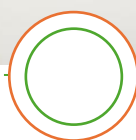**QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project 2023-24**

Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through Collaborative Observation

Final Report

January 2025

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About this report

This report is the final project report for the QAA, its members and the wider academic community who are interested in student and staff collaboration in quality enhancement. The Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through Collaborative Observation project was funded by the QAA's 2023-2024 Collaborative Enhancement Fund. For more information about the QAA's Collaborative Enhancement Fund and funded projects, visit: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/membership/collaborative-enhancement-projects.

Executive summary

Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in higher education (HE) is a policy priority for all HE providers in the UK. Yet current HE policies and institutional practices continue to rely on managerialist approaches that decontextualise learning and teaching as socially situated practices. As a result, too much emphasis is placed on measuring outcome-focused data such as module evaluations, student completion and attainment, with too little emphasis on investigating the processes and experiences of those involved. This has led to the creation of a vicious policy-practice circle with institutions continuing to concentrate their efforts on doing more of the same (i.e. measuring learning and teaching) without actually making a tangible impact on moving knowledge, understanding and practice forward in the field of quality enhancement. The inspiration for this project came from a frustration and dissatisfaction with these engrained policies and practices in HE and a desire to want to think and do things differently.

Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through Collaborative Observation (ELTQCO) puts the two most significant players involved in learning and teaching (i.e. students and academic staff) at the centre of the process through an authentic model of collaboration and dialogue that provides situated opportunities for them to work together to understand and improve their learning-teaching experiences. For both the students and staff who participated in the project, pedagogical relationship building was identified as the key to creating the conditions for learning and teaching enhancement to be effective and sustainable for both parties. This relationship building underpinned the collective sharing and discussion of meaningful learning and teaching experiences among the participants. Our innovative Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) provided the participants with a structured framework for fostering meaningful pedagogical relationships. It is a genuinely collaborative model that provides institutions with an authentic approach to addressing the burning question of how students and staff can work better together to understand and enhance the learning-teaching experience for both parties.

Our project findings reinforce the belief that students and academic staff learn about teaching and learning by interacting with their peers and with each other, by sharing their insights and experiences in collaborative, cooperative forums. It therefore makes sense that any attempt to enhance understanding of and improve these practices is best served by allowing its key participants to be part of a collective community in which they are encouraged to engage in reflexive dialogue and collective sense making. The case studies included in this report reveal that creating the conditions in which students and staff have the opportunity to examine their understanding and experiences of teaching and learning and open them up to dialogic exchange is fundamental to developing greater awareness of the strengths and areas for development in their practices. Participation in CoCO helped to create these shared spaces in which teaching staff were able to come together with their peers, and equally with their students, to engage in reflexive pedagogical dialogue on their classroom teaching and learning, with the ultimate aim of improving the learning experiences for all.

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Introduction

Project overview

Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through Collaborative Observation (ELTQCO) was an 18-month project, funded by the QAA's collaborative enhancement project scheme from January 2023 to July 2024. It included a collaborative partnership between three universities - Birmingham City University (BCU), Loughborough University (LU) and the University of Wolverhampton (UoW) - with each university focusing on priority areas for improvement identified in each of the respective institutions.

Building on a previous HEFCE-funded project which developed a cycle of collaborative observation (CoCO) (e.g. Cui et al 2020), ELTQCO used the CoCO model as a conceptual and operational tool to engage participants in collaborative discussion and reflection on the quality of learning and teaching through a range of discipline-specific case studies. The three participating universities focused on specific themes relevant to their local contexts (e.g. student engagement at BCU; student inclusivity and belonging at UoW; and dialogical assessment and feedback practices at LU).

ELTQCO was underpinned by the premise that improving the student learning experience starts by improving the teacher learning experience. Shaped and informed by innovative observation research and practice (e.g. O'Leary 2020), the project team implemented and evaluated two cycles of this innovative approach to observation (see **Figure 1** below), involving groups of students and teaching staff from varied disciplines, co-observing and co-reflecting on the quality of their learning and teaching experiences and perceptions.
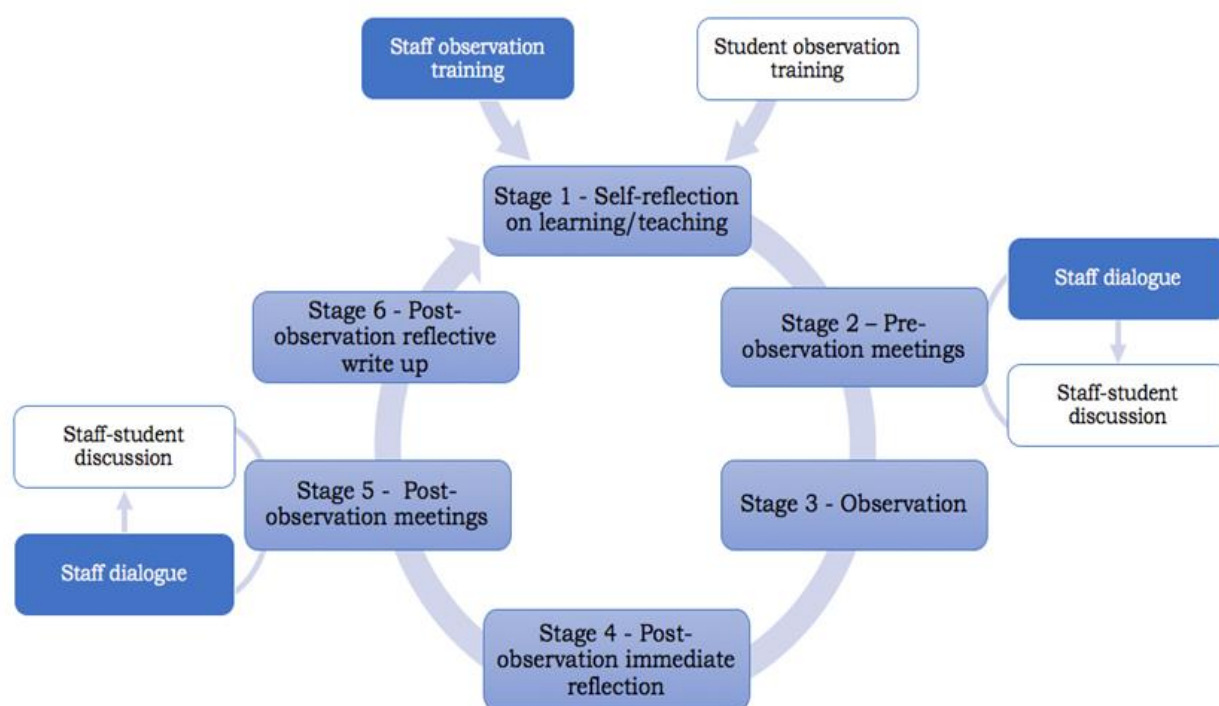

Figure 1 – Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO)

Project team

The project team comprised five academics from three universities in England (BCU, LU and UoW). All members of the project team have extensive experience of conducting research into a range of aspects of learning and teaching in higher education.

Birmingham City University

Professor Matt O'Leary is Professor of Education at Birmingham City University. He is one of the world's leading experts on classroom observation. He is internationally renowned for his extensive body of work on the use of classroom/lesson observation in understanding and improving teaching and learning across colleges, schools and universities. He was the project lead for the QAA collaborative enhancement project *Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through Collaborative Observation* (ELTQCO).

