

Directors of Education (DoE)

4.5 The DoE identify the focus for peer review at the beginning of each academic year, aligned with the education priorities of the Department or School and previous feedback.

4.6 The DoE design and manage a consistent operating framework for peer review. This includes when and how the review of teaching should take place, how peers are paired or grouped, how themes emerging from the discussions are captured, and how good practice is shared. This approach is made available to every colleague in the department and shared with the Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate.

4.7 The DoE report an annual summary of the actions taken or proposed because of peer review to Faculty Education Committee.

4.8 The DoE provide an annual summary of professional development needs and further support requests to Organisational Development.

Heads of Department/School (HoD):

4.9 The HoD ensure that all academic staff with a responsibility for teaching in their department are aware of the minimum requirements for peer review.

4.10 The HoD work with the DoE to support academic colleagues engaged in teaching to engage with opportunities for cross-departmental peer review of teaching activity.

4.11. The HoD create a departmental culture where feedback on teaching is valued.

Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate:

4.12 The Faculty Deans (UG and PG) provide assurance to Education Committee annually that peer review of teaching is taking place and is effective.

Organisational Development (OD):

4.13 OD promote and provide training, support, and guidance for the observation of teaching delivery and peer feedback conversations. Centrally provided support is accessible through the Educator Development Framework.

4.14 OD work with the Director of Education to meet additional support needs identified in the annual summary of professional development needs.

5. Equality Statement

5.1 We are committed to meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which requires the University show no discrimination as required by law on account of age, disability, gender reassignment*, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The University will always act lawfully and this may include taking action to support people with particular protected characteristics, including disability and sex. In addition to its obligations under the EA, the University shall adopt policies, practices, and procedures that define expected standards of behaviour and specify any additional characteristics, beyond those required by law, to which protection is provided, for example, in relation to political belief, social background and refugee status.

*The University's policies, practices and procedures specifically extend to all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

5.2 Our [Equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#) sets out our approach, in the context of our institutional mission, values and objectives as set out in our Strategic Plan, our People Supporting Strategy, our Education and Research Strategies and equalities legislation.

6. Monitoring

6.1 Education Committee will receive an assurance report from Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate to assure itself that effective Peer Review of teaching is taking place and that the resources, including training, to support colleagues in delivering high quality teaching are appropriate to the needs identified.

Peer Review Workflow:

Department identify focus for Peer Review

Departmental education leadership roles agree focus for Peer Review with Faculty education leadership roles in advance of each academic year.

Informed by – Annual Review of Courses, Education Action Plan, National Survey results, in year feedback, Students' Union priority areas.

Department communicate Peer Review

Peer Review focus and frequency for the academic year communicated with academic staff engaged in teaching, taking a risk-based approach:

Higher Risk – New modules, modules taught with inexperienced educators, modules where areas have been highlighted in student feedback.

Will engage with Peer Review more than once every academic year and as agreed by the departmental education lead.

Lower Risk – experienced academic staff and established module delivered.

Will engage with Peer Review at least once every academic year.

Academic teaching staff engage with Peer Review

Pre-agreed departmental peer observation criteria used. Good practices and additional support needs are recorded.


Department collates and reviews Peer Review themes

Department education leadership roles collate and review themes. Additional support identified as a result of Peer Review.


Departmental themes shared across Faculty

Departmental Peer Review themes reported to Faculty Education Committee by Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate.


Faculty themes shared across the institution

Faculty Peer Review themes are reported to Education Committee by Faculty Deans Undergraduate and Postgraduate.

Document Control Panel

Title	Peer Review of Teaching Policy
Policy Classification	Policy
Security Classification	Open
Security Rationale	None
Policy Manager Role	Education Developer
Nominated Contact	Education Developer
Responsible UoE Section	People and Culture
Approval Body	Senate
Signed Off Date	November 2022
Publication Status	Open
Published Date	February 2023
Last Review Date	December 2023
Minimum Review Frequency	3-Yearly
Review Date	July 2025
UoE Identifier	

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