Peer Support for Teaching: Appendices to Policy (2015)

Appendix I:
Frequently Asked Questions on Peer Support for Teaching (PST)

Why did the policy replace Peer Observation of Teaching (PoT) with Peer Support for Teaching?

a) PST can include PoT as one of many learning and teaching activities that staff might consider engaging with (See Appendix II).
b) PST encourages wider dialogue and collegiality in departments on learning and teaching practice.
c) PST can operate flexibly at the level of departmental strategy, across teaching teams working on programme and module development and delivery, or continue to serve as a framework for individuals to reflect on and improve their teaching practice.
d) PST can be embedded more solidly into departments’ day-to-day work of delivering and supporting teaching.
e) Guidelines for PST have been left as loose as possible to ensure teaching staff and departments can identify areas of activity and approaches that are likely to be of greatest benefit to them in the near future.

How does it differ from learning and teaching support activities we already, routinely do?

a) PST encourages departments to identify and focus on specific learning and teaching issues and/or themes that are relevant to their programmes, disciplines and/or teaching practice.
b) It is expected that PST will be prompted by individual and group reflection on what the department does well that should be sustained, what areas it could improve, and whether there is potential for fruitful innovation, or for wider dissemination of good practice.
c) The choice of themes and issues for PST activities should therefore be driven by a progressive vision of learning and teaching enhancement within the department.
d) Ideally, PST should be driven by a proactive and aspirational consideration of the questions:
   - “What could I/we do to improve our teaching next year?”
   - “How can I/we help colleagues improve their teaching?”

   However, the policy recognises that individuals and departments may need to engage with the process reactively in response to pressing issues.
e) There is an expectation that PST will involve engaging in critical reflection and appropriate scholarship to support the teaching activity under review.

How should we document the process?
Other than an optional PST Prompt Sheet (Appendix IV), pro-formae for reporting PST activities have not been designed, as it was felt they would be too restrictive and burdensome for departments.

For an example of a flexible reporting and documentation process, see Appendix III.
Appendix II: Suggested Guidelines for PST Approaches and Activities

1. Identifying Areas of PST Activity

Peer Support for Teaching can engage with:

a) Agendas and issues identified externally to the department.
   - National agendas and issues in Higher Education learning and teaching.
   - Agendas and issues identified as priorities within the University Learning and Teaching Strategy.

b) Agendas and issues identified internally to the department.
   - Identified by the department’s Board of Studies, Teaching Committee, Staff-Student Liaison Committee, or through Annual or Periodic Review.
   - Identified by teaching teams at module or programme level on the basis either of a desire to enhance their learning and teaching, or in response to student evaluations.
   - Identified by individual members of staff reflecting on their own teaching practice.

2. Approaches to PST

- **Group Project:** An approach best suited to addressing issues on large modules or at programme level. Project teams can be self-selecting or nominated depending on how the area of activity has been identified.

- **Paired support:** Two staff members are paired up to discuss each other’s teaching, as conventionally used in classroom Peer Observation.

- **Nominated supporter:** A single staff member is responsible for supporting a group of junior colleagues using a range of PST activities. This approach is commonly used to support PGWTs and other inexperienced staff. There should be a formal recognition in large departments of the extra workload burden on the nominated supporter for undertaking this approach.

- **Individual reviewed by Group:** An approach best suited to reviewing examples of exceptionally good practice for wider dissemination.

- **Twinning Departments:** Can be an effective approach to investigate interdisciplinary teaching, to share learning and teaching practices common to one discipline but not to the other, or to engage staff on PST activities identified by interdisciplinary centres that draw on teaching staff from different departments. Care should be taken to ensure staff are not required to undertake PST activities for more than one department or centre in any given year.

**Note:** PST can allow for more than one of these approaches to be used during any given period.
How It Works: Group Projects

- Over the autumn and spring terms, the HoD (or proxy) consults with BoS, SSLC, and the APR to identify thematic clusters appropriate to PST for the department for the coming year.
- Staff, either as individuals or teaching teams, are also encouraged to submit proposals for PST projects and activities.
- These areas of activity are then discussed at a Teaching Awayday, where staff volunteer to participate in a group.
- The groups are formally timetabled to meet once a term, in line with the PST Cycle outlined in the Peer Support for Teaching Policy (2011), although they can arrange further ad hoc meetings if necessary.
- After the last meeting of the year, the group submit a brief report of their activities to the HoD.
- The nature of PST projects can mean that activities might extend, evolve, or develop over more than one year.

How it Works: Paired Support Group

- Staff who do not volunteer for a PST Project are assigned to the Paired Support Group by default.
- Paired supporters are encouraged to observe each other on a range of teaching activities, which can still include observations of a teaching session, and which can also cover other areas of activity (outlined below).
- All paired supporters meet once a year as a group, once all observations are completed, to summarise their activities and submit their report to the department, including any suggestion for wider action or review.

