Guidelines for Conducting Peer Review of Teaching Practice

1. Background

1.1 As advised by the University, many departments have already set up their own systems of peer review of teaching, although there are marked variations in the purpose, process and vigour in the implementation across departments. Academic staff, in general, are not adversarial towards the developmental use of peer review feedback for the enhancement of teaching.

1.2 Recognizing its usefulness as a source of evidence in teaching evaluation, peer review of teaching practice is gradually being incorporated into the formal teaching evaluation framework. While the policy of mandating peer review may be implemented in stages, the need for clear guidelines on how it should be done when the circumstance arises is immediate. This paper aims to offer a set of guidelines for Departments’ reference when conducting peer review of teaching practice (hereafter referred to as “peer review”) pertaining to important personnel decisions.

2. Guidelines

Is peer review of teaching practice mandatory or voluntary?

2.1 Peer review of teaching practice is only mandatory under the specific circumstances as stipulated by the University’s human resources policies. Please refer to the relevant policy documents (e.g., “Appointment/Further Appointment of Teaching/Clinical Staff”) for details. Typically, judgmental peer review may be required in teaching evaluations pertaining to important personnel decisions such as promotion or further appointment. Staff members may request peer review to be conducted for them in connection with particular teaching evaluation exercises even when it is not required by policy; this will be subject to the approval of the department. On the other hand, peer review for developmental purposes is always encouraged and no approval is required.

When should it be conducted?

2.2 In cases when peer review is conducted in connection with promotion or contract renewal exercises, whether it is required by university policy, department’s decision, or initiated by the staff member under review, it is recommended that the peer review should be conducted at least one month before the relevant exercise in order to allow sufficient time to process the comments for the purpose of the promotion or contract renewal exercise.

Who will be the reviewers?

2.3 Departments should appoint a pool of academic peers who have sound pedagogical knowledge and are generally recognized as good teachers, or have expertise in a related discipline area, or both, as “expert reviewers” for conducting peer reviews of teaching. The list should be continually updated and made known to the staff.

2.4 It is advisable to have at least two reviewers involved in the review process. At least one reviewer should be appointed directly by the Department, while the staff member should be given the option to nominate additional reviewers to the panel. The staff member should be allowed to choose the “expert reviewers” from within the Department’s list or nominate their own “expert reviewers” from outside the list or the Department. Approval of these reviewers is subject to the endorsement of the Department/School or relevant committee.

2.5 All reviewers should receive training provided by the University to ensure a consistency of review standard before they are qualified as reviewers.

What will be reviewed?

2.6 Peer review of teaching at PolyU will be conducted in the form of a classroom observation. The
major focus will be on the classroom acumen of the staff member. The overall judgment, however, should be based on a holistic judgment of the classroom performance together with associated materials including teaching plans, teaching approaches and methods.

What happens before the class observation?
2.7 The staff member under review should select a session for the review, with a duration agreed upon by both parties (minimum duration should be one classroom hour). The type of session to be observed may include lectures, tutorials, seminars, clinical teaching sessions, laboratory, practical classes, etc. The teacher is advised to select a session that

- belongs to a subject that he/she has high engagement for (i.e. a subject that he is responsible for would be preferred to a subject that he/she may partially contribute to)
- allows him/her to demonstrate the essential teaching skills that are required by the position.

If possible, the two reviewers can review the same class to minimize time cost and to streamline the process. Separate class observations are possible at the discretion of the reviewee.

2.8 The reviewers and the staff member under review should meet before the session (pre-observation meeting) to achieve pre-arranged specified outcomes such as:

- setting the context and focus of the session to be reviewed;
- communicating the learning outcomes, approaches and strategies to be used and the rationale for teaching;
- reviewing the documents related to the session observed (lesson plans, session materials, course outlines, etc.);
- reviewee alerting reviewers of aspects for effective teaching that cannot be observed in the session but appear in other places of his/her teaching;
- agreeing on observer behaviour in class (participant or silent observer). If necessary, they should consider whether it is appropriate for the observer to be introduced and if so how this will be done.

What happens during the observation?
2.9 The reviewers sit in and observe the session on the agreed time and date. He/she should sit in an unobtrusive position but where there is a good view of the classroom at large. If agreed, the teacher should introduce the reviewer but avoid further comment which may alter the behaviour of the students.

What are the criteria and standards?
2.10 This exercise is not meant to compare the performance across teachers but is a standard-based evaluation aiming to review the teaching effectiveness of individual teachers against a set of criteria and standards.

