



UNIVERSITY  
CENTRE  
SOUTH DEVON



## HIGHER EDUCATION

### OBSERVATION PROCESS PROCEDURE (PR38)

2019/2020



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## Document Control

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### APPROVAL

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Background to this policy**

The College has, for many years, operated a policy of observing and making judgments about the quality of teaching and learning for Further Education (FE) and separately for Higher Education (HE). During this time, both procedures have evolved. In line with this evolution of thinking and practice, a working group reviewed the current documentation, along with a critique of practice and process. Resulting in a revised process, with closer alignment to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Higher Education

### **1.2. Context**

With significant changes in the national landscape of higher education, imminent in the form of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), there is likely to be the need to provide evidence to support the external quality monitoring of the College's teaching. This, coupled with the increasing significance placed on the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) and being lauded as a possible benchmarking tool in measuring teaching excellence within the TEF, has informed the approach to this policy.

### **1.3. Aims of this procedure**

This procedure aims to:

- reflect current discourse within the higher education sector regarding peer review, peer observation and reflective practice to inform the practices, approaches and enhancement activities within the College's higher education provision.
- complement and support the advancement of the realisation of the College's ambitions as encapsulated within its strategic plan and its HE Strategy.
- empower its HE teaching teams to actively reflect on their current practice whilst informing the reflection on practice among their peers and thus contribute towards the college-wide enhancement agenda.
- incorporate the student voice to give a powerful and meaningful input into the teaching they experience and to further strengthen the partnership between the College and its students as partners in the teaching and learning process.

## **1.4.What is HE Observation Review (HEOR)?**

HEOR is a process that helps define higher education from further education through the use and process of reflective practice to inform improvements in teaching; 'providing formative feedback...can be one of the most powerful approaches to academic development' (MacKinnon, 2001). It is often seen as being distinct from the graded approach used within the College's FE provision that is often described as being 'seen in the prescriptive and formulaic nature of Ofsted criteria which present a 'recipe' for the perfect lesson – a recipe which many staff feel is at odds with their practice when engaged in HE teaching' (Gray, 2010).

HEOR, whilst often focused on the use of observations, is a broader set of activities that inform and are then impacted by the process of peer observation. It is closely linked to the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education and, as such, is intertwined with other indicators and activities that impact upon that agenda.

A key feature of the enhancement of teaching and learning is the student voice. Student views are collected through many means but primarily a record is made through meetings and surveys.

Another key strand of activity is that of External Examining, peers from another institution formally review assessment activities to help improve the practice of teaching, learning and assessment.

Whilst, within the wider context of higher education in the UK peer review can take these forms and is understood in varying ways, this policy seeks to make use of peer review but within the context of the College's strategic aims and culture.

## **1.5.Peer review and scholarly activity**

Participation within a HEOR process is a form of scholarly activity (as defined within the College's HE Scholarly Activity Procedure). It therefore lends itself to being evidence that can be used when applying for recognition against the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) Professional Standards Framework (PSF) that demonstrates individual impact on teaching and learning within higher education.

The observation forms devised by the College are mapped to the PSF to help enable this process of reflection in order to support application for recognition. The College's commitment to supporting its staff in applying for recognition is given in more detail in the HE Scholarly Activity procedure.

## **2. POINTS OF REFERENCE**

### **2.1.Internal points of reference**

This policy and procedure should be read within the context of the following College documents:

- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy
- Higher Education Strategy
- HE Scholarly and Research Procedure

## **2.2.External points of reference**

This policy has been developed with due reference to key external documents, including: The UK Quality Code for higher education, with particular reference to Part B, Chapter B3 'Teaching and Learning' (September 2012). This chapter expects:

*Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.'*

A full list of references used is provided within the appendices.

## **3. ENGAGING IN OBSERVATION**

### **3.1.Expectations of staff engagement**

The aspiration of the College, in order to work towards enhancement of teaching, is that all staff involved in teaching HE will be expected to participate within the HEOR process by being observed once per academic year, or once per every two academic years if also teaching across FE.

The programme will be monitored by the quality and HE Team who will record the peer observations that are planned and have been completed centrally. The quality Team will also hold records of each peer observation completed.

The outcomes from the HEOR can then be used to inform discussions at the point of appraisals with management, where reflecting on teaching quality and practice is discussed.

HEOR will be conducted by the HECOT, which will expand as those HE PCs or in some cases HE Leads who have been observed may become part of the HECOT.

This HEOR will be used exclusively when observations are taking place when staff are being observed teaching Higher Education.