How it Works: Nominated Supporters

- A staff member supports a group of less experienced staff through regular meetings.
- Support encompasses discussions on student feedback, individual classroom observation and advice on performance, ad hoc training, and maintaining a Guidance document on Best Practice for staff at their level.
- The Nominated Supporter is mentored by a senior colleague.
- The higher workload burden of this role is recognised in the departmental model.
### 3. Areas of PST Activity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Activity</th>
<th>Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Design or review of programmes or modules</td>
<td>Group Project (although some activities might be adapted for other approaches, including Paired Support)</td>
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<td>• Designing Summative Assessment</td>
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<td>• Using Formative Assessment</td>
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<td>• Effective Feedback</td>
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<td>• Monitoring and Evaluation (including NSS)</td>
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<td>• Design or review of on-line teaching delivery</td>
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<td>• Managing student discussion forums and/or personal emails</td>
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<td>• Academic/Transferable skills (including employability)</td>
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<td>• Teaching difficult concepts</td>
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<td>• Enhancing student engagement</td>
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<td>• Supporting transitions (first year, “second-year slump,” capstone projects)</td>
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<td>• Inclusivity (widening participation, disability support, internationalisation)</td>
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<td>• Funding application for teaching and learning</td>
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<td>• Planning for Continued Professional Development (CPD), Higher Education Academy accreditation/engaging with UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)</td>
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<td>• Trialling teaching methodologies unfamiliar to disciplinary teaching traditions (e.g. Problem based learning, tutorials, etc.)</td>
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<td>• Integrating new/junior staff into the department</td>
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<td>• The PhD Experience</td>
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<td>• Distance Learning</td>
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<td>• Subject specific activities identified by departments, including interdisciplinary work across departments</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Observation of a lecture, seminar, laboratory or practical class</td>
<td>Paired/Nominated Supporter/Individual by Group</td>
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<td>• Observation of an undergraduate, postgraduate, or academic support supervision (with the student’s consent)</td>
<td>Paired/Nominated Supporter</td>
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Appendix III: Implementing PST: An Example

Annual Cycle

The annual PST cycle revolves around a departmental Teaching Awayday, held towards the end of the academic year. At the Awayday, the department:

- Evaluates the outcomes of completed projects.
- Evaluates the stage boundary of, and future plans for, ongoing projects.
- Outlines new project proposals, and arranges staff into project groups on a voluntary basis.
- Receives summary reports and recommended further actions on all PST activities for the previous year.
- Reflects on wider implications of PST activities for the department.

Administrative Process

- The department organises its PST activities around four approaches, although not all four approaches need to run in any given year:
  1. Group Project activities focusing on strategic themes, reviewed annually.
  2. Group Project activities that arise organically from teaching or programme teams.
  3. A standing group, led by a Nominated Supporter, for PGWTs and other staff new to teaching.
  4. A standing Paired Support Group is also in place for any staff who are not engaging with the Group Projects, or who feel that Peer Observation of Teaching would be more useful to them.
- The Head of Department has nominated a proxy PST Officer to coordinate activities.
- Project Groups are officially timetabled to meet once a term.
- At their first meeting, groups define the project more clearly, devise a project plan, and determine how they will assess whether the project is successful. This first meeting is also where they identify whether they need any further support or expertise to implement the plan.
- The Paired Support Group meets once towards the end of the academic year, after all observations have been completed.
- All Groups report on their activity to the PST Officer after their end of year meeting.

Reporting and Documentation: Departmental and University level

- The department requires groups to report activity on a PST Report spreadsheet held on the department’s shared drive towards the end of the year, and prior to the Awayday.
- The spreadsheet asks groups to confirm:
  - The names of participants
  - The title of the project/type of paired activity
  - Whether the project is closed or ongoing.
  - Any recommendations and/or further actions.
  - Whether anyone wishes to disseminate a more substantial report on their PST activity to the department.
- The PST Officer collates a summary report to distribute to the Head of Department, Board of Studies, and Teaching Committee.
• The report is also circulated to staff prior to the Awayday, with any actions for the following year identified.
• The PST Office also reviews suggestions for more substantial reports to share, and makes a judgement – in consultation with colleagues - on whether they would be useful for wider discussion at the departmental Awayday.
• The summary report also forms the basis for the department’s APR statement on PST activities.

Reporting and Documentation for PST Project groups/ Paired Support

• The department does not require staff to use any PST pro formae. However, some groups find the optional PST Prompt Sheet useful for planning activity (Appendix IV).
• The PoT form used previously by the department has also been adapted to reflect the wider type of activity that Paired Supporters might review, and is also available for optional use.
Peer Support for Teaching (this prompt sheet is intended as an aid to PST groups and may be adapted as appropriate; it is not intended as a reporting form to Heads of Department)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PST Participant(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>What area of practice do we want to improve / work on and why?</td>
<td>What do we hope the improvements / benefits will be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are we going to do to achieve these improvements / benefits?</td>
<td>How will we know whether we have been successful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What support / expertise do we need, if any?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comment on Impact / Success</td>
<td>Additional Comments / Observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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