

Peer Review and feedback about Teaching and Supervision

Introduction

Peer review describes a wide range of evaluation and development practices that are undertaken with colleagues. It can offer new critical insights into our teaching or supervision that are complementary to those obtained through other sources, such as student questionnaires or self-reflection. Peer review should be combined with the insights from other sources of evaluation, and is not a substitute.

This resource outlines a five-stage process that is recommended for the peer review of teaching or supervision. It is not the only possible approach but it is very useful for improving and enhancing our practice. Peer review can also provide evidence of professional development that can be included in your Otago Teaching Profile where you document what you have learned from the review and any changes you have made as a result.

Principles of the Otago peer review process

Peer review involves collaborative partners working together voluntarily, to learn about and improve or enhance their teaching or supervision. There are three key principles in the Otago peer review process:

- It is voluntary;
- It is collaborative;
- It is done for the purposes of reflection, learning and development.

Stage 1. Choosing an appropriate peer

The first and perhaps most important decision you must make is the choice of your reviewer. You may need a peer from your own department if the reviewer requires specialist knowledge – for example if you are reviewing a course or aspects of supervision that involve a lot of technical knowledge. However, peer reviews often deal with more general areas of teaching or supervision, and then a peer from any discipline can be chosen. You should also choose a peer who you trust and respect, and who is prepared to be critical and challenging but simultaneously constructive and supportive – a ‘critical friend’.

Stage 2. The briefing session

Before carrying out the review, you and your reviewer should agree about the aims and focus of the review, how it will be conducted, what aspects of teaching or supervision will be reviewed, and the roles each partner will play.

As the person initiating the review process, you should outline a focus or aim for the review, based on what is important to your teaching or supervisory practice, or what you want to enhance. For example, the review might address improving student engagement, or stimulating interest in what you teach.

In the briefing also agree about how the review will be conducted, in particular, what will be reviewed and how it will be reviewed (see stage 3 below). Also discuss practical matters such as the time and place of the review. If the chosen process involves students (live or recorded observation

of your teaching), you should decide how you will inform them of the review. If your peer is to be present when you are teaching, then agree where the peer will be positioned in the teaching room, whether the peer will be introduced to students, and how they will take notes. In the briefing, it is also useful to decide when the debriefing session will take place (see stage 4 below).

Stage 3. The review

The review itself involves collecting data from one or more sources (see the lists below). In the briefing session, you should discuss and agree upon which sources of data will be gathered, and how they will be gathered. For example, a peer might observe your classroom teaching, and read your course material, and read student questionnaire results from past teaching. Alternatively, they might only read your assessment tasks, or discuss your course design with you without prior reading or observation.

Sources of data about teaching: Which aspects of teaching will be reviewed and how will they be reviewed?

- The peer observes live teaching (sometimes called peer observation)
- The peer watches a recording of your teaching
- The peer reads course materials, examination papers or other assessment tasks
- The peer reads the results of student evaluation questionnaires
- You discuss your experience of teaching with your peer, whether or not they have observed you teach
- You discuss the design of your course with your peer, whether or not they have read your curriculum documents
- You watch a recording of your teaching with your peer, and pause frequently to discuss
- Your peer asks individual students for feedback on your teaching. This can be via email or face-to-face, and might include past students
- Your peer organizes a group discussion (focus group) with your students to get feedback on your teaching
- Pre-review where the peer observes you teach a mock session *before* you teach to students. Then the peer feedback can help you improve and enhance the teaching for the students.
- Non-judgemental review where the peer explains what they learned about teaching from observing your teaching (See Teaching and Learning Circle or TLC for this model of review)

Sources of data about supervision: Which aspects of supervision will be reviewed and how will they be reviewed?

- The peer reads the feedback you have provided to your students
- The peer observes one or more supervisory meetings
- The peer watches a recording of one or more supervisory meetings
- You discuss your supervisory aims and practices with your peer
- Your peer asks individual students for feedback on your supervision. This can be via email or face-to-face, and might include past students
- Your peer organizes a group discussion (focus group) with your students to get feedback on your supervision.

