**Why Observe Teaching**

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| Three reasons are often given for observing teaching.  **1.  To assist colleagues to identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching**  Many college teachers are effectively left to conduct their teaching on their own. While we can and do reflect upon our teaching, we can easily miss points which would be evident to an outside observer, and the questionnaires filled in by our students are often too general and unreliable to be helpful. However, a colleague sitting in our classes can help us to identify our strengths and weaknesses in some detail and to build up a self-profile of our performance in this role, so that we can then make changes if necessary.  **2. To help colleagues prepare for external assessment of teaching quality**  The Education Funding Councils (WAG) are required to assess the quality of education provided in institutions funded by them. Part of the process of assessment includes the visits by subject assessors (ESTYN), who observe teaching and allocate grades. Colleagues can be helped to prepare for this by observing their teaching, which:   * accustoms them to the presence of an observer in the classroom, which can be an unnerving experience * enables them to improve their teaching prior to being internally or externally assessed * can help them to appreciate the criteria which are applied by external assessors in grading teaching   **3. To make formal judgements about teaching quality**  As noted above, the Funding Councils use Teaching Quality Assessment visits to assess the quality of teaching in college departments. An outside observer, who is a peer assessor from the same discipline in another FE institution, makes a formal visit to a teaching session and makes a judgement.  A number of institutions now require that staff should be observed, either as part of the probation process or as a means of gathering evidence when making a case for promotion. In addition, those institutions with accreditation for FE lecturing are likely to include direct observation as part of the assessment process.  Therefore teaching observation may be either developmental or judgmental, and this is a key distinction. Developmental observation is likely to be tentative in tone, part of a continuing process, formative, and confidential to those immediately involved. Much of its value will be in the exploratory discussion, between teacher and observer, resulting from it. Judgmental observation tends to be firmer, to be linked with decisions such as promotion make, is less likely to be part of a continuing process and is relatively public.  **Observation is likely to take place in one of the following situations:**   * as part of probationary appraisal. It is now a normal expectation that probationers will be observed teaching, and that this process will contribute to their probationary appraisal. (PMAR) * as part of departmentally-based peer observation. A number of departments have organised peer observation, where pairs of staff have observed each other, sometimes in advance of teaching quality assessment visits. * as part of the mandatory induction programme. New staff are asked to work in a pair and undertake peer observation during their first year of employment. * as part of the Teaching Certificate (PGCE). Participants are observed by a programme team lecturer. In addition they may undertake peer observation. * as an informal arrangement.   It is very important that all concerned should understand the nature of the activity, and that clear ground rules should be established at the outset. |  |