2.11 When conducting the review, the reviewers should review the aspects of teaching stated on the attached “Observation Form for Mandatory Judgmental Peer Review of Teaching”.

What happens after the observation?
2.12 After the observation, the reviewers should each complete the Observation Form (refer to Appendix). In this process, the reviewers should not confer with each other.

2.13 After the form/report has been completed by the reviewers, it should then be viewed and signed by the staff member under review. He/she will have a chance to write a response on the form. When this is done, he/she will send the form to the respective HoD/ Director of the School/Departmental Staffing Committee or their delegate. This process should be completed

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1 For a common reference on teaching performance for staff members who are involved in teaching or evaluating teaching, please refer to the LTC paper “Criteria for Evaluating Teaching Performance: A Concise Reference”
within four weeks from the date of the observation.

**How will the results be used?**

2.14 The document should be submitted as part of the documentation requirement for promotion/contract renewal. It should also be kept by the department in the personal file of the staff member concerned.

**What should Departments do to coordinate and monitor the process?**

2.15 Each department should appoint a senior academic staff member to coordinate and monitor the peer review process. The Department should continually review the effectiveness of the process.

The process of judgmental peer review of teaching is illustrated in Figure 1.

*Figure 1: The Process of Judgmental Peer Review*

- **Before the observation**
  - Department identifies a pool of trained reviewers for the exercise
  - Reviewers and reviewee conduct a “pre-observation meeting”

- **The observation**
  - The reviewers sit in and observe the session on the agreed time and date
  - Reviewers use a standard form for the observation

- **After the observation**
  - Reviewers each complete the observation form
  - Reviewee views and signs the form, writes responses and sends the form to Department
  - Department submits the form as part of the documentation requirement for promotion/contract renewal. Department should also keep it in the personal file of the staff member concerned
## Appendix

### THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

**Observation Form for Peer Review of Teaching Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Staff under Review</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Rank of Appointment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Reviewer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of Pre-Observation Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Details of Session to be observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme and subject</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of teaching activity</td>
<td>Lecture / Tutorial / Others: (Please specify: _________________)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date, time and venue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class attendance on the date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Aspects of Teaching Reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of Teaching Reviewed</th>
<th>Ratings (Please ✓ as appropriate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Clear Expectations and Requirements Communicate to students the intended learning outcomes of the session; give clear instructions to students to encourage them to do pre-class preparation tasks</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preparation Have content logically organised; incorporate appropriate learning material and activities to facilitate learning</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Approaches and Methods
Use a learner-centred and active learning approach; adopt teaching methods appropriate for achieving the intended learning outcomes, such as Problem-based Learning, e-learning, blended learning, etc.

### Clarity of Presentation and Pace
Present material, explain concepts and information clearly; give clear instruction for activities; speak at an appropriate pace; check student understanding and adjust accordingly; manage class time well

### Use of Appropriate Learning Resources
Use material that is appropriate for the level of subject and related to local context; use handouts that help in highlighting the main points and develop students’ understanding of the topic

### Student Participation, Engagement and Impact on Learning
Provide opportunities for students to ask questions and make comments; make students think and learn actively; ask questions of individual students/class as whole; students show signs/evidence of learning

### Classroom Management and Rapport
Create a conducive classroom climate; maintain discipline; have a positive attitude towards students

### Intellectual Stimulation
Generate students’ interest in the topic; encourage students to think critically and creatively, use examples relevant to students’ experience and interest

### Ability to communicate effectively in the language of instruction specified for the subject

### Overall Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Very satisfactory</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Less than Satisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Approaches and Methods</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Clarity of Presentation and Pace</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use of Appropriate Learning Resources</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Student Participation, Engagement and Impact on Learning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Classroom Management and Rapport</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ability to communicate effectively in the language of instruction specified for the subject</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Comments**
(The following is a list of examples of areas for comment. Reviewers may also provide comments beyond these areas)
- Justification/ elaboration for areas rated as “Excellent” or “Less than Satisfactory” above
- Comments on appropriateness of associated materials
- Suggestions for further improvement
- Advice regarding professional development needs of the staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Reviewer: ___________________________</th>
<th>Signature: ___________________________</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date: ________________________________</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Response of Staff under Review**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Reviewee: ___________________________</th>
<th>Signature: ___________________________</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date: ________________________________</td>
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