The HEOR may inform targets as part of the PPDR process in-line with College Practice

## **4. THE PROCESS OF OBSERVATION**

### **4.1.Preparing for observation**

#### **Scheduling and arranging peer observations**

The quality team will hold a record for the observations for the current academic cycle that will attempt to track all staff teaching in HE to ensure that they all have the opportunity to participate. It is envisaged that the HECOT will act as a conduit to encourage engagement with the process and maintain an active dialogue with the HECOT to help the College realise its aspiration of all HE teaching staff taking part in peer review.

#### **Training and support**

The College will provide training and support to enable and operationalise the peer observation process as it recognises that 'without resources to expedite the process...and to support any identified development needs, the process becomes meaningless' (Shortland, 2004). This will be

facilitated by the HE Team via the TLCHE.

### **The role of the observer**

The TLCHE will lead the training programme to support the eventual embedding of the peer observation process which will form part of their wider remit to support and provide a comprehensive programme of training for HE teams at the College. Training will be available to support all HE staff and will be delivered on a rolling programme each academic year.

Within the College's HE Observation model the observer plays key roles:

- To offer reflections on the teaching and learning observed to inform enhancement to their colleague's teaching practice.
- To reflect on the teaching and learning observed to inform their own teaching practice.

The observer is as much part of the process as the person being observed. 'This is active self-development: an intra-personal process, which encourages awareness, experiment and the sharing and dissemination of good practice' (Cosh, 1998). Of these roles the latter is likely to cause consternation among teams in terms of their role in making a judgement and is slightly at odds with the purpose of a truly reflective peer review system.

The observer will use the forms devised by the College available within the appendices to inform the process of the review and record the findings and reflections resulting from it.

### **Practical considerations**

Below is a checklist of the actions that need to be considered when preparing to undertake a peer observation:

- In-line with the cross college process, the HE Manager will align members of the HECOT to those in scope for an HE Observation
- Establish contact with each other and agree a mutually convenient approach to the observation that will benefit both of you.
- Agree in advance any specific pedagogical or organisational aspects that the observer will give a particular focus to, if appropriate.
- Ensure that students are advised of the purpose of the peer observation prior to the lesson commencing, ideally before the day of the lesson and that their feedback forms a critical part of the review process.
- Build in time to meet with students immediately after the session to gather their feedback
- Agree a suitable time slot (normally around 30mins) to meet again and discuss the feedback. This should be as soon after the observation as possible, but normally not more than a week.

### **Preparing to be observed**

When you have agreed to be observed through the peer observation process there are a number of considerations you should be mindful of in advance of the observation taking place that are listed below:

- You may want to liaise with the observer in advance and send them documentation relating to the session/activities they are planning to observe
- Take time to consider if there are any particular areas of your practise that you would like specific feedback on and communicate this to the observer in advance of the observation

### **4.2.Student engagement in the peer observation**

Students form a critical part of the peer observation process. Students should be notified ahead of the planned observation and given a short briefing about the process and what is expected from them following the observation (a short briefing guide is given within the appendices which can either be used as a point of reference or copied and distributed to the group).

Feedback from the students should be gathered immediately after the session and captured within the form.

### **4.3.Using the HEOR forms**

The forms provided should be used to help guide the observer in the areas that they give consideration to and feedback on the colleague being observed. Whilst there are specific criteria and aspects to the form it is not mandatory or expected that every criteria would be reported back on. It is useful to give a detailed but succinct level of feedback that can be used to map to the PSF criteria given.

Following the observation a coherent written summary should be made in the corresponding box on the front of the form and an overall judgement confirmed for the lesson/session/activity.

#### **4.4.Guidance on giving feedback following the peer observation**

##### **Giving feedback**

If giving the feedback then MacKinnon's guidance (2001) may be useful to bear in mind 'the feedback session should always begin by encouraging the teacher to review his or her own performance. This serves to encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation while providing consultants with the opportunity to learn more about the teacher's point of view.' Providing balanced, supportive but honest feedback that underpins the improvement of practice is the aim of this element of peer observation.

Ensuring that your colleague has the opportunity to reflect and to have guidance on those reflections is critical. Remember that this is a peer observation and as such neither of you are the expert on the topic or pedagogical approach(es) observed; please do not offer absolutes in terms of solutions. Giving guidance, reflections on your own practice and experiences is how this process is intended to work from the observers' point of view.

##### **Receiving feedback**

Receiving feedback is a chance for reflection upon the session that has just been observed and to pick up any points you may have specifically asked the observer to focus on ahead of the observation. You need to be open to the feedback given by your colleague, both good and areas they are highlighting for improvement; this is not a personal critique but a chance for you to make informed improvements to your practice that ultimately benefit you and your students. It is also an opportunity for you to help the observer reflect on how their own practice and whether there is anything they can take from the observation to inform their own practice and approaches; trying to tease this out of them may be a useful exercise.

##### **Using feedback**

