

# University Centre Colchester

## Teaching Observation and Teaching Review Policy

Policy Details			
<b>Policy Owner</b>	Head of Teacher Development and HE Education		
<b>CE Sponsor</b>	Principal & Chief Executive Officer		
<b>Date created this year</b>	10.10.2024		
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2	College Executive	05.11.2024	August 2027
2	Curriculum and Quality	06.11.2024	August 2027

Version Control	
Version Number	Changes from previous 12 months policy
2	Policy updated to reflect new UCC structure and job titles, with other minor amendments to wording to improve clarity of policy.
Changes to policy in year	
2	
2	

**Equality Impact Assessment Tool: UCC Teaching Observation and Teaching Review Policy**

		Yes/No	Comments
<b>1</b>	<b>Does the policy/guidance affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:</b>		
	Race or ethnicity	No	
	Disability	No	
	Gender	No	
	Religion or belief	No	
	Sexual orientation	No	
	Age	No	
	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No	
	Maternity and Pregnancy	No	
	Gender Reassignment	No	
<b>2</b>	<b>Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?</b>	No	
<b>3</b>	<b>If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?</b>	N/A	
<b>4</b>	<b>Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?</b>	No	
<b>5</b>	<b>If so, can the impact be avoided?</b>	N/A	
<b>6</b>	<b>What alternatives are there to achieving the policy/guidance without the impact?</b>	N/A	
<b>7</b>	<b>Can we reduce the impact by taking different action?</b>	N/A	

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A lesson/session observation is the process of colleagues observing each other in their teaching, with the overall aim of improving pedagogical practice, and thus the student experience. It has become common practice to engage with lesson/session observations through both formal and informal structures such as learning walks, peer observations and teaching reviews. These form part of a strategic institutional approach to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.
- 1.2 When the main focus of peer observation is on helping colleagues develop their teaching, the process is generally undertaken as a reciprocal exercise, with staff observing each other, sharing their insights and providing mutual support<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.3 The traditional view of the process also includes an assumption that colleagues can learn effectively from each other's considered and constructive feedback about observed teaching. Furthermore, evidence is increasingly emerging that learning from watching a colleague teach can be just as beneficial as, if not more than, receiving observer feedback, even when that feedback is well constructed. The benefit to the reviewer from watching a colleague teach can explicitly enhance a tutor's self-confidence through observational learning or 'vicarious experience'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bell, M. (2005). Peer observation partnerships in higher education. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc., Milperra, NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Hendry, Graham D. and Oliver, Gary R., Seeing is Believing: The Benefits of Peer Observation, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 9(1), 2012.  
Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol9/iss1/7>

## **2. Categories of Teaching Observations**

2.1 University Centre Colchester promotes the notion of observed, and observing, teaching on four levels: an informal Learning Walk, Peer Reviews, a documented Teaching Observation, and a formal Teaching Review. The organisation views the difference between these as follows:

### **2.2 Learning Walks**

A Learning Walk is an informal quality tool, aimed at enabling the observer (usually a Head of School) to sample the student experience.

Learning Walks can occur at any point during the academic year. They are neither scheduled nor announced.

The purpose of a Learning Walk is to:

- Share good practice and promote consistency.
- Provide a 'snapshot' view of practice throughout the College.
- Check for progress of a particular initiative, e.g. a Learning Walk to focus on how TEL is used to support learning across the College.
- Support CPD where appropriate.
- To stimulate professional discussion regarding learning
- Provide opportunities for colleagues to see practice across the curriculum and learn from others.
- Inform our understanding of our standards in respect of learning and supporting learning.
- Involve all members of the learning community in the promotion of learning.

### **2.3 Peer Observations**

A Peer Observation is a reciprocal, collegiate observation in which both parties identify best practice in each other's work, and (where appropriate) make recommendations aimed at improving the student experience.

#### **Benefits:**

- Encourages reflection on personal practice.
- Provides opportunities for constructive feedback.

- Facilitates the exchange of ideas and methods.
- Supports the development of a learning community among faculty.

**Areas of focus:**

- Teaching methodologies and techniques.
- Curriculum design and content.
- Student engagement strategies.
- Research methodologies and outputs.
- Professional conduct and ethics.

**Outcomes:**

- Improved teaching and research quality.
- Enhanced collegiality and collaboration among faculty.
- Identification of areas for professional development.
- Recognition and dissemination of innovative practices.

## **2.4 Teaching Observations**

A Teaching Observation is a collegiate observation that identifies best practice, and (where appropriate) makes recommendations aimed at improving the student experience.

