

**Title:**                   **Peer Observation of Learning and Teaching:  
understanding the experiences of new staff**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

- Reflect on the outcomes of LJMU's research particularly in the context of the professional standards agenda
- Evaluate the findings in terms of their applicability to participants' own institutions

#### **Session Outline**

Peer observation of teaching has long been considered a valuable part of professional development in HE. The practice has encouraged tutors to scrutinise and reflect upon their own practices, while learning from others. However, research indicates a mixed picture about the benefits of peer observation. There is evidence that it can generate new ideas, promote sharing and build confidence, (Brown and Jones, 1993: Fullerton, 1999: Gosling, 2000 and Gledhill, Smith and Cooke, 2002), but in some cases peer observation has been likened to "putting on a show" with no constructively critical dialogue (Crutchley, Nield and Jordan, 2005: Blackmore (2005).

Peer observation has been well established at Liverpool John Moores University for many years. An evaluation in 2005 indicated that motivation for engagement in the process had waned. This paper explores the impact, barriers and motivations for peer observation by focusing on the experience of new HE teachers. The research that informed this involved interviews with staff that had successfully completed an introductory module of LJMU's PG Cert LTHE programme. One assessment task for this module required course members to undertake and reflect upon a series of peer observations. Consequently, all participants in this research had considerable recent experience of peer observation. To encourage participants to speak freely about their experiences interviews were carried out by an experienced researcher who was not connected to the course team.

Preliminary findings suggest that novice HE staff find observation a useful tool in their professional development. However, some concerns have emerged over the difficulties associated with giving feedback to colleagues, particularly those with much more experience and status.

In the light of this evidence the authors conclude that peer observation has value in the professional development of new staff but that the process of observation needs careful consideration. The findings are also informing LJMU's response to the professional standards agenda where continuous development and refinement of teaching and learning throughout careers in HE are key components.

#### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

- Introduction – 5 minutes
- Overview of research findings – 20 minutes with opportunities for questions built in

- Group task – 15 minutes sharing of experiences of using peer observation of teaching with new teachers and how the LJMU research findings match that experience (see indicative discussion questions below)
- Conclusion and further opportunities for questions – 5 minutes

### **Indicative questions (comparisons with LJMU experience)**

- What arrangements are in place for observing new teachers?
- How do you prepare new teachers and observees for the process? What are the issues surrounding this?
- What plans do you have in place relating to peer observation (for new staff) in the light of the new professional standards?

### **References**

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