

Observation of Teaching: A student guide, by students

What is Observation of Teaching?

Observation of Teaching (OoT) is one of the ways that lecturers can explore their teaching methods in order to develop the learning process for you. Observation of teaching can take many forms, but the main feature of it is collaboration with other lecturers to share practice and evaluate one another's teaching strategies. This collaborative process allows educators, and in some cases students, to share experiences with a view to enhancing practice so that staff can better cater to your needs as a student. So don't worry; nobody is coming in to watch you, so act naturally if you are in the room when an observation is taking place. And if something isn't working, speak up if you are asked.

What's in it for YOU?

This whole process is strongly motivated by a desire to help you, the student. The educators that participate in this process are determined to make the learning process better for you. They are collaborating in order to create more effective learning experiences for you. In some cases, students can contribute and collaborate with educators on this process. If this is the case, be authentic with the opinions that you share. If staff do not know what you need, then it is harder for them to help you.

Benefits

There are a range of benefits associated with observation of teaching:

- Personal and professional development for educators.
- Improved teaching methods to better support student learning.
- A shift from educator-focused to student-focused teaching.
- Improved quality of the students' learning experiences.
- Opportunities for professional dialogue, mostly in the case of the educator but in some cases, students can also be involved.
- Optimisation of problem solving and decision making.
- Enhanced practice to contribute to greater student success.

Possible approaches to Observation of Teaching

The typical method of observation involves a colleague entering a classroom setting and evaluating the teaching methods of the educator. This process can involve variety in terms of the approaches.

Institutional disciplinary peer observation of teaching: an educator from the same discipline observes the teaching of a colleague, from the same discipline, in the same institution.



Cross-Institutional peer observation: educators across different institutions observe teaching practices of colleagues in other institutions (Walker and Forbes, 2018; O'Keefe et al., 2021).



Institutional inter-disciplinary peer observation: educators across different departments in the same institution observe the teaching methods of an educator that is not in their own department (Miranda et al., 2021).



Cycle of Peer Observation (CoPO): a series of steps that include pre-talk, the observation and a post-talk in a continuous cycle for educators to be able to develop teaching methods with the aid of colleagues in a feedforward approach (O'Leary and Cui, 2023, pp.100-157).



Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO): similar to CoPO but with the inclusion of discussion and dialogue with students on the teaching methods (O'Leary and Cui, 2023, pp. 158-197).



Silent/Unseen Observation: an educator reflects on their own teaching methods, with student feedback in some cases, and meets with colleagues for professional dialogue as part of a feedforward approach (O'Leary and Cue, 2023, pp.198-216).



In MU, OoT happens between staff who teach within and across departments, by staff from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and by colleagues from outside of the University. In turn, staff may adopt alternative approaches, for instance, including students in OoT or working within a small group of colleagues.

How to cite this guide: Ritina, K and Centre for Teaching and Learning (2023). *Observation of Teaching: A student guide, by students*, Maynooth: Maynooth University Centre for Teaching and Learning.

References and Further Reading

- O'Keefe, M. et al. (2021) 'Exploring the role of peer observation of teaching in facilitating cross-institutional professional conversations about teaching and learning', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 26(3), pp. 266-278. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2021.1954524>.
- O'Leary M. and Cui V., (2023) *Developing Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Through Observation*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Miranda, J.P. et al. (2021) 'Interdisciplinary Class Observation in Higher Education: Lessons Learned from the Professional Development Experience of Four Teachers', *Education Sciences*, 11. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1321225>.
- Walker, R. and Forbes, D. (2018) 'Cross-institutional peer observation by online tutors: Sharing practice "outside the family"', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(3), pp. 285-293. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1281751>.

