

## **GBS Malta**

### **Observation of Teaching Policy and Procedure**

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#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Observation of teaching is widely practiced in higher education. It is seen as an activity important for enhancing the quality of teaching, resulting in greater student satisfaction with their learning experience, strengthening quality assurance processes and positive staff development for the teacher. However, it must be regarded as just one element for enhancing the student learning experience. Observation of teaching is unlikely to provide a full picture of the 'teacher' and areas such as curriculum design, assessments being fit for purpose, and student support are best evaluated and reviewed by other methods, for example student surveys. Nevertheless, observation of teaching has the potential get to the very heart of the student learning experience and it is generally regarded as valuable and informative to engage in the practice.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 GBS Malta is introducing an observation of teaching policy and system to further enhance teaching practices and identify staff development needs across GBS Malta. Observation of teaching also feeds into the staff appraisal process. In addition, a summary report of teaching observations is required for consideration by Academic Board and Executive Board.

#### **3. GBS Malta's Policy for Observation of Teaching**

3.1 It is GBS Malta's policy that observation of teaching is mandatory for all teaching staff (both full time and part time) and should take place on at least an annual basis. New teaching staff to GBS Malta should be observed within the first three months of starting teaching and then towards the end of the academic year.

3.2 The Associate Dean is responsible for making arrangements to for the observation of teaching of staff. It is important to ensure that different types of teaching (lectures, seminars, etc.), as appropriate, are observed for each member of teaching staff. In order to ensure consistency in approach, the Associate Dean or nominee will brief members of teaching staff on the process and the range of outcomes from the observation. The pro-forma to be used will also be explained.

3.3 The Associate Dean or nominee will prepare a short report once all teaching staff have been observed, which will be incorporated into the annual quality monitoring report. The summary report should identify areas of good practice, areas for enhancement and staff development needs. This

will help inform staff development needs across GBS Malta. The summary report on observation of teaching will be considered by Academic Board and by Executive Board.

3.4 The outcomes of observation of teaching and any associated action points will feed into the GBS Malta Staff Performance and Appraisal process. Observation of teaching should normally take place before the staff appraisal of the member of teaching staff. The completed observation of teaching form and the observation of teaching action plan resulting from the teaching observation should accompany the staff appraisal documentation for the appraisal session itself.

#### **4. The Process of Observation of Teaching**

4.1 Observation of teaching may take place in one of two ways: announced and agreed in advance or unannounced. The procedure detailed below is for teaching observation that is agreed in advance by the teacher and observer. If unannounced observations are undertaken the first, pre-observation phase is to be omitted. However, pre-arranged observation of teaching should be regarded as the norm.

4.2 The process of observation of teaching falls into three phases:

- 1) Pre-observation phase
- 2) Observation phase
- 3) Post-observation phase

##### **4.3 Pre-observation Phase**

Before any teaching observation takes place the observer must hold a pre-observation meeting. This is important for setting the scene for the observation, clarifying any issues before the actual observation and ensuring that a rapport exists between the observer and teacher. The observer and member of staff to be observed should confirm and agree the following:

- Where the observer should sit in the classroom
- whether or not the observer's presence should be explained to the students in the class
- the form to be used to record observations and the range of ratings available to the observer
- protocols regarding confidentiality and anonymity
- when the feedback meeting will be held
- what will happen to the teaching observation record made by the observer

The member of staff to be observed should:

- provide the observer with relevant information about the unit, the learning objectives of the teaching session to be observed and any supporting material (lesson plans, etc.)
- provide any relevant information about the student group attending the teaching session to be observed.

##### **4.4 Observation Phase**

In agreeing which teaching session to observe there may be an inclination for the teacher to suggest one that he or she is most comfortable and confident with. However, maximum benefit from observation is likely to be gained from selecting a session which may be new for the teacher, in need of change or where experience has shown that students have difficulty with concepts, calculations, etc. The observer should observe a significant part of the teaching session ensuring that either the start or end is observed. If an observer was present for the start of the teaching session it may be a good idea to observe the latter part of the session next semester. The observer should avoid talking to students at the end or during a break about the teaching session that under observation. Student feedback about teaching is obtained through module and course questionnaires that students are asked to complete each semester.

The observer should ensure the following for any observation of teaching:

- sit in the location agreed at the pre-observation meeting
- be as discrete and unobtrusive as possible and not make any comments during the teaching session itself. The observer should refrain from joining in any discussion even if directly invited to do so by students
- record details of the observation on the pro-forma provided
- ensure that all parts of the teaching observation pro-forma are completed.

The member of staff being observed should ensure that:

- the observer has been introduced to students in the class, their role explained and students asked not to talk to the observer or try to draw him or her into any class discussion that may take place.
- undertake teaching as usual without further reference to the observer
- no attempt is made to draw the observer into any class discussion or any other activity with students in the classroom.

#### 4.5 Post-observation Phase

It is good practice to ensure that the post-observation debriefing between the observer and the member of teaching staff takes place as soon as possible after the observed teaching session. Ideally, this should take place on the same day. It is normally best to let the observed member of teaching staff go first and comment on how they felt the session went, their own views on what went well and what could have gone better, and identification on what they were satisfied with and seen as good practice. This can then be followed up with feedback from the observer. This may be best achieved by going through the various sections on the pro-forma. The evaluation for the session should be provided and reasons given for the evaluations made.