Dr Vanessa Cui is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Birmingham City University Centre for the Study of Practices and Culture in Education (CSPACE). Her work with Professor Matt O'Leary on the use of observation in higher education has led to the creation and development the Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) which underpins this project. She led on the evaluation of the project.

Loughborough University

Dr Victoria Wright works at Loughborough University as an Academic Projects and Development Adviser within Organisational Development. Her work includes managing the central observation scheme and observer training, teaching and mentoring on the PG Certificate Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, mentoring and reviewing for Advance HE Fellowships, teaching across a range of staff development workshops including workshops for Doctoral Researchers and Supervisors.

University of Wolverhampton

Professor Jenni Jones is Professor of Coaching and Mentoring at the University of Wolverhampton Business School. She teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students, leads L&T initiatives in her faculty, including the Observation of Teaching Scheme, and publishes in the areas of learning, teaching, leadership, diversity, coaching and mentoring. She is a PFHEA and a National Teaching Fellow.

Julie Hughes is an Associate Professor in Learning and Teaching Enhancement at the University of Wolverhampton. She works on cross-institutional projects to support student transition into and through the university including the Academic Coach scheme and inclusion and belonging projects. She is a National Teaching Fellow.

Delivery of project

The project has been extremely successful in producing a range of high-quality outputs, many of which are open educational resources that are free to access via the **project webpage**. In summary, the project has achieved the following outcomes in each of the participating universities:

- developed a reconceptualised approach to the use of observation as a tool to enhance the quality of teaching and learning

- implemented two cycles of collaborative observation with students and staff across three universities and evaluated its impact at the course/module level

- provided students and staff with conceptual and practical tools to promote authentic collaboration and inquiry into the quality of their learning and teaching

- produced a practical step-by-step guide and accompanying resources for institutions to use to support the training, preparation and implementation of CoCO as a quality enhancement tool for students and staff

- produced a series of blog posts by the project team and project participants capturing their experiences and perspectives on student-staff collaborative partnerships through CoCO

- produced a podcast in which members of the project team and project participants discuss the opportunities that CoCO offers for enhancing student learning experiences

- created a series of digital video case studies providing insights into the learning and teaching experiences and practices of students and staff

- increased student engagement in shaping their learning experiences by empowering them to become directly involved in informing and improving the quality of learning and teaching on their course/module

- delivered an end of project launch webinar at a QAA event 'Implementing and Evaluating a Cycle of Collaborative Observation to Improve Learning and Teaching Quality'

Project methodology

The objectives of the ELTQCO project were:

• To increase student engagement in shaping their learning experiences by empowering them to become directly involved in informing and improving the quality of learning and teaching on their course/module

• To implement 2 cycles of collaborative observation (CoCO) with students and staff across three universities and to evaluate its impact at course/module level

• To provide students and staff with conceptual, practical tools to promote authentic collaboration and inquiry into the quality of their learning and teaching

• To work collaboratively with staff and students at three universities to share a reconceptualised approach to the use of observation as a tool for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, with a view to sharing the findings/recommendations across these institutions and the QAA membership

Participants

The project participants comprised academic teaching staff and students across a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses across the three universities. All participants were volunteers.

During the recruitment stage of the project, all participants (both staff and students) were briefed on the aims, focus, anticipated outcomes and potential benefits of the project. They were fully informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their participation at any point during the project. They were also fully informed that they had the choice to remain anonymous throughout the duration of the project or to have their identities disclosed should they wish to do so. None of the participants chose to remain anonymous.

Inviting students and staff to reflect on and openly discuss the student learning experience is part of ongoing work for many universities. While there might be occasions when this may be considered a challenging issue, it is one that was dealt with transparently during the project. The project team was mindful of addressing any sensitivities at all stages and ensured that any information disseminated as part of the project did not compromise any member of staff or student. We also acknowledged that there was the possibility that some students might be entering a space of vulnerability by openly discussing their perceptions of their learning experiences with the academic staff teaching them, particularly if their perceptions include critique of the taught session. However, several steps were taken to minimise the likelihood of such vulnerability.

Firstly, in the introductory project briefing and as part of the participant training sessions, it was emphasised from the outset that the role of both student and staff participants was not to make evaluative judgements about staff performance during the observed sessions. Instead, the conversations, observations and reflections focused on making sense of the connections and intersections between learning and teaching on their programmes, with students' learning being the central priority and point of reference for both parties.

Secondly, there was a specific part of the project training that focused on the use of non-judgemental statements and questions in conversations for developmental learning (see below for more detail). Participant observers were instructed to compile a descriptive log/field notes of what they observed, along with associated questions and/or reflective comments to discuss during the professional dialogue stage rather than make evaluative judgements.

Thirdly, the project team established from the start of the project that trust between the participants was vital. Thus, throughout the project, the project team acted as a mediator at the beginning to facilitate dialogue and allow the participants to have time and space to develop trust. The observation training had a primary focus on providing constructive, non-judgemental feedback and feed forward for participants across each case study.

The Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) underpinning the project methodology comprised of six stages: pre-observation reflection, pre-observation discussion between students and staff, observation, post-observation reflection, post-observation discussion between participants, and a reflective write up. Throughout this process, there were several opportunities for the participants to feedback to the project team. This was especially important given the effectiveness of staff and students working together as co-reflectors, co-observers and co-researchers was a key part of the project's evaluation.

BCU case studies

There were three case studies on the theme of student engagement, comprising six academic staff and six students across three different subject areas:

Case Study/Subject(s)	Staff members	Student members
Diagnostic radiography (UG)	Alistair Bardwell Holly Pickford	Nikki Godridge Simran Gohil
Paramedic science (UG)	Mark Sibbald Samuel Davies	Hannah Bennett Rebecca Wright
Public Health (PG)	Nasrin Soltani Natalie Quinn-Walker	Saimun Farhana Zeinab Tahersima

LU case studies

There were three case studies on the theme of assessment and feedback, comprising five academic staff and twelve students across five different subject areas:

Case Study/Subject(s)	Staff members	Student members
Psychology (UG) Computer science	Dr Laura Jenkins Dr Yanning Yang	Chloe Daniel, Clare Lewis, Shana Ryan, Seth Johnson and Liam Roberts
Sports Management (PG) Human Biology (UG)	Dr Susana Monserrat-Revillo John Warren	Albi Al-Muhammed, Ziqian Pang, Johnny Tang, Muhibatu Yahuzah, Cassandra Marillier and Holly Read
Essential Teaching Skills for Doctoral Researchers (PG)	Dr Victoria Wright Will Carey	Stephanie Gou

UoW case studies

There were four case studies on the theme of engagement & inclusivity, comprising four academic staff and four students from the Business School across three different subject areas:

Case Study/Subject(s)	Staff members	Student members
Marketing (UG)	Hajrija Dergic	Thea Mills William Talbot
Human Resources (UG)	Janet Cash	Izbar Hamid
Hospitality (UG)	Abby Pearce	Maggie Rayner
Marketing (UG)	Dr Imran Khan	Thea Mills William Talbot

Data collection methods

The project adopted a qualitative, case study approach. Data collection was broadly separated into two phases/sets:

1. **Institutional case studies** – across different programmes/subject areas in each of the participating universities. Each case study was identified and selected by the institutional leads in consultation with academic staff in each university. Participation in the project operated on a voluntary basis and an open call was issued for expressions of interest. On average, each case study consisted of two members of academic staff and two students, though numbers were higher or lower in some cases.

