

Guidance Notes on the Role of Subject Adviser

Each participant should identify a Subject Adviser, from their broad discipline area, who will support and advise them during their studies, and who will summatively observe their teaching, endorse that it meets core requirements and provide feedback .

The Subject Adviser will be a person whom participants feel they could call upon to provide guidance, support and specialist knowledge within the context of their academic discipline. **The Subject Adviser must hold HEA Fellowship at D2.**

He/she will be someone whom they consider will have an interest in a particular area of their studies and would be willing to share their own expertise and knowledge, though in doing so, they would not be formally called upon to assess written work. They will however observe teaching on two occasions and be required to sign the second off as satisfactory. If this is not possible during the planned observation, the Subject Adviser will then schedule a further observation for assessment purposes.

The person concerned would be selected by the participant in liaison with their Head of School/Supervisor, or person closest to this particular position or office. It is possible that participants may have a number of Subject Advisers, depending on the areas that they are studying/researching at a particular time while a participant on the course. The Subject Adviser for the modules *Learning & Teaching @ Ulster* and *Enhancing Learning* should be a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. For the module Supporting Research Development the person should be in a position to draw on their own experience to provide appropriate and relevant support linked to the module coverage. Subject Advisers should be capable of:

- building a rapport with the participant
- showing empathy with them in relation to their professional roles
- respecting participants and the choices they make concerning their work as a PGCHEP student
- encouraging participants to take responsibility for their learning
- acting as a 'critical friend', that is, someone capable of:
 - offering unbiased constructive criticism, guidance and feedback
- being a good listener
- questioning, interpreting and explaining
- assisting with problems while challenging participants to make decisions
- striking an acceptable balance between giving advice and not taking control.

He or she will also have a very particular interest in higher education practice and would in turn be willing to share insights and reflections with you about their work.

Not Just Teaching

While observation of teaching is clearly an important aspect of the Subject Adviser's role, it is not, however, the only role that could be fulfilled by the person concerned. For example, he or she may be called upon to discuss their expertise in and or experiences of:

- * course development, management and planning
- * research supervision
- * student support
- * specific strategies they use in their own teaching, including student assessment
- * research capacity building

and so forth.

In other words, the Subject Adviser will be a confidential sounding board for a variety of course-related and subject specific issues. It is precisely because the areas of activity and expertise are likely to be so varied, that participants are advised to change Subject Adviser as circumstances require and to be pro-active concerning this, liaising with their respective Head of School (or other appropriate person of comparable status).

First Instances (Observing Teaching/Providing Feedback)

Subject Advisers will be provided with a pro-forma to guide the evaluation of any teaching observations. It should be clear whether the observation is solely formative or has a summative function. Arrangements for the observation should be made with as much advance notice as possible. Providing participants with feedback should occur preferably immediately after the observation, however if this is not possible, then within the next 2-3 days of the observation. Feedback is generally most welcome and most effective if given at the earliest opportunity.

The post-observation meeting should ideally begin with the participant's own thoughts about the teaching session, and you are encouraged to begin with positive aspects first of all. Many people find this difficult, wanting to look first at the less positive, but this is not always a good thing, as negativity has a habit of taking over in such situations.

It will therefore be important for the Subject Adviser to keep the discussion focused in a positive way, before dealing with other issues that point to the need for development within them.

Given that the Subject Adviser will have used the agreed evaluation pro-forma, it is therefore very important that this is used to focus the discussion and in turn avoid generalities. There should be a focus on what was done, why it was done and how well it was done, again beginning with the participant's evaluation which should focus on the facts of the situation, drawing upon these as evidence to substantiate and support reflections and findings.

In addition to the above, it is accepted that, for future development purposes, there must be an emphasis on what can pragmatically be changed, though this does not preclude the introduction into one's teaching of new challenges and a more creative approach, if this is needed. Drawing on their own acknowledged level of expertise, the Subject Adviser is to be encouraged to discuss new ideas with participants, while also encouraging them to hold fast to tried and tested characteristics of effective teaching.

During and after the discussion, the participant and the Subject Adviser will identify points of interest and importance which should subsequently be prioritized for developmental purposes. It may prove useful to divide these into two categories, short-term and long-term, there being due recognition of the fact that some of the action points agreed may be more developmental in nature, and therefore to be implemented over a longer period of time, while in contrast, other points could be implemented more speedily.

The usefulness of the experience for both parties should be reflected on, and it will be interesting to note what the Subject Adviser herself/himself has gained from collaborating in the above process.