

**Title:**                   **From Peer Observation to Peer Learning – a case study**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

1. recognise how their own approach to peer observation (peer learning) can evolve through a process of reflection and evaluation;
2. develop, harness and share innovative practice/expertise in learning and teaching through a systematic approach to peer learning.

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are:

This case study describes the development of the peer observation scheme in the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science at University of Worcester. It was launched with one fundamental aim: to identify and share good practice in learning and teaching. From the outset the intention was to remove any misconceptions among the staff that the programme was a thinly veiled attempt to disguise it as a system of appraisal. As Gosling and O'Connor (2006) remind us, Academics are familiar with the concept of peer review in both research and quality assurance processes, where the role of the reviewer is essentially a judgemental one and where the power undoubtedly resides with the reviewer.

The challenge therefore was to devise a programme based on mutual trust with a clear focus on a developmental approach as opposed to one, which was designed to be judgemental (Hopkins, 1993, cited in Peel, 2005). Indeed Bell (2005, cited in Bell & Mladenovic 2007, p 736) defines peer observation of teaching as: "...collaborative, developmental activity in which professionals offer mutual support by observing each other teach; ...reflecting on understandings, feelings, actions and feedback and trying out new ideas."

While the term 'peer observation' has been transformed into 'peer learning', it is important to remember that observation is still a critical part of the process. However the development has essentially seen peer observation absorbed into a wider ranging scheme which seeks to take advantage of individual teaching expertise by systematically organizing a series of opportunities to learn from colleagues in a supportive and creative environment. Staff evaluation of this change in focus revealed strong support for the enhancement of the scheme.

## Session Activities and Approximate Timings

### **Introduction/background to Peer Observation in the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science (ISES) at the University of Worcester.**

- What are your positive and/or negative experiences of Peer Observation (delegates engage in a post it note exercise)?

(15mins)

### **Identifying the need for change in our practice.**

- Identify similarities and differences in terms of approaches to Peer Observation across institutions (discuss in small groups current practice and highlight benefits and areas for further development on flip chart paper – gallery ideas and give delegates time to share key points of discussions).

(15mins)

### **The next steps – where do we go from here?**

Identifying further developments for Peer Learning in the ISES. Delegates to identify their next steps in terms of Peer Observation/ Peer Learning and share ideas.

(10mins)

### **Plenary and the opportunity for any further questions that have not been covered during the discussions.**

(5mins)

## References

Bell, A. & Mladenovic R. (2008) Higher Education 55: 735-752 *The Benefits Of Peer Observation Of Teaching For Tutor Development*, Springer

Gosling, D. and O'Connor, K.M. (2006), 'From Peer Observation of Teaching to Review of Professional Practice (RPP): a model for Continuing Professional Development', *Educational Developments*, 7 (3), 1-6.

Hammersley-Fletcher, L. & Orsmond, P. (2004) *Evaluating our peers: is peer observation a meaningful process?* *Studies in Higher Education*, 29 (4) 489 – 503.