

# Encouraging Hourly Paid Lecturer engagement with scholarly activity and the HE community through peer review

## Introduction

These guidance notes are designed to be used in conjunction with the resource 'HE Peer Review resource' which can be found in the same download location as this document. This approach can be used to either replace an existing FE-based Observation of Teaching and Learning system or run alongside it; it has been successfully trialled and implemented at the College of North West London (now part of the Greenwich College Group), evidencing a high engagement with Hourly Paid Lecturers (HPLs)/casual bank staff and overwhelmingly positive feedback from those who took part. The following procedural stages are only a suggestion based on this successful model; the wording, structure and implementation can be adapted to the specific needs and existing frameworks of any FE college providing a higher education offer.

## What are the issues with HPLs in college HE?

HPLs are usually employed on zero hours contracts and, as such, are often resistant to engaging with duties they feel they are not being paid for. Ironically, many HPLs undertake teaching to support their own vocational practices, meaning they are a potentially rich source for the identification and inclusion of a wide range of creative, academic, technical and pedagogic skills within an existing or newly developed higher education department.

Furthermore, it is widely recognised that one of the biggest disadvantages of HPLs is a potential lack of continuity for learners. While they undeniably bring subject legitimacy and authenticity into the classroom, any approach that integrates them into the college community and values their scholarly achievements and activities can only be a positive thing. More importantly, their work, societal and cultural experience brings with it a wider context of learning for

learners, often relating it to local, regional and national employment needs – the ‘reality’ of working in the curriculum area.

## Is this approach only relevant to HPLs in college HE?

No. Some of the issues surrounding the positive engagement of college-based HPLs delivering higher education courses with their employers are identical to fractional and full-time contracted individuals. Many colleges use a ‘one size fits all’ approach in relation to the Observation of Teaching and Learning, with the categories for observation and assessment of preparation, teaching and learner engagement not always appropriate to higher education curricula, provision or delivery. Peer review schemes, when organised and employed carefully, can not only de-mystify the objectives of Observation of Teaching and Learning but make them more acceptable to all members of staff, bringing a legitimacy that can engender trust in the assessment process within higher education educators and provide very real benefits for all staff concerned. Furthermore, combining hourly paid and contracted individuals could have the additional benefit of creating a more integrated, scholarly community within HE staff.

## How does this approach promote scholarly activity for staff and students?

Ernest Boyer’s Model of Scholarship categorises scholarly activity into four areas: Discovery (‘traditional’ research), Integration (the use and contextualisation of research), Application and Engagement (student engagement and collaboration in their learning), and Teaching and Learning. This strategy mostly falls within the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, as it aims to directly observe teaching and its impact on learners. Peer Review is an excellent way to share good practice and to be exposed to different pedagogical techniques, allowing teachers to take ideas from others they feel might be effective in their own delivery and suggest ways of improvement to their colleagues. However, there is also a strong element of the Scholarship of Integration and Application and Engagement; peer review can accurately assess how well teaching materials are being employed in the classroom and contextualised for the learner. It can also evaluate how involved the learners are in their educational journey, from collaboration on curriculum design and structure to assessment (which may also include industry and employer links).

## Methodology

Peer review of teaching in higher education contexts involves a purposeful, collaborative process whereby one peer observes another's teaching and provides constructive feedback on its effectiveness in promoting student learning. Strong leadership that enables people to 'take on' the change, commitment and perseverance are required for success in embedding new practices, such as peer review of teaching, within existing cultures. There are many theoretical models involved with teaching and learning that support peer review as an 'agent of change'; many HE HPLs, particularly those new to college HE, often question the legitimacy of existing FE-based observation systems from a number of perspectives, furthering potential alienation of them from colleagues and the college itself.

Any Peer Review Scheme aims to enhance the student learning experience and enable HPLs (or others) to teach and facilitate learning more effectively. As such, it should be a supportive process that promotes a reflective conversation about teaching that can link to an individual's personal and professional development. Peer review aims to:

- give feedback that is challenging and supportive
- move beyond teaching style and delivery and focuses on students' learning
- provide more specific and meaningful evaluation, regardless of subject area
- offer greater challenge or provide new insights into curriculum design and delivery methods
- share best practice and distribute innovative, dynamic and effective approaches to teaching and curriculum design

## What peer review involves



### Stage 1 – Planning

A teacher identifies an area of teaching activity (such as Developmental Practice Sessions) that they wish to focus on and develop in some way as part of the peer review process. They work with colleagues to identify ways in which their practices can be enhanced, developments made or initiatives taken. Ideally, partners are paired based on subject knowledge/specialism, experience and teaching analysis from Developmental Practice Sessions. This aims to generate trust and legitimacy in the process from the outset, particularly when it comes to vocational subject areas which may include specific concepts, methodologies and contexts for the effective design and implementation of the curriculum (e.g. within STEM or arts-based subjects). Planning should, therefore, be undertaken with care although the effectiveness of pairing will depend on the availability of staff and scale of provision.

### Stage 2 – Observation

The HPL (or other) shares parts of their practice with their peer review partner.

This may be through:

- direct observation of activities
- provision of documentation
- student work and other evidence
- open discussion

## Stage 3 – Professional Discussion and Reflection

HPLs (or others) then take part in a reflective dialogue where the partner will seek to facilitate a productive conversation:

- exploring ways forward
- making action plans

Although focussed on the needs and interests of one partner, it is hoped that all participants in the process will find points of reflection, learning and benefit in these conversations.

## Peer Review scenarios

To give HPLs further insight into how peer review could develop their learning and teaching practice, a number of scenarios are suggested:

- e-tutoring
- lecturing
- marking work
- small group teaching
- student placement activities
- supervision of research students
- supporting a student with dyslexia
- visiting another institution
- writing exam questions

This list is not exhaustive and can be adapted to the structures and frameworks existing within a specific provider. The three stages are, similarly, only suggestions but they have been based on a model which has proved to be successful in its implementation; however, it could be adapted or streamlined accordingly.

## Peer Review – Action Plan/Timeline

The following table is an example an implementation schedule; all stages and dates are for indicative purposes only. This should be used in conjunction with the accompanying peer review documentation ('HE peer review resource') once it has been adapted to an individual college's structures and requirements.

Action	Who	When	Actioned
Teaching and Learning team discuss initial approach to Peer Review design and implementation then present to HE Management team	Head of Learning/ Improvement/Standards HE Management team	September/October	
Pairs differentiated and chosen to maximise personal growth and impact with regard to; subject knowledge/specialism, experience and teaching analysis from Developmental Practice Sessions	HE Management team	November	
Documentation for each of the three stages finalised/content of peer review training confirmed	Head of Learning/ Improvement/Standards HE Management team	December/January	
Training for HPLs* on the peer review process	Head of Learning/ Improvement/Standards HE Management team	February	
HPLs* undertake stages 1 & 2 of the peer review	Monitored by HE Management team	February/March	
HPL* meeting - feedback and review of stages 1 & 2	Head of Learning/ Improvement/Standards HE Management team	March	
HPLs* undertake stage 3	Monitored by HE Management team	March/April	
Evaluation of scholarly learning	All	April	
Impact and report	Head of Learning/ Improvement/Standards HE Management team	June	
Dissemination event	All	July	

Planning stage    Implementation stage    Evaluation, feedback and reporting stage

\* and/or full-time/fractional staff if appropriate