Teaching Observations are normally carried out by an experienced Higher Education practitioner nominated by the Head of Teacher Development and HE Education. On occasions a follow up Observation may be scheduled to confirm whether recommendations have been incorporated into future sessions.

A formal teaching observation aligned with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) quality code for Higher Education staff offers several significant benefits and outcomes.

**Benefits:**

- Quality assurance: Ensures teaching practices meet established standards.
- Professional development: Provides structured feedback for improvement.
- Evidence-based practice: Encourages data-driven approaches to teaching.
- Alignment with sector standards: Ensures compliance with UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF).
- Reflective practice: Promotes self-evaluation and continuous improvement.
- Peer learning: Facilitates knowledge exchange between colleagues.

- Student experience: Ultimately aims to enhance the quality of education for students.

**Outcomes:**

- Enhanced teaching quality: Improved instructional techniques and methodologies.
- Professional recognition: Can support applications for HEA fellowships.
- Curriculum development: Insights gained can inform course design and content.
- Institutional quality metrics: Contributes to overall quality assurance processes.
- Staff confidence: Validation of effective practices boosts morale.
- Career progression: Can support promotion applications and career development.
- Departmental cohesion: Fosters a culture of openness and collaborative improvement.
- Evidence for TEF submissions: Provides data for Teaching Excellence Framework evaluations.

## **2.5 Teaching Review**

A Teaching Review is a line management tool for documenting the quality and effectiveness of a staff member's practice. It is normally carried out by the staff member's line manager and informs the Check-in Conversation process. Teaching Reviews are formally scheduled activities. For further information, please see item 4 of this policy.

The observations of a Learning Walk do not normally inform the Check In Conversation but may result in the scheduling of a Teaching Observation or Teaching Review, if required.

The resulting documentation from a Teaching Observation may be referred to by a line manager as part of a Teaching Review or Check In Conversation. Staff can also refer to peer feedback as part of any professional development activities, such as studying for a PGCE or supporting an Advance HE Fellowship application.

## **3. Purpose of the Policy**

- 3.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the main characteristics of the University Centre Colchester lesson/session observation system. All core UCC teaching staff are required to participate in a Teaching Observation one year, and a Teaching Review the next. Ideally, this establishes a two-year cycle of documented reflective practice.

- 3.2 The spirit of lesson/session observations is to monitor and improve the standard of teaching, learning and assessment in UCC, and to enable staff to engage in constructive and collegiate dialogue about pedagogical practice. It also enables the institution to document an ongoing engagement with reflective practice across all programmes.
- 3.3 It is a strategic aim of Colchester Institute to have all members of the University Centre Colchester teaching staff formally recognised by Advance HE in the context of the Professional Standards Framework (see: appendix 1) as having either descriptor 1 or descriptor 2 status, with all core staff and course leaders holding at least descriptor 2 status.
- 3.4 The present policy supports the Colchester Institute's and UCC's aim to deliver excellence in teaching, learning and assessment in all aspects of the student experience.
- 3.5 All new members of teaching staff receive a Teaching Review from their Head of School within their first semester of working at University Centre Colchester.

#### **4. The Process**

The process is intended to provide a developmental approach whereby UCC teaching staff are supported to improve their teaching, learning and assessment practice with the help of observers.

##### **4.1 Organisation and timetabling**

At the start of the academic year the Area Heads confirm the expected teaching teams for their areas. UCC Academic Services is responsible for setting up a central register of all expected Teaching Observations and Teaching Reviews for the academic year.

A list of staff requiring a Teaching Observation will be passed to the Head of Teacher Development and HE Education who has responsibility to ensure such an event takes place during the academic year. Area Heads will simultaneously be informed of which of their staff require a Teaching Review. It is expected that all Observations and Teaching Reviews should be completed within the first semester.

On a bi-annual basis an observed session can be either a traditional face-to-face session or can be a live session delivered on-line.



All staff are invited to voluntarily take part in Peer Reviews in addition to their scheduled Teaching Observation or Teaching Review, however since 2023/24 this is no longer a compulsory activity. Organisation of Peer Reviews should be made locally between the two partaking members of staff and is not required to be logged with UCC Academic Services.

## **4.2 Undertaking the Teaching Observation/Teaching Review**

### **Teaching Observations**

Staff are to be observed by an experienced Higher Education practitioner nominated by the Head of Teacher Development and HE Education. The observation is to be undertaken from a developmental perspective, with both good practice and feedforward advice given. Where significant areas of development are identified a follow up Observation should be scheduled to showcase how the feedforward advice has been utilised and embedded into future sessions. If following the follow up Observation there are continuing concerns the observer can recommend that a Teaching Review is also undertaken during the academic year.

