

**Title:**                   **When are we talking teams? Recognising and adding value to team-working practices in teaching and learning**

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### **Abstract:**

#### **Session Learning Outcomes**

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

- Reflect on their own experiences of team-working as a recognised form of peer enhancement
- Evaluate the research evidence on a range of peer enhancement activities for continuing professional development
- Consider what criteria might best support the evaluation of teaching in teams within their own setting

#### **Session Outline**

Key issues to be addressed are: recognition of team-working; peer enhancement of teaching, assessment and learning

Talking, team talking and reflective conversations feature frequently in the research literature on professional development in higher education as having significant positive impact on the student experience (Eraut, 2004, Smith & Crow, 2005, Haigh, 2005, Harwood & Clarke, 2006, Gibbs, 2010, Byrne, Brown & Challen, 2010). The potential of team talking is exemplified in the 2008 study by Havnes which identifies that high performing subject areas are characterised by 'healthy 'communities of practice' involving much discussion of how to solve teaching problems so as to make the entire programme work well for students' (Havnes, 2008 in Gibbs, 2010:48).

In many instances, discussions of teaching practice have been encouraged by institutional schemes of peer observation of teaching. Such schemes have been revived or remodelled and extended many times, but seem generally unable to meet ongoing professional development needs past initial teaching development. The academic development literature is replete with versions of peer observation schemes and their frequent revitalisation using various levers of institutional control to drive greater success (see Byrne, Brown and Challen, 2008 for a recent summary). At the same time, course and programme teams continue to investigate, develop and redesign their teaching on an ongoing basis, often involving other professionals and thereby enhancing their practices and improving their student outcomes. Too often this is not institutionally recognised as peer enhancement.

One possible way forward has been introduced at Oxford Brookes University in the form of a peer enhancement scheme for learning and teaching which is explicitly: team-based, embedded within working practices, requires high levels of student engagement and is integrated into the annual review cycle. The scheme takes naturally occurring teams as its basis, a move that challenges the divide between academic, administrative and learning support colleagues. A further challenge is that the scheme demands student engagement.

In this session, we therefore ask the question when and how might we give greater value and recognition to team-working practices in our institutional enhancement schemes? We also ask what the implications might be for evaluating teaching if we acknowledge the synergy of the team rather than keeping our attention on the individual teacher?

### Session Activities and Approximate Timings

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 15 mins | Introduction<br>Summary of benefits of peer enhancement schemes and recognition schemes in learning and ongoing teaching as basis for decisions made to introduce a team-based scheme for established members of university staff |
| 10 mins | Share experiences of delegates and their own institutional approaches to peer enhancement with particular reference to team-working   |
| 10 mins | Discussion activity on what works, under what circumstances and for whom – and what criteria are we adopting?   |
| 10 mins | Use handout to reflect on how you might use this information on professional and personal level (take-aways) and evaluation of the session through a short writing activity   |

### References

Eraut, M. (2004) Informal learning in the workplace, *Studies in Continuing Education*, Volume 26, Issue 2, July 2004: 247-273

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Haigh, N. (2005) 'Everyday conversation as a context for professional learning and development', *International Journal for Academic Development*, Volume 10, Issue 1 May 2005: 3–16

Harwood, T. & Clarke, J. (2006) Grounding continuous professional development (CPD) in teaching practice. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, Volume 43, Issue 1, February 2006: 29-39

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Byrne, J., Brown, H. & Challen, D. (2010) Peer development as an alternative to peer observation: a tool to enhance professional development, *International Journal for Academic Development*, Volume 15, Issue 3, 2010: 215-228