The project team collected a range of qualitative data in collaboration with the case study participants relating to their reflections and discussions on learning and teaching practices in their respective subject areas. This included written reflective accounts, observation notes, teaching resources, audio recorded collaborative discussions and feedback sharing between participants relating to their chosen area of focus of learning and teaching on their course/module. Towards the end of the project, a collection of digital video case studies was created to capture the project's success and impact. The digital case studies were not used as a primary data collection tool but as a means of capturing and presenting video summaries of the experiences of participants. These were uploaded onto the QAA's **project webpage** and shared with students and staff institutionally and sectorally at external conferences.

2. **Project evaluation** – This involved collecting data with participant staff and students relating to their experience of actively participating in the cycle of collaborative

observation (CoCO). Data were collected via a series of online focus groups, which were recorded on MS Teams. The project evaluation focused on the impact of CoCO on the learning and teaching practices and experiences of participants, lessons learnt about perceptions of the quality of learning and teaching, and the extent to which student engagement in their learning experience had changed. It was made clear to all participants in the introductory project briefing and the training programme that the purpose of the focus groups was not to evaluate or make a judgement about the quality of any of the taught sessions but to explore the experiences of the participant staff and students in participating in CoCO as a process. The emphasis was also heavily on exploring the student learning experience.

Underpinning philosophy and implementation of the Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO)

The Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) is underpinned by the ethos that improving student learning requires teachers and students to develop a reciprocal, contextualised awareness and understanding of their teaching and learning and what it means to learn collaboratively in the context of their course. We define this as 'classroom consciousness' (Cui et al 2020, O'Leary and Cui 2023), which builds on Bowden and Marton's (2004) notion of 'collective consciousness'.

Much of the inspiration and conceptual underpinning for the development of CoCO came from the Cycle of Peer Observation (CoPO) originally developed by O'Leary and Savage (2020). In addition, Bowden and Marton's work (2004) contributed to the conceptual and theoretical underpinning of CoCO. In their work, they argue for an understanding between students and staff that is based on a common frame of reference of learning and teaching as fundamental to building a *collective consciousness* of learning in the context of a programme of study:

> Learning from other people means that we become aware of their ways of seeing things, regardless of whether or not we are convinced by, or appropriate, their ways of seeing... this means that not only do students have to learn from teachers, but teachers have to learn from students as well ... Our views of a certain phenomenon can therefore be shared or they can be complementary. Combining differing views implies richer, more powerful, ways of understanding a phenomenon or a situation and is likely to offer more options for handling varying conditions (Bowden and Marton 2004, 14 -15).

This concept shares the critical social constructivist stand we adopted throughout this project, emphasising how teaching and learning should be built on an ethos that challenges our taken-for-granted views and practices to develop new understandings. As the project's **digital case studies** illustrate, viewing subject specialist learning through the eyes of others enables us to develop a mutual awareness and understanding, which in turn helps us to appreciate, challenge and further our individual and collective understanding. Teaching and learning are social practices that require the protagonists to engage in a process of reflexivity. Examining our own understanding and experience of teaching and learning by cross referencing these assumptions and opening them up to dialogic exchange enables us to become aware of the strengths and areas for development in our practices. Instead of disseminating feedback to each other about teaching and learning, we argue that by creating shared spaces in which teachers and students can engage in reflexive dialogue, this leads to collective sense making (Fielding 2004), as exemplified by the nine case studies involved in the project.

The other theoretical tool used in the development of CoCO is Brookfield's (1995) work on the critically reflective practitioner. In order to challenge the hegemonic assumptions that we hold about teaching and learning, Brookfield argues that it is important to draw on both our peers' and our students' perspectives to illuminate different interpretations of our actions and provide different frames of reference to understand them. According to Brookfield (1995), student learning is one of four key lenses through which teachers are encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. In CoCO, students and staff all take an active role in critically reflecting on their practices, viewing the shared classroom experience from their perspectives and exchanging their observations and reflections with each other. Our methodology draws

individual perspectives together to observe learning and teaching at a course-specific level rather than focusing attention on an individual's practice or a one-off session. Central to our philosophy of improving learning and teaching is the need for students and teaching staff to take shared responsibility for developing mutual understanding, using a shared frame of reference from which to generate new understandings of situated learning and teaching.

Bringing students and staff together to collaboratively observe, reflect and investigate their learning and teaching requires careful ethical considerations. As well as following ethical research procedures and practices, and ensuring ethical consent was gained from each participant, our project paid special attention to the ethics of student-staff working relationships, the potential impact on participating staff and students, along with the impact between participants and their peers on the course. Trust between the participants was vital. In our project, the project leads acted as a mediator at the beginning to facilitate dialogue and allow the participants to have time and space to develop trust. It was important for the students to recognise this was not an exercise in gathering feedback and evaluating staff performance. Instead, the conversations, observations and reflections were focused on making sense of the connections and intersections between learning and teaching on their programmes. Part of the training sessions focused on the use of non-judgemental statements and questions in conversations for developmental learning. It was important for us to ensure that the participants had ownership of the work and were able to select the focus in their respective case studies. This included the power to decide which aspect(s) of learning and teaching they wished to focus on. We were keen to avoid any prescriptive and/or one-size-fits-all approach, as these contradicted the underpinning principles of CoCO and could potentially jeopardise the opportunities for learning between staff and students.

The relationship between participating staff and students and the rest of the students on the course was a factor that required careful thought and sensitive handling. Staff were required to communicate the project, key findings and any actions from the project to their colleagues and their students to ensure transparency. Students were also responsible for ensuring that their work did not compromise any member of staff or peer on their course. So, for example, when reporting their observation notes, staff and students were required to keep the identities of their students/peers anonymous and focus on the aspects of teaching and learning that they observed rather than the individuals.

Project training and resources

All participating staff were required to complete an observation training programme, delivered by the project team before undertaking CoCO with their peers and students. The project team provided project briefings for all participants.

The project started with us reconceptualising and reconfiguring the way in which we planned for the project's participants to engage with observation as a method for inquiring and enhancing teaching and learning. Like CoPO, severing the umbilical link between observation and its use as a method of assessing teaching and teacher performance was central to the process we undertook in the creation of CoCO and the training and preparation of the project participants. We were convinced that unless we were able to remove observation from the assessment context, this would jeopardise our efforts to capture situated examples of authentic teaching and learning and in turn to create a safe, trusting and collaborative environment for reflection and dialogue between staff and students.

When it came to student involvement, our approach put student voice and their active involvement in informing and shaping learning and teaching at the heart of this practice, thus reconceptualising students as members of their HE learning and teaching community. Without assuming students and/or staff were experts of learning and teaching, we decided that the best way to embark on meaningful and sustainable improvements was thus to build a shared understanding of learning and teaching between them in the context of their respective courses.