Completed Teaching Observation forms (Appendix 2) are then forwarded to the Area Head for confirmation and referencing in the individuals' Check-In Conversations. A copy should also be forwarded to UCC Academic Services for monitoring purposes.

### **Teaching Reviews**

Teaching Reviews are normally completed by the Area Head or Assistant Area Head. The observer should use the same observation form as Teacher Observations (Appendix 2) and must clearly identify the Professional Standards Framework evidenced in the observed lesson. Teaching Reviews are formal quality monitoring processes and can be referenced to inform Check-in Conversations, PDR Objective Settings, Capability Measures and Disciplinary action.

## **4.3 Best practice and monitoring**

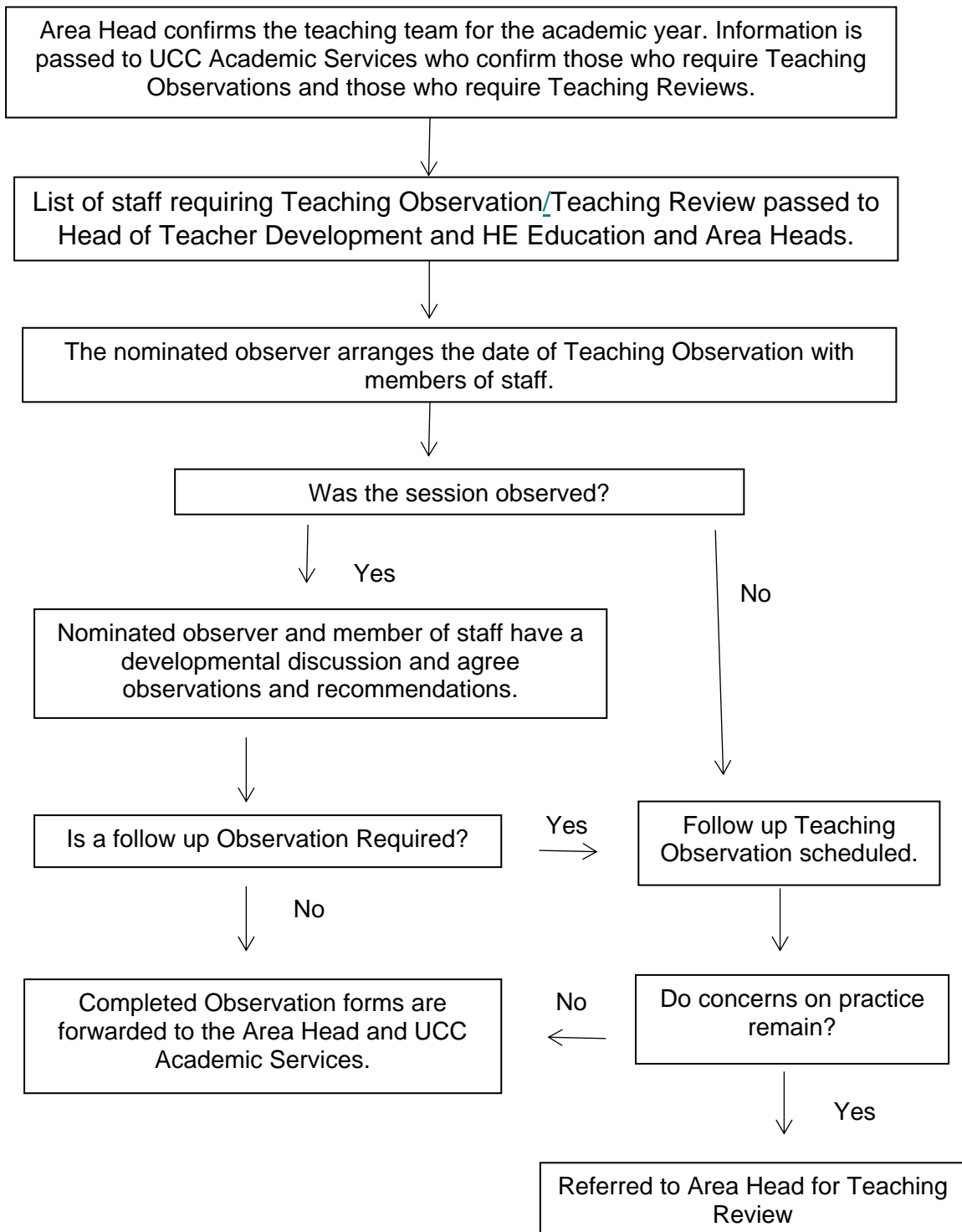
The Head of Teacher Development and HE Education, and Area Heads are required to identify best practice, which is to be shared across the UCC community, utilising UCC's Learning & Teaching Committee meetings to disseminate such recommendations.

