



QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project: Enhancing learning and teaching quality through collaborative observation

Questions and answers from the launch event

The following questions were raised at the project launch event on Friday 5 July 2024. Colleagues from the project team provided further answers below. All [resources from the project](#) are available on the QAA website.

Question

Recognising the importance of creating spaces for collaboration between students and staff, what challenges did the team face ensuring there is 'space' for this collaboration and whether there were differences in terms of time and physical spaces across different settings?

Answer

All participants (staff and students) and project members volunteered for the project - there was no additional time given specifically from institutions for the project. The project team supported participants to identify suitable time and opportunities for meeting and observations and identified opportunities for staff and students' professional development. The project team and participants adopted a hybrid model where the training and meetings were online and in-person. This was mainly due to the logistics of timetabling. However, some participants and project team felt that physical in-person contact is very important, particularly at the early stage of the project, for developing relationships.

Question

What steps have you taken to engage participating staff and students, and how you would you suggest engaging those less enthusiastic?

Answer

As this was a project, all participants were committee volunteers. If the Cycle of Collaborative Observation (CoCO) was going to be implemented more widely across institutions/faculties, appropriate resources, support and approaches would be required. There was no monetary incentive for students. Staff members shared the information about the project and invited their students to take part as collaborators. We recognise that for students, there are professional development opportunities (for example, learning about reflection, developing mentoring practices), and they were highlighted by some participating staff to their students.

Question

How scalable do you feel this approach is, extending the approach to a wider group of students for all to benefit?

Answer

There are two ways to consider this. Certainly, across a programme, multiple pairings of staff and student observation teams can run alongside of each other. With careful planning, this model can contribute to course-wide quality enhancement activities. The second way to consider scaling up CoCO is how the collaboration can develop into other areas of quality enhancement work. From our case studies, we learned how the collaborative observation work and findings enabled the case study teams to create further student-staff collaborations and to gather meaningful feedback from wider student bodies. When it comes to considering scaling up CoCO, we need to be mindful of its underpinning pedagogical principles. In our [blog post](#) we addressed this question in more detail.

Question

Are there any refinements you would make to the process if you were to do it again?

Answer

Explore ways of involving students indirectly in the process. When possible, run the training sessions in-person, face to face. The training session is the first opportunity for staff and students to meet and to get to know each other. It is a very good opportunity for them to ask questions and discuss learning and teaching. Now we have a set of resources developed from the project, we can use them in any future project. When we started this project, we had limited resources.

Question

How has the project has been positioned within your institutions? Was this in addition to the usual observation of teaching and learning, or in lieu of it? Could staff choose to participate in the project instead of an observation run by the quality team?

Answer

This was a small-scale project with students and staff who volunteered to take part. It was advertised at local level. It wasn't intended to replace the institutional scheme.

Question

It's great to hear how this changed the nature of the relationship between staff and students, and their shared sense of engagement in learning - it would be helpful to hear your reflections on whether there was a shift in feedback outcomes? Do you feel this process led to a different type/quality of feedback on teaching compared to more conventional staff peer observation schemes and student module feedback questionnaires that might typically be used in other institutions? If so, how did it differ?

Answer

From my perspective as a tutor involved in the project, I would say it did differ. I find that in my experience, students usually treat the mid module and end of module feedback forms as a 'tick box exercise' at times, and I felt that the quality of feedback I received was enhanced in this project because they were being asked to openly, in their own words, explain what their experience of the classroom was. Listening to the language they chose to use to describe the classroom experience was so much more powerful and useful than seeing what box they had ticked on a multiple choice form.

Question

I have a question regarding the focus of the observation - I noticed that you adopted a focus based on the university needs (i.e. assessment & feedback, student engagement). What would be the benefits of having the staff member deciding the focus? What would be the challenges?

Answer

Participants decided the focuses based on what the case study staff and students want to learn in the context of their programme/module. The overarching institution themes were suggested, but they had autonomy in making their decisions. The institution themes were helpful for cross-case study sharing and learning at individual institutions.

Question

It would be helpful to have reflections on which of the proformas were most helpful/effective or led to the most productive dialogue.

Answer

The proformas were used as a prompt, but the students were guided to develop their own approach to take observation notes that suited their own needs and style. Illustrative examples are in the project report. We didn't prescribe the proformas as we were mindful that students were observing and taking notes in situ.

This QAA Collaborative Enhancement Project is supported and funded by QAA Membership. The project is led by Birmingham City University in partnership with Loughborough University and the University of Wolverhampton. Find out more about Collaborative Enhancement Projects on the [QAA website](https://www.qaa.ac.uk).

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