The delivery of the training sessions for CoCO varied across the three participating institutions and the case studies, dependent largely on the availability of participants and the logistics of arranging the training. In order to maximise participation, we adopted a hybrid approach to the training of participants. Some sessions were conducted largely in person, though some took place online. Some sessions involved both staff and students, but there were also separate training sessions for staff and students. Participants in all training sessions worked collaboratively on a range of immersive exercises to facilitate their familiarisation with the methodology and the activities involved.

While the training sessions were aimed collectively at both staff and students, there were elements of it that were targeted specifically at students. For example, helping them to think about their position as students through the lens of learning, to reflect on how they engage with learning and teaching, and how that connects to their knowledge and experience as a student on their programme. Exercises were included on reflecting on learning experiences, learning about the role of observation in understanding learning and teaching and practising classroom observation as a method. The training materials also outlined the different stages of CoCO, explaining and providing examples of the student observers' roles and responsibilities at each stage of the cycle. The accompanying **training guide** provides a rich bank of resources, with illustrative examples for those who are interested in implementing CoCO in their own courses, without being prescriptive to the particular methodology and methods that we adopted.

Key themes

Theme 1 – Relationships

This theme is about relationships and shares insights from staff and student participants on their experience of **building a relationship** in the context of this collaborative observation project.

In the first instance, staff and students came together to be trained as observers and/ or as observees. They have shared experiences of attending pre and post observation meetings and being observed (staff) or observing (staff, students) in a teaching session. Throughout the data, participants describe their relationships in very similar ways i.e. as genuinely collaborative, non-judgemental, very positive, empowering, respectful, friendly, inclusive, comfortable, constructive, helpful, authentic, personal and more connected. The fostering of a genuinely collaborative relationship has enabled a different kind of interaction to that more habitually experienced by staff and students (and perhaps more particularly when staff are teaching larger student cohorts), Empathy, respect, trust and reciprocity has been grounded in respectful professional interactions in which staff and students have worked together to share their perspectives on an observed session for the mutual benefit of all participants.

Building relationships from the start

Birmingham City University

> *'In terms of just how much planning goes into something, how much thought, it almost like humanised the lecturers. Not that we ever think that they're not human and approachable, but knowing the effort that they put into things. To be able to have that perspective from them made it much more personable for me.*
>
> (Nikki Godridge, student, Diagnostic Radiotherapy Case Study 1)

Alistair Bardwell (staff, Diagnostic Radiotherapy Case Study 1) shares how *'including 2nd year students has made a difference as they feel staff are more approachable. It takes time to break that traditional mindset of the teacher as being a person of authority.'* Similarly, Holly Pickford (staff, Diagnostic Radiotherapy Cycle 1) reflects *'As a 1st year, students can still tend to see their lecturers as the 'teacher''*. This perspective is echoed by Simran Gohil and Nikki Godridge (students in the case study).

Loughborough University

> *'Build[ing] a collaborative relationship together'* (Yanning Yang, staff, Case Study 1)

Reflecting on the training of staff and students in Case Study 1, Yanning Yang (staff) describes how *'It was also a very friendly session and really helped everyone involved understand the project and each other.'* Stephanie Gou (student, Case Study 3) shares how *'Victoria encouraged open communication by allowing each of the three observers, including myself, ample time to introduce our backgrounds and express our expectations. This inclusive approach fostered collaboration and facilitated understanding of diverse perspectives.'* Shana Ryan (student, Case Study 1 Cycle 1) echoes this sense of a *'highly collaborative atmosphere at the training'*. Chloe Daniel (student, Case Study 1 Cycle 1) describes how she was *'excited to work in this collaborative way, helping to give my insights .... and having closer communication with the lecturer which is hard to do being on such a big course'*. Cassandra Marillier (student, Case Study 2 Cycle 2) reflects similarly that for her *'the most important bit was getting to build a relationship with my lecturer because it's quite a big class and you don't really get to have contact with your lecturers outside of just sitting and listening'*.

University of Wolverhampton

> *'I've got to learn the ways in which my lecturer kind of thinks things through'* (Maggie Rayner, student, Case Study 3)

Across the four case studies, staff and students share the benefits of the teacher- student relationship built through the collaborative observation process. There is a shared understanding from staff as to the value of *'put[ting] yourself in the shoes of the students'* (Hajrija Dergic- staff, Case Study 1, Cycle 1). Dr Imran Khan (staff, Case Study 4, Cycle 2) shares how much he enjoyed the experience of collaborating with the students. Izbar Hamid (student, Case Study 2) makes an interesting point about her own preparation for observing and feeding back to her lecturer. She recognises how highly she already regarded her lecturer and shares how she anticipated giving feedback in this specific context, recognising how important it would be to provide *'honest feedback'*.

Pedagogical relationship building through the application of CoCO

The strong and enabling collaborative relationship proactively developed by the staff and the students has created unique opportunities for staff to engage in more open dialogues with their students.

Birmingham City University

> *'The building of relationships was a real shining light in this project'* (Alistair Bardwell, staff, Diagnostic Radiotherapy Case Study 1 Cycle 1)

In Paramedic Science (Case Study 2); as across all data sets, Samuel Davies and Mark Sibbald reflect: *'it shows the benefits of getting to know people a bit more individually'* (Sam), *'it's been*

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really beneficial ... getting to know some of the students a little bit better outside of the classroom' (Mark). For Rebecca Wright (student, Paramedic Science, Case Study 2) she describes feeling *'a little bit more open to go up to them and have a conversation'*.

Alistair Bardwell (Diagnostic Radiotherapy Case Study 1 Cycle 1) describes how; being relatively new to academia, applying the collaborative observation model triggered a perspective shift from *'lecturers should be all knowing ... at the front of a class and distributing all the knowledge'* to a recognition of how beneficial a collaborative relationship between staff and students could be. The re-positioning of staff and student as collaborative partners saw Nikki Godridge (student, Diagnostic Radiotherapy Case Study 1 Cycle 1) reflect in the video on feeling able to inform the teaching session before it took place and then seeing those adaptations in action.

Loughborough University

> *'We all felt like we could contribute without judgement'* (Seth Johnson, student, Case Study 1 Cycle 2)

Participants have personally invested in building collaborative relationships. For John Warren (staff, Case Study 2 Cycle 1 and 2): '*the two students that were involved as collaborative observers with myself and the other staff member that was observing ... they really threw themselves into the role. They were able to provide some really in-depth points of focus to reflect on afterwards.*' For Yanning Yang (staff, observed by Seth Johnson and another participant of Case Study 1 Cycle 2): *'The collaborative feedback provides an excellent opportunity to clarify the meaning of the feedback'.* Will Carey (staff, Case Study 3 Cycle 1) describes this kind of interaction as *'reciprocity'*; we are all learning from each other. For Susana Monserrat-Revillo (Case Study 2 Cycle 1 and 2), participating in the project enabled her to *'have another kind of interaction with students in a very constructive way'*.