- 4.4 UCC Academic Services will monitor the completion of both Teaching Observations and Teaching Reviews throughout the academic year and provide verbal reports to UCC Learning & Teaching Committee and a verbal headline summary at UCC Academic Board.

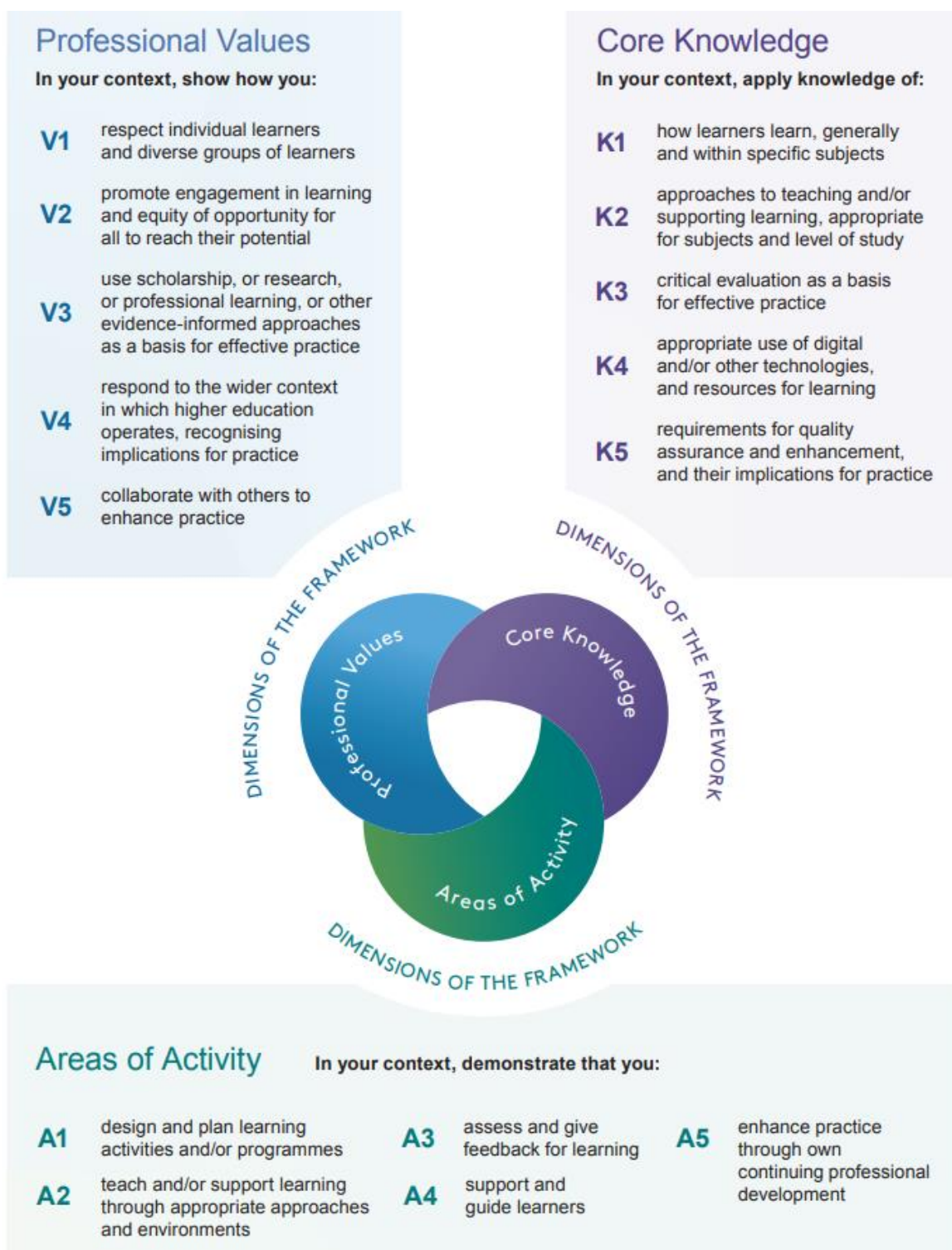
## **5. The Time Scale**

- 5.1 It is recommended that all Teaching Observations and Reviews should take place in Semester One within a time frame agreed by the Area Head to cause as minimal disruption as possible to the course teams and the students. Staff who are not observed within Semester One should be brought to the attention of the Head of Teacher Development and HE Education. Those staff who have not been observed for either a Teaching Observation or a Teaching Review in semester one would then be subject to a Teaching Review by their Area Head before the end of Semester Two. Area Heads are responsible for ensuring that all eligible teaching staff are engaged with the process.