If your peer directly contacts students for their feedback

You might ask your peer to directly contact students to ask for feedback via email, interview or group discussion. This can be particularly useful for peer review of supervision or where your teaching groups are very small or one-to-one (for instance clinical supervision). Peer review is a useful way to get student feedback in these contexts because it enables you to combine the feedback from multiple students, while providing anonymity. After interviewing students or getting their email responses, the peer reviewer would summarise the feedback from all the students and prepare a report for you, which is seen first by the students so they can be assured that their anonymity is preserved. The HEDC website has three templates for questionnaires for a peer review of teaching or supervision: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/evaluate/peer-review/index.html>

If you use this kind of peer review, you should advise your students that the reviewer will be contacting them and let them know that their participation is voluntary. Your reviewer should also advise the students of this and reassure the students that any data collected will be summarised into an anonymous report where responses are not linked to individuals. When you have completed the peer review, communicate with your students about the outcome of the review and thank them for taking part in the process.

Peer review where the peer uses an HEDC student questionnaire

If you ask your reviewer to use the University Evaluation service to conduct an online questionnaire to gather feedback from your students, then please follow the steps below to organise this.

Note: the results of questionnaires will go to your Head of Department, but if the peer reviewer uses one of their own templates, the results will only go to the reviewer.

- (i) Contact the University Evaluation services by email to advise that you are being reviewed and who by (reviewer name, department and contact email needed).
- (ii) Agree with your reviewer when the questionnaire should run (start date and duration). The standard is two weeks duration, but you may require a different time frame.
- (ii) Your reviewer should order the online evaluation through Otago inFORM and provide evaluation services with an email list of the students (with first name, surname and email address). Templates for a review of supervision are available within the custom group in Otago inFORM, or you can use a standard template for evaluating teaching. These can be adapted to suit.
- (iii) Once the survey has closed the results will be sent to your reviewer. Your reviewer should summarise the results and make them anonymous so that responses cannot be linked to individual students.
- (iv) Note: The results will also be sent to your HoD. Let students know that this will happen, and let your HoD know that the results should be made anonymous before they are sent to you.

Stage 4. The debriefing session

Debriefing is a dialogue about teaching. It may take place immediately following the review session, but it can happen at a later stage or take the form of an ongoing dialogue. It is usual to structure this session by focusing on what was agreed in the briefing session. Remember that the aim of the debrief is for you and the reviewer to inquire together about teaching, and the peer reviewer is not there to tell you how to teach, or how they teach.

Encouraging critical reflection

During the debriefing session, it is important for both peers to consider:

- What has been learned from the peer review?
- What is being done well? What can be improved or enhanced?
- What action will be taken as a result of peer review?

Stage 5: Including peer review in your Otago Teaching Profile

The person being reviewed and the reviewer can write a critical reflection about what was learned from the review to consolidate ideas and record what occurred. This reflection can be recorded on a *Peer Review of Teaching Form* or *Peer Review of Supervision Form*. These forms can be downloaded from the HEDC website: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/evaluate/peer-review/index.html>

Peer review forms can be included in your Otago Teaching Profile for promotion or confirmation purposes. In your self-evaluation of teaching statement in your Otago Teaching Profile you might say what you have learned from the review and what you have changed. Any reports or other notes that were produced as part of the peer review process are included in the on-call documents. <http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/evaluate/profile/index.html>

Reciprocal peer review, mentoring and partnerships

The peer review process might involve a peer doing a single review of your teaching or supervision. However, we recommend reciprocal peer reviews where you also review your reviewer. You can improve or enhance your teaching or supervision by observing and giving feedback as well as by being observed and receiving feedback.

You might also set up a long-term, ongoing mentoring relationship or partnership with a reviewer, which gives a powerful means of improving or enhancing your teaching or supervision. The aim is to create an ongoing dialogue or inquiry into teaching or supervision which involves regular peer reviews and regular discussions over a year or even several years. In a mentorship, one person will provide ongoing support and peer reviews to enable the other to improve and enhance their teaching or supervision. In a partnership, both work together so that both improve and enhance their teaching or supervision.

To make the most out of your own peer review, to set up a long-term mentoring relationship or partnership, or to foster a culture of peer review in your department, please contact HEDC for more guidance and support.

Some comments from teachers after peer review

“Peer review was good for our teaching because both me and my colleague trusted each other to keep it confidential. Whatever we said to each other would not be used against us, and so it was in this environment that we could really discuss what portion of our course was of particular concern to us. I suppose it was like doctor/patient confidentiality.”

“In our sessions for peer review we talked openly about what concerned us about our course. It was really good, ‘cause I could open up about how incompetent I felt in one aspect of the course, and after a few laughs she gave me options for what I could do. I implemented one of the options, and immediately I saw good results. It was the confidentiality aspects of peer review and the trust that I had in my colleague and vice versa that made this system work for us.”

Tony Harland (2012) *University Teaching: An Introductory Guide*, London, Routledge p.27