**The observer should clearly identify both good practice and areas for enhancement. The member of teaching staff observed should be informed that the teaching observation report will feed into their staff appraisal.**

The observer should:

- invite the member of staff observed to provide a reflective evaluation of the teaching session
- focus on the observed behaviour
- provide feedback that is specific, constructive and supported by evidence from the observation
- identify areas for enhancement
- indicate the evaluations that are likely to be made
- confirm with the member of staff the next stages in the process
- complete all aspects of the written teaching evaluation pro-forma and send a copy to the member of staff observed
- Send a copy of the report to the Human Resources Manager

The member of staff observed should:

- Provide an oral, reflective evaluation of the session
- be open and avoid being defensive
- recognise that the observation of teaching process is intended to be supportive and developmental, and intended to enhance the student learning experience
- make an informal record of any actions that need to be followed up
- when sent the report, to read and sign the teaching evaluation made on the pro-forma

## 5. The Observation of Teaching Report Form

5.1 Observers of teaching must complete each section of the pro-forma as fully as possible. It is important to provide a good summary evaluation of the teaching session observed together with both **examples of good practice and areas for enhancement**. The value of observation of teaching can only be realised if we are able to share good practice amongst all our teaching staff and that teaching staff are supported to enhance their teaching. Achieving an excellent satisfaction rating from students and striving continually to enhance their opportunities to learn is at the heart of what we want to achieve here.

5.2 Below is given some guidance on the questions that you may want to consider for each section of the report pro-forma:

### Introduction

- were the learning outcomes for the session clearly identified and communicated to students well?
- did the class begin on time and were students punctual for the start of the session. If students arrived late how did the teacher handle this?

### Planning and organisation

- did the tutor relate to forthcoming session to previous sessions and set it in the overall context of the module?
- was the overall purpose of the session made clear to students?
- do the learning objectives support the module learning outcomes and the overall programme objectives?
- has due consideration been given to the teaching space and the appropriateness of the classroom for the teaching activities?
- was the session well-structured with an identifiable introduction, development and conclusion?
- was the session well-planned in terms of time management?

### Learning and teaching methods

- were the learning and teaching methods used appropriate to the learning objectives of the session?
- were the methods well suited to the students' level and learning needs?
- Did the methods used stimulate student interest and result in evidence of good student engagement with the content?
- was there sufficient variability of teaching methods to maintain student interest and motivation for the whole of the teaching session?

### Delivery and pace

- did the pace and delivery seem appropriate for the students?
- Could all students hear the teacher clearly
- did the session cover material at an appropriate pace?
- Were there aspects that seemed too rushed or drawn out?

### Content

- Did the content, as far as you could tell, support the learning objectives for the session?
- Did the content seem accurate and up-to-date?
- was the session pitched at the appropriate level for the students and for the level of the programme?
- was the material clearly structured and easy for students to understand

## Student engagement and participation

- did students engage well with the material and were they offered opportunities to ask questions, seek clarification, etc.?
- were students kept engaged with the content throughout the session?
- was student participation well- managed and students encouraged to express their views at appropriate points in the session?
- What strategies were used to gain attention, to refocus at intervals, and to ensure that attention span was maintained throughout the session?
- was there good eye-contact with students, and was body posture, facial expression, etc. used appropriately?

## Use of learning resources

- where used, was powerpoint and other visual presentations of material used appropriately and presented in a clear, understandable manner to students?
- where used, were handouts and any other hard copy material appropriate to the learning outcomes and well-received by students?
- was reference made to e-learning materials available on the student portal or elsewhere, for example, the internet?
- was the classroom and layout of the classroom appropriate to support the learning objectives of the session?

## Summary, good practice and areas for improvement

5.3 Each of these sections of the report must be completed. What is written in these sections should be evidenced based and clearly relate back to comments made in one or more of the previous sections. Areas for enhancement will be monitored generally to determine whether there are staff development needs more widely. This will inform staff development sessions for teaching that may be offered.

## 6. Summary reports on teaching observations

6.1 A summary report on the observations should be produced on at least an annual basis and include in the annual quality monitoring report. These should be written according to guidelines provided. Ideally, the report should be written as soon as practically possible following completion of all teaching observations. The report should be considered at the next appropriate meeting of the Executive Board and Academic Board.

## 7. Briefing sessions for teaching staff

7.1 All members of teaching staff at GBS Malta will be briefed on the observation policy and process operating at GBS Malta. This will fall into three areas:

- i) Briefing about the process and an opportunity to clarify any issues that teaching staff may have
- ii) Follow up briefing about general findings from teaching observations
- iii) Informing the teacher that the observation report will feed into the staff appraisal process.

## 8. Concluding comments

8.1 It is intended that this updated approach to observation of teaching both builds upon previous experience at GBS Malta and represents good practice in the higher education sector as a whole. The policy and pro-forma will be reviewed and updated on annual basis by the Director of Quality. Where significant changes are made the revised policy should be approved at Academic Board.

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