**Figure 1: Flow chart to demonstrate the Teaching Observation/Review Process**



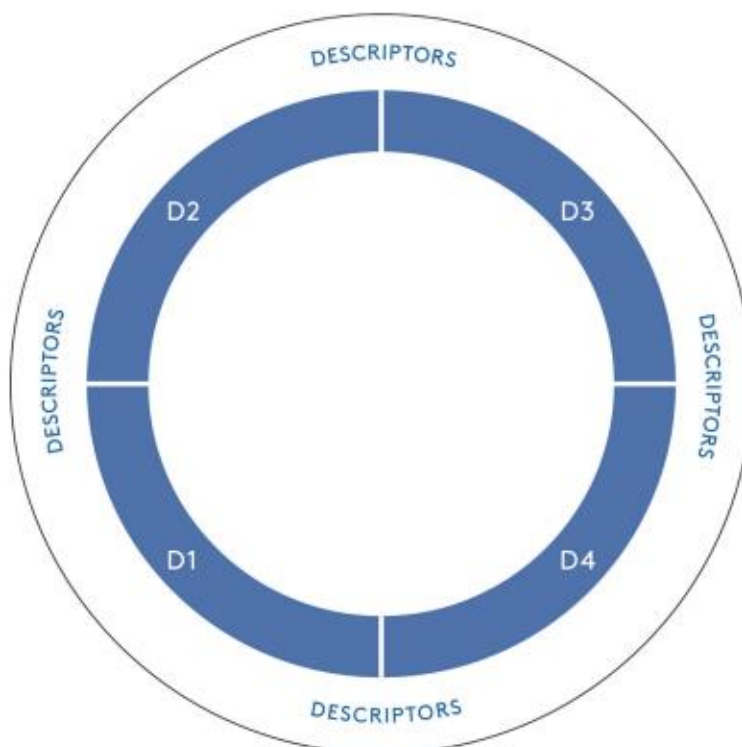
## Appendix 1 - Professional Standards Framework