Liam Roberts (student, Case Study 1 Cycle 2) captures how *'This non-combative and slightly informal atmosphere made me feel more confident in giving feedback'* on the observed session. As Seth Johnson (student, Case Study 1 Cycle 2) notes: *'We all felt like we could contribute without judgement, and this allowed for a very constructive feedback environment. I think we all were quite enthusiastic as well – we all wanted to be there and wanted this to be successful.'* For Clare Lewis (student, Case Study 1 Cycle 1) *'I found explaining some of my feedback and hearing my lecturer's response ... allowed for an open communication between us'.*

University of Wolverhampton

> *'Be authentic to what you would usually do'* (Abby Pearce, staff, Case Study 3)

For Abby Pearce (staff, Case Study 3) *'being observed by a student was a bit of a different experience'*. She reflects that *'you are in the position of the teacher and they're a student'* so only some will be confident enough to give you feedback. While she already works

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collaboratively with students (as described in the case study video), her involvement in the project has led to future oriented reflections on how to *'encourage students to feel that they are an equal part in that partnership'*.

For Dr Imran Khan (staff, Case Study 4, Cycle 2) the staff student partnership also developed students' understanding of *'how academia and or how basically university process works, how teaching works, what are the teaching objectives, how teachers think'.* This resonates with case studies across the three institutions. It is also reflected in Thea Mills and William Talbot's (students, Case Study 1 Cycle 1 and Case Study 4, Cycle 2) realisation that with large groups and different teaching and learning contexts, *'everything they do [the choices lecturers make in the selection and running of activities] has a purpose'*.

Summary (key messages)

As a model, CoCO is best applied when proactive attention has been paid to the building of a collaborative relationship such that fosters open communication. Staff and students need to share their expectations and hopes for engaging in this work at the start. Gaining insight into each other's perspectives of teaching and learning is also very helpful i.e. What is meant by 'good' teaching? Asking such questions (ideally within the training stage) supports shared understanding and inclusion.

Theme 2 – Student voice and feedback

> *I've learned how important this is and how valued my voice is within the university*
> (Chloe Daniel, student participant, Loughborough. Case study 1).

Central to a rich student learning experience is the idea that each student belongs and matters and that they are partners and equals in the messy relationship between learning and teaching. In our project objectives, we prioritised authentic student engagement in shaping their learning experiences by empowering them to become directly involved in informing and improving the quality of learning and teaching on their course/module. Underpinning this were collaborative methodologies, tools and practices designed to promote authentic inquiry and discussion to enhance the quality of the learning and teaching experiences of our participants. In our blog on **fostering belonging and building pedagogic relationships**, we outlined how our approach sought to deconstruct the traditional power dynamic between students and staff and to replace it with a more peer-based relationship of equals where students would feel that their views were valued and that their voices were heard and were being taken seriously as core ingredients in the success of this project.

Our values, approach and the training provided emphasised the value of collaborative, honest discussions between students and staff to provide meaningful opportunities for co-inquiry and insights. To facilitate this, our project was careful to address and consider the ethics of a staff-student working relationship and the need for the creation of non-hierarchical spaces for trust and challenge to grow. This had to be handled with sensitivity to allow all participants the opportunity to engage in confidential, collaborative discussion.

As this was probably the first time that our student participants had acted as observers, we needed to set the parameters for their 'engagement' and feedback and foreground how important discussion, suggestion and question-raising was to the activity. When students are usually asked to provide feedback on their learning experiences e.g. mid-module, end of module feedback, National Student Survey/Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey there is no feedback loop or discussion in the formal model, so we had to be careful to model and scaffold this approach as it was a new space and practice for all involved. For support in implementing this approach see our **Enhancing Learning and Teaching Quality through a Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) Training Guide (2024)**.

Our modelling and scaffolding included reflective templates designed as both icebreaker for meaningful discussion and reflections prior to the observation and aide memoire during the observation. Building trust and understanding of the process of collaborative observation included demystifying terms, discussing potential misunderstandings and emphasising the value of productive conversations on both sides. In this blog on **enhancing learning and teaching quality** we identify the diversity of the students and staff involved and how the learning relationships developed over time during the two cycles of the project.

As the project **podcast** and **eight digital case studies** show there was some apprehension and fear evident for all participants, students and staff. The podcast student participants comment on their initial feelings of nerves and being daunted and not sure what they had signed up for which was rapidly resolved.

> *I'd been in non-collaborative meetings before, this broke stigmas ... it was the complete opposite. The stereotypes of uni were broken and staff were there to help you. It broke*

down barriers, it's not just a one-way street, it's two-way (Simran Gohil, student participant, BCU, Case Study 1. Podcast)**.**

I was initially quite scared about my peers judging me as well (Clare Lewis, student participant, Loughborough. Case study 1).

As our blog on **belonging and building pedagogical relationships** illustrates and further reinforces, being valued, seen and heard was important in demystifying the perceived hierarchical boundaries to allow students to adopt an unboundaried insightful position.

*Initially I found it hard to give her feedback...but when you are seeing it from this point of view and you are observing you need to be honest and see potentially, let me step out the box and see what constructive feedback I could give her (*Izbar, student participant, Wolverhampton. Case study 2).

It was relaxed, I felt what I said was important, it was great to hear what I said was heard and made an impact (Simran Gohil, student participant, BCU. Podcast).

I did feel that everything I was writing was going to be considered (Clare Lewis, student participant, Loughborough. Case study 1).

When asked what they had learned and were taking from their involvement in the project participants said:

Learning that lecturers are people... and how much staff want that feedback (Chloe Daniel, student participant, Loughborough. Case study 1).

Knowing that I have to actively engage in the session to have a positive impact on the teaching process (Izbar, student participant, Wolverhampton. Case study 2).

Relationships, empathy and reciprocity emerge again and again from the narratives of the participants, students and staff, who become more situated in their shared learning about the messy nature of learning and teaching. The qualitative, story making approach allows the students to get behind the scenes to experience the processes staff adopt and to question and even challenge some of their choices for the benefit of current and future cohorts.

It's been good to get to know the lecturers a little bit better and I have felt more open to go up to them and have a conversation about various things (Rebecca Wright, student participant, BCU. Case study 2).

From a student perspective it's an absolute privilege to be part of something like this when we get to see the other side (Nikki Godridge, student participant, BCU. Podcast and Case Study 1).

Putting students and their teachers as key agents at the heart of the observation process in higher education offers a powerful opportunity for dialogue and collective reflexivity. The sense making that students bring to the activity can clearly benefit their experience within their study and offer their teachers powerful, timely and personalised feedback.

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The teacher participants in the case studies and podcast equally valued the opportunity to gather student feedback on their teaching,

> *I wasn't expecting the level of depth to their ideas that they would share and the conversations we were having* (John Warren, staff participant, Loughborough. Case Study 2).

> *It really helped me to understand what they wanted from me in the classroom. They gave me feedback that I never received before in a more traditional form of feedback. It was a way to empower students as collaborators of teaching. It helped me to reorganise activities for next year* (Susana Monserrat-Revillo, staff participant, Loughborough. Case Study 2).

In their blog, [Being Co-Creators in the Learning Experience](#), three of our staff participants reflect upon their engagement in the project. They credit the collaborative project with reshaping their experience and stress how important dialogue and feedback was to the experience of all of the participants

> *Together we developed a mutual understanding on what we hoped to achieve together from the observations. The combination of structured guidance and open communication meant that, as a staff member, I felt well-prepared and confident to engage in the collaborative process* (Yanning Yang, staff participant, Loughborough. Blog).