# Descriptors

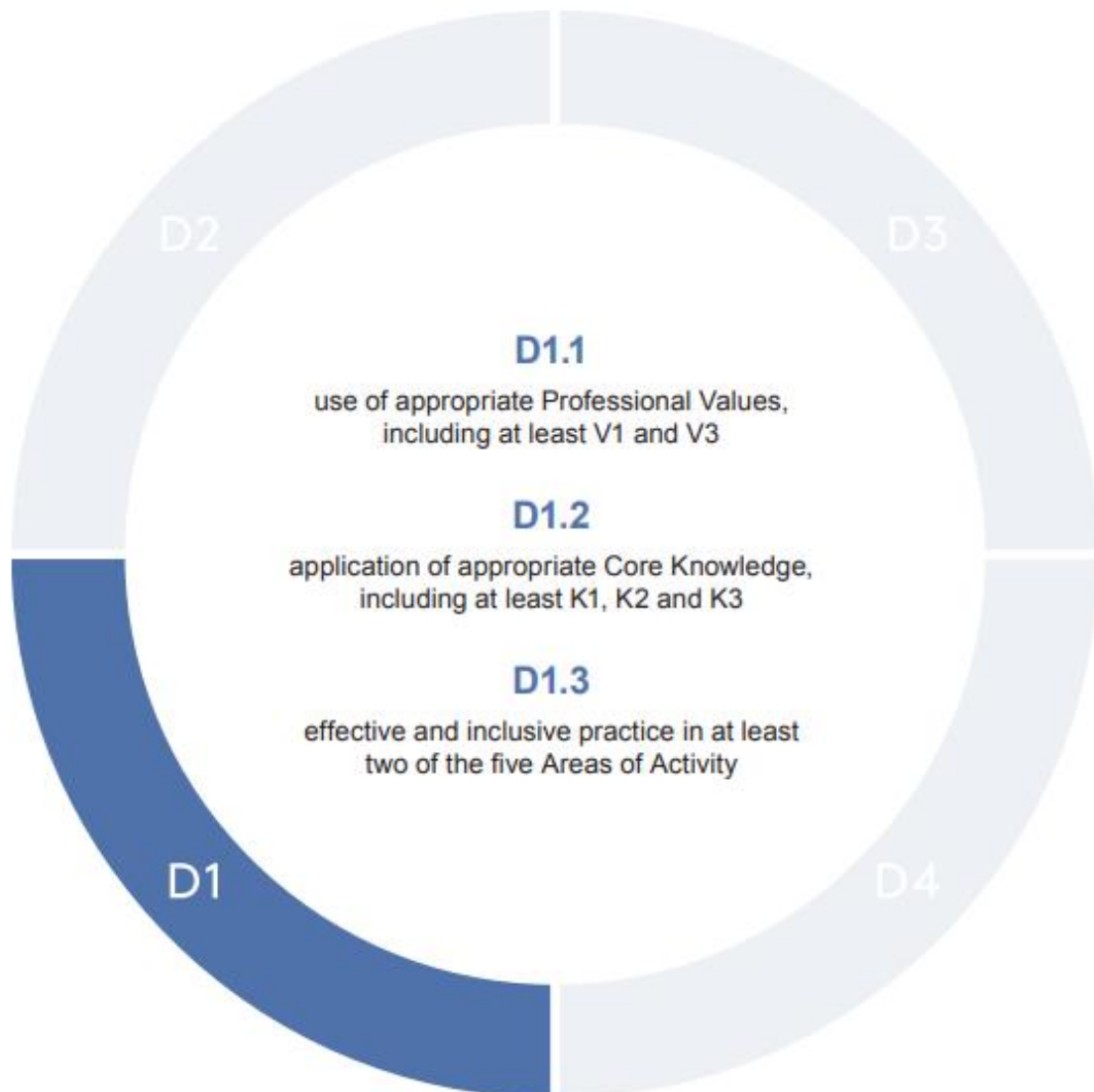
## What are Descriptors?

- Four Descriptors, each consist of an introduction and a set of three criteria statements.
- These define the key characteristics of four broad categories of practice. Incorporating the Dimensions, each Descriptor identifies the extent of practice required to meet it and recognises the variety of practice and roles undertaken by professionals who teach and/or support learning.
- **Individuals** use the Descriptors to plan their development and evidence their practice to achieve professional recognition.
- **Institutions** use the Descriptors as a basis for initial and continuing professional development and recognition programmes, to inform career/ progression pathways and support talent development.
- **Professional organisations** use the Descriptors as a basis for activities and recognition frameworks that support the professional development of individuals and institutions.



# Descriptor 1

D1 is suitable for individuals whose practice enables them to evidence some Dimensions. Effectiveness of practice in teaching and/or support of learning is demonstrated through evidence of:



**Descriptor 1 aligns with Advance HE  
recognition as Associate Fellow.**

## Descriptor 2

D2 is suitable for individuals whose practice with learners has breadth and depth, enabling them to evidence all Dimensions. Effectiveness of practice in teaching and/or support of high-quality learning is demonstrated through evidence of:



**Descriptor 2 aligns with Advance HE recognition as Fellow.**

## Appendix 2 - Teaching Observation and Teaching Review Form

TEACHING OBSERVATION, AND TEACHING REVIEW FORM			
<b>Observation Type</b>	Teaching Observation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Teaching Review
			<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Academic Year</b>	2024/25		
<b>Lecturer</b>			
<b>Observer</b>			
<b>Date, Time, Room</b>			
<b>Course, Module</b>			
<b>Focus/Content/Aim of session</b>			
<b>How I intend to achieve this</b>			
<b>What I hope to gain from the review</b>			



Points for Discussion					
<b>Observer</b> Points raised in the dialogue					
<b>Observer</b> Insights gained from the dialogue					
<b>Lecturer</b> Insights gained from the dialogue					
<b>What standards have been observed during this session</b> (see: Appendix 1)	<b>Areas of Activity (A1-A5)</b>				
	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
	<b>Core Knowledge (K1-K5)</b>				
	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5
	<b>Professional Values (V1-V5)</b>				
	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5
<b>Session strengths for sharing at L&amp;T forums and committee meetings</b>					
<b>Main action points for Development</b>	1. Specific area to be developed				
	2. Specific area to be developed				
	3. Specific area to be developed				

Signed Observer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed Lecturer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**When completed please send a copy of this form to both your Area Head and UCC Academic Services**