> *I would say that the most important thing about this project was that the students' comments during the sessions following the observations gave me the opportunity to think about the best in-class activities for next year, as the discussion held was very rich. Empowering the students gave them the opportunity to share their opinions in a more direct way, bringing a new perspective that I had never received before through the annual quality surveys* (Susana Monserrat-Revillo, staff participant, Loughborough. Blog).

> *I saw the project as a unique opportunity to get an in-depth insight into student learning I gained so much from being a part of this project! I have always valued my students' views, inputs and experiences on my modules; however, I do not think I have ever considered collaborating with them to solve a classroom-based problem. This provided me with a new tool for my teaching practice that I had not previously heard of or used myself* (Abigail Pearce, staff participant, Wolverhampton. Blog).

The collective community created by the QAA project has facilitated critically reflexive dialogue about learning and teaching where student participants felt empowered to explore and share their observations as peers with teaching staff who valued and acted upon the feedback from their students.

Theme 3 – Changing thinking and practice

There are clear examples of how thinking, and as a result, how practice will be changed from both the student and staff perspectives from taking part in this QAA collaborative observation project. Quotes have been shared below taken from the pre and post verbal and written reflections, and the case study videos.

It is clear that both parties were nervous at the start about being involved, but once supported through the pre-observation materials and meetings with each other, they felt much more comfortable. Students shared how they developed greater insights into the world of teaching, how pleased they were to have ideas to share and to have them listened to. Staff shared how they were grateful for the feedback, the dialogue that followed and the new ideas and insights to take on board. New and different thinking was shared for both parties, and practice will be changed as a result.

From a student/observer point of view – early thinking

Students reported initially being nervous about being involved, but due to being well supported through the pre-observation conversations and the training session, as well as during the briefing session, these fears were allayed. Some students shared they were initially concerned about the power dynamics of feeding back upwards to their tutors, and were surprised that their tutors shared similar concerns:

> *'I was surprised that Abby was nervous, as she is such a good teacher…it gave me insights in the ongoing worries of being a teacher.'* (Maggie Rayner/University of Wolverhampton)

Others were using the observation opportunity to better understand tutors' thinking and expectations, which would later support their own learning and teaching practice:

> *'Having the opportunity to take part in this cycle allowed me to develop and form many different skills before, during and after the process…working with members of staff that we would also be taught by allowed me to touch base with their overall expectations. It was useful to see the resources and to discuss them before the session. Helped us to think about what we were going to learn. It gave me an insight into what I need to look out for in the third year.'* (Simran Gohil/BCU)

Students also shared thoughts that they may not be able to find anything helpful beyond the positive to report back but later realised the value of being able to give direct feedback about their module to influence practice, which would otherwise not have been possible. They felt that their ideas for change, however small, would make a difference to practice:

> *'I found it easy to write about all the fantastic things I had observed; It was harder to think of improvements. Most of the suggestions I made are just small things, but from a student's perspective, I think they can make a lot of difference; it might be helpful to encourage students to reflect on their learning and engagement with the module.'* (Shana Ryan/Loughborough).

From a student/observer point of view – later thinking

On reflection, students shared how being in the lesson as an observer, rather than a learner, gave them the opportunity to more intently consider teaching practice and gave them a greater awareness of what it must be like to be a teacher. As they had been involved in the initial planning conversation with their teachers, they knew better what was planned, and then in some instances saw it play out differently:

> *'I could see the learning and teaching involved, as not interacting in it myself. I could see my tutor is doing a good job. It was nice to be involved in the planning/preparation that teachers do before the session and see the application in the lesson. I can see more now how teaching can be challenging.'* (Maggie Rayner/University of Wolverhampton)

This same student shared how they found it hard not to get involved in the activity (as they were observing their own module) and to try not to say anything. Later they reflected this was good learning for them, not to be so vocal or feel they need to lead the discussion in the classroom all the time.

Students also learnt how receptive and open their tutors were to feedback:

> *'It was interesting to hear what other people thought and their perspectives. I felt happy to share my input as everyone there was very open and non-judgmental, and the lecturer was very happy to receive our feedback. Overall, I found this experience very positive and uplifting.'* (Shana Ryan/Loughborough)

> *'Holly was really receptive to what we were saying in the pre-observation meeting… having the opportunity to undertake this role has been so beneficial.'* (Nikki Godridge/BCU)

Some students were involved in more than one cycle, which meant they were able to build deeper relationships and further cement skills through working with tutors:

> *'In Cycle 2 we've become more comfortable with each other. Our confidence has really grown being involved in this. Confidence and communication have really grown.'* (Thea Mills and William Talbot/University of Wolverhampton)

From a student/observer point of view – changing practice

As much as students were increasing their awareness about their tutors and their teaching, they also shared practical suggestions to change practice too:

> *'The post observation meeting was very reassuring in that there was an agreed consensus on things that could have gone better and why. Overall, there was a consensus that the session met the aims…but that the environment was a big factor in influencing the response to the session.'* (Nasrin Soltani/BCU).

> *'I suggested our Tutor could show a previous assessment example as they work through each week and show how it relates to each section of our assessment. My tutor explained he prefers students devise their own approach to avoid students copying it. After some debate, we agreed he could show this example in week 10. He took my idea on board quickly after explaining why he did not do this to start with. This gave me a better understanding of why tutors do certain things – some actions they take may look pointless to us, but they have a reason!!'* (William Talbot/University of Wolverhampton)

Students were pleased to make a contribution, to be heard and were pleased to know their ideas would influence future practice:

> *'My teacher took on board my ideas and I felt my ideas were validated; this has built my confidence.'* (Izba Hamid/University of Wolverhampton)

From a staff point of view – early thinking

Tutors were nervous at the start too but, as with the students, fears were allayed by the pre-observation meeting with the student observers:

> *'Before the pre-observation meeting, I was nervous about being judged by students while teaching. I very quickly got the impression that the students observing me were not highly critical in nature and saw this opportunity as constructive. This made me feel more comfortable in taking part in the study and being observed.'* (Dr Laura Jenkins/Loughborough)

Another mentioned the added pressure of being observed by their own student whilst in the pre-observation meeting with their student; already showing some vulnerability and building trust in the relationship:

> *'Felt pressure today as being observed by a student – felt high pressure but glad I did it, as a really positive experience. Generally, don't feel as nervous when a colleague does an observation, as they only see a snippet, but the student knows me well, so I didn't/couldn't change how I teach; the student was aware of what was planned and how I typically teach.'* (Abby Pearce/University of Wolverhampton)

From a staff point of view – later thinking

Despite early reservations, staff were grateful for the feedback given:

> *'Hearing these comments reminded me of my purpose here and reaffirmed any doubts I had in terms of my session design and delivery.'* (Alistair Bardwell/BCU)

Other were more targeted with the focus of feedback to more directly inform thinking which worked very well:

> *'I wanted to know if because the group was a very big group... if the task and activities I gave to them were good enough for the very different levels we have in the classroom...they gave me feedback that I never expected and I would say that they never told me that in a more traditional way of receiving feedback, it was a way to empower students as collaborators in the process of teaching.'* (Dr Susana Monserrat-Revillo/Loughborough)

New and different thinking was also shared and changed tutor thinking. One tutor shared their plans with their observer but then when teaching, the students were struggling with the activity and so she felt what was planned was too much of a challenge, so gave an alternative activity:

> *'On reflection, I felt I could have scaffolded more, made the connection to the assessment clearer and given them more time to think through the activity for themselves.'* (Dr Imran Khan/Wolverhampton)

After reflecting with the student though, she left feeling much more positive and reassured that it is acceptable to change the lesson plan halfway through.

Student's thinking didn't always validate or agree with tutor's views and gave additional perspectives on what might be the causes of engagement:

> *'We had an informed discussion about how to engage quieter ones and it was interesting to see that these students were less worried about the quieter ones and had a different view about their non-engagement.'* (Dr Imran Khan/University of Wolverhampton)

From a staff point of view – changing practice

Staff shared many examples of how the learning from being observed had improved their practice:

> *'It was insightful as it caused me to consider my own actions and practices in the X training session and the decisions, I need to make in our session planning/execution going forward.'* (Dr Laura Jenkins/Loughborough)

Other learning for tutors was less about their teaching and more about the physical space and need for pre-reading:

> *'For future sessions of this kind, I need to be fully aware of the logistics of the teaching space and make sure the content is available and clearly visible to all the cohort prior to and within the session...I would also encourage further staff support for larger sessions...Following feedback from the students, they advised pre reading and time to research the teaching content would have added a level of understanding prior to the session and almost grasped their vision to align this with the topic area ready to interpret images and pathologies.'* (Alistair Bardwell/BCU)

However, not all student ideas were practicable, but tutors still felt they had gained by better developing relationships with the students:

> *'Some of the solutions offered in the post-observation feedback were not realistic due to constraints with timetabling and the available teaching spaces, but being able to have a dialogue around this and engage in a discussion with the student collaborators was powerful in itself.'* (Will Carey/Loughborough)

One of the biggest takeaways was the importance of creating a space for the dialogue between staff and students, which widens tutors thinking and ultimately leads to changes in practice, including the practice of authentically asking students for their views:

> *'I found the collaborative observations very valuable to complete. It was an overwhelmingly positive process. It provided an opportunity for a novel approach to student feedback, in a way that facilitated professional dialogue and as a result felt genuinely useful.'* (John Warren/Loughborough)

Summary/key messages

It is clear that both parties learnt and have made changes as a result of taking part in the observation experience. Both parties were nervous at the start, and this reiterates the importance of managing the early part of the relationship through pre-observation meetings, and training, to encourage the sharing, the dialogue and relationship building early on. This section also demonstrates the importance of capturing the learning through post-observation meetings and reflective notes/blogs/diaries to ensure the rich picture of learning for both parties is clearly documented. This also serves as a reminder for reflection later and also helps to show the reciprocal nature of this type of observation process to more clearly sell the benefits for others to get involved in the future. In addition, it helps to act as a checklist to check for implementation of agreed changes to practice later on.

Theme 4 – Facilitation and support

So far, the key themes from our evaluation have revealed that authentic student and staff collaboration is built on genuine relationships which enable open, honest and meaningful dialogues. The whole process of creating and sustaining this collaboration required careful planning, facilitation and support. For example, the project team were mindful of recognising and effectively addressing changes of pedagogical relationships, as well as participants' initial uncertainty and nervousness. Other challenges that the project team needed to pay careful attention to included the implementation of CoCO and creating the conditions to empower students and staff to work together on something that is meaningful and authentic to them. The final theme from our evaluation focuses on what participants and project facilitators from the three institutions considered as important factors that enabled the success of meaningful staff and student collaboration for quality enhancement using CoCO.

The project participants' perspective

Across all case studies, the importance of institution leads as facilitators, training providers and organisers of the scheme is highlighted during evaluation discussions. All participants commented on how the supportiveness of the institution leads made them feel confident and comfortable in taking part. The language and approaches used by the institution leads were highlighted by participants as examples of the supportive and inclusive ethos embodied by the institution leads when working with all participants. The introduction to the scheme and the training workshops with accompanying materials using accessible language, activities and examples which all participants could engage with. As commented by Yanning Yang (Lecturer, Loughborough University):

> 'These sessions did more than provide logistical details; they created a space where staff and students could begin building rapport, helping to establish trust and mutual respect before the formal observation began…The combination of structured guidance and open communication meant that, as a staff member, I felt well-prepared and confident to engage in the collaborative process.'

During the end of the project evaluation focus groups, all participants echoed Yanning's comments and emphasised how important the training sessions were to enable CoCO to foster meaningful collaborative relationships and practices. As John Warren (Lecturer, Loughborough University) states, *'it was key for students to understand the difference between evaluating and collaborating.'* From the students' point of view, the training sessions clarified *'what was expected of them', 'how to approach observing their classes'* and *'how to carry out open discussions with their lecturers about teaching and learning'*.

In the project evaluation, all participants made comments about how *'supportive', 'positive', 'helpful', 'approachable'* and *'knowledgeable'* the institution leads were as facilitators of CoCO in their local contexts. Their pedagogical expertise enabled case study teams to effectively address the practical challenges, such as preparing student participants, overcoming timetabling issues, but more importantly they supported case study members to develop their collaborative relationships and practices. Case study members felt they could reach out to the institution leads when they had queries or when the case study had important decisions to make (e.g. changing case study members). This is certainly vital when introducing and implementing a new pedagogical model involving students and staff across the university.

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Our project initially suggested each case study team should include two staff and two student members. In reality, five out of the eight case study teams experienced changes to their case study team memberships, some of which were pre-planned and some were unexpected. Changes to the team had some impact, for example, training for new members, and in one case, changing a staff member meant the case study couldn't carry out the second cycle of observation Notwithstanding this, the case study teams and their institution leads felt that as long as the changes were facilitated and supported by team members, the impact was minimal on the quality of participants' experiences and the outcomes of their collaborative observations. Communicating the change across the team and developing a shared understanding about how to fully involve the new member from the moment they joined the team were important elements to ensuring meaningful participation within the case study team.

Across all the case studies that completed two cycles of observations, students and staff felt strongly that being able to work together on the collaboration over two observations really enabled the development of their relationship and their pedagogical knowledge and practices. Observation as a method for inquiry is best suited for long-term, qualitative work as the detailed observation notes need to be built over time. Using it as part of a student-staff pedagogy collaboration means the observations need multiple occasions to generate the quantity and quality of data to support meaningful discussion between participants. Indeed, across all case studies, participants recognised how the process and underpinning principles of CoCO facilitated the creation and development of such discussions between students and staff.

Within the cycle itself, the various stages whereby participants come together to discuss learning and teaching are crucial to this process. In the evaluation focus groups, students and staff members reflected on their experiences of the two cycles and suggested that the training sessions and the pre-observation meetings are a really important step to establish and nurture their collaborative relationships. In **their blog post**, Yanning, Susana and Abby reflected on how their experiences of the training sessions and pre-observation meetings played a vital role in fostering the collaborative relationship and understanding between them and their students.

Participants across case studies also commented on how post-observation discussions facilitated their collective learning about learning and teaching on their courses. In particular, students and teachers valued the opportunities for students to share their insights about how they approached learning during sessions and to give suggestions on learning activities they felt would be more suitable for their class. When asked about what they thought facilitated dialogues between students and teachers, participants commented on the importance of using '*open questions*' and giving '*spaces for each member to talk*'. The students felt '*lecturers showed an interest in my perspective*, which was key to developing their confidence.

The training sessions took place both online and in-person across the three institutions, and so did the pre- and post- observation meetings. Some case study teams reflected on their online meetings during the end of Cycle 2 evaluation and concluded that while they do offer the flexibility to enable the planned activities to go ahead, it is always more beneficial to meet in person, particularly when the meetings are also an opportunity to develop participants' relationships.

In addition, all participants recognised that to utilise the intended benefits from a new pedagogical model and approach, such as CoCO, it needs time for participants to learn, practice and reflect on its implementation in their own contexts in order for individual participants and their case studies to achieve their intended outcomes. Whilst it is possible, as

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demonstrated by a couple of the case studies in the project, for students and staff to carry out two cycles of observation over one academic year (in both cases they are postgraduate programmes), the time demands on students and staff and the potential challenges of timetabling mean that it is often the case that completing one cycle of observation is more realistic in an academic year.

The project team's perspective

The overall focus and implementation of the project centralised participants' pedagogical interests while considering institutional priorities. This was to ensure that participants had the scope to choose any area which they felt interesting and important in their own context. There was wider organisational buy-in and importantly an opportunity for the case studies at each institution to develop a network that was built on similar pedagogical interests/focuses. Each institution's lead was able to utilise the institution's thematic focus at local/institutional events/forums to share the project's findings and work. This further provided participants with opportunities to meet with colleagues and students locally to discuss their case study work. This again reinforced the ideology that collaboration between students and staff takes place in a wider community for sustainable development rather than episodic events.

The project team worked closely throughout the project, meeting monthly to discuss and reflect on project progress, participants' and our own experiences and emerging findings from each case study. This enabled the team to create a trusting and collaborative approach to work on the project. The same approach was also applied to working with case study participants. This is reflected in the evaluation findings from participants where they all highlighted how the project team/institution leads' approach to facilitating the project and supporting the case studies ensured them that it was safe to share their experiences, views and feelings, even if some of them were about issues, challenges and areas that required change. This was a particular aspect of the project that made it so successful.

The ethics of student-staff working relationships was the key aspect that enabled our trusting and collaborative approach to the project. Since the original research work when CoCO was developed (O'Leary & Cui 2020), the ethics of student-staff collaboration has always been at the forefront of our work. Trust between the participants was vital. In our project, the project team acted as a mediator at the beginning to facilitate dialogue and allow the participants to have time and space to develop trust. It was important for the students to recognise this was not an exercise in gathering feedback and evaluating staff performance. Instead, the conversations, observations and reflections were focused on making sense of the connections and intersections between learning and teaching on their programmes/modules. In our **training guide** (p.7-8), we highlighted how this was practised throughout the project. The relationship between participating staff and students and the rest of the students on the course is another factor that required careful thought and sensitive handling. Here, transparency is key. Again, we shared the approaches we took to address this in our **training guide**.

Conclusion and recommendations

Concluding comments

CoCO provides a framework for fostering meaningful pedagogical relationships between students and staff. It is a genuinely collaborative model that provides institutions with an authentic approach to addressing the burning question of how students and staff can work better together to understand and enhance the learning-teaching experience for both parties. By collectively reflecting on and discussing their experiences and perceptions of learning and teaching together through the scaffolded approach provided by CoCO, students and staff enter into a process of collective sense making and meaning, which is fundamental to enabling both parties to develop their insights, knowledge, skills and practices further. Staff and students coming together to reflect on and discuss their respective experiences of teaching and learning cultivates a genuinely authentic approach to creating meaningful and sustainable collaborations between staff and students. Furthermore, CoCO creates the conditions for students and staff to engage in reciprocal reflection about their understanding and experiences of teaching and learning, as it provides a structured process with dialogic space for the two to engage in situated dialogue that is driven by a desire to develop shared awareness of the strengths and areas for development in their respective learning and teaching experiences.

Pedagogical relationship building emerged as a key theme in this project. Across all of the case studies, this relationship building underpinned the collective sharing and discussion of meaningful learning and teaching experiences among participants. From a student perspective, being treated as equals by academic staff and being made to feel that their voices were valued and taken seriously were repeatedly identified as some of the core ingredients in building effective pedagogical relationships. This also contributed to an authentic sense of belonging and mattering for students, as the relationships that they built with academic staff engendered reciprocal trust and respect for one another. This raises interesting questions about student participation and representation in the context of student voice in higher education. In particular, how universities perceive the role of students in contributing to organisational data sets and the type of meaningful relationships they attempt to encourage by current approaches to student voice. CoCO facilitates the breaking down of traditional hierarchies, particularly in terms of the student-staff relationship, as the former is seen as an integral member of the academic community. For the students in our project, this resulted in an increased sense of agency and voice in discussing and shaping their learning experiences. In addition, many of our participating students talked about how their self-confidence had improved as a result of feeling trusted and empowered when interacting and collaborating with academic staff. From a staff perspective, they embraced the opportunity to share their own reflections with interested students, to increase their awareness of what works and/or could work differently and felt supported to make the changes.

Recommendations

Developing pedagogical relationships between students and staff takes time and requires deliberative facilitation and scaffolding to nurture this development. CoCO provides a structured framework with discursive spaces, which are fundamental to establish and nurture these collaborative relationships over a substantive period of time. However, the nature of these collaborative relationships is such that they require time to grow and flourish on a longitudinal basis. Observation as a method of inquiry is best suited for sustained, qualitative work as the

detailed observation notes and collaborative sense making are built over time rather than isolated, episodic events. Using it as part of a student-staff pedagogical enquiry means the value of observations themselves is often enhanced when they take place on multiple occasions, as they generate richer data to support discussions between participants. That said, even those participants who only completed one cycle of CoCO still found it beneficial. On an institutional level, this means that there needs to be a commitment to enabling participants the time to engage in this type of activity longitudinally rather than episodically.

- Space for experimentation – There needs to be a move away from the overreliance on the use of observation as a form of assessing performance and a greater emphasis on using it as a joint pedagogical enquiry for staff and students to explore learning and teaching. This could be institutionally supported by, for example, providing an option for CoCO to be used as an observation model on a PG Cert HE or as evidence for Advance HE Fellowships and/ managed at a local level within individual departments/schools.
- Time allocation and recognition for participation – all institutions have a scholarly allowance for staff that recognises the importance of their professional learning. Formally acknowledging this work on staff workload allocations by ringfencing a time allowance for participation is important if institutions are to demonstrate their commitment to supporting this type of professional learning activity.
- Encouraging harder to reach students and staff to engage in this type of collaborative activity – the digital case studies of the project's participating students and staff help to showcase the benefits of participation to both parties.
- Purposeful student involvement – it is important to ensure that all student participants are students of the classes that they will observe. In other words, CoCO works most effectively when students are observing their own teachers and the time they spend observing is carefully managed with their peers and their teachers so that they don't miss out on learning in the observed session (See the **training guide** for further details).
- Need for a change in learning and teaching cultures in HE and how related enhancement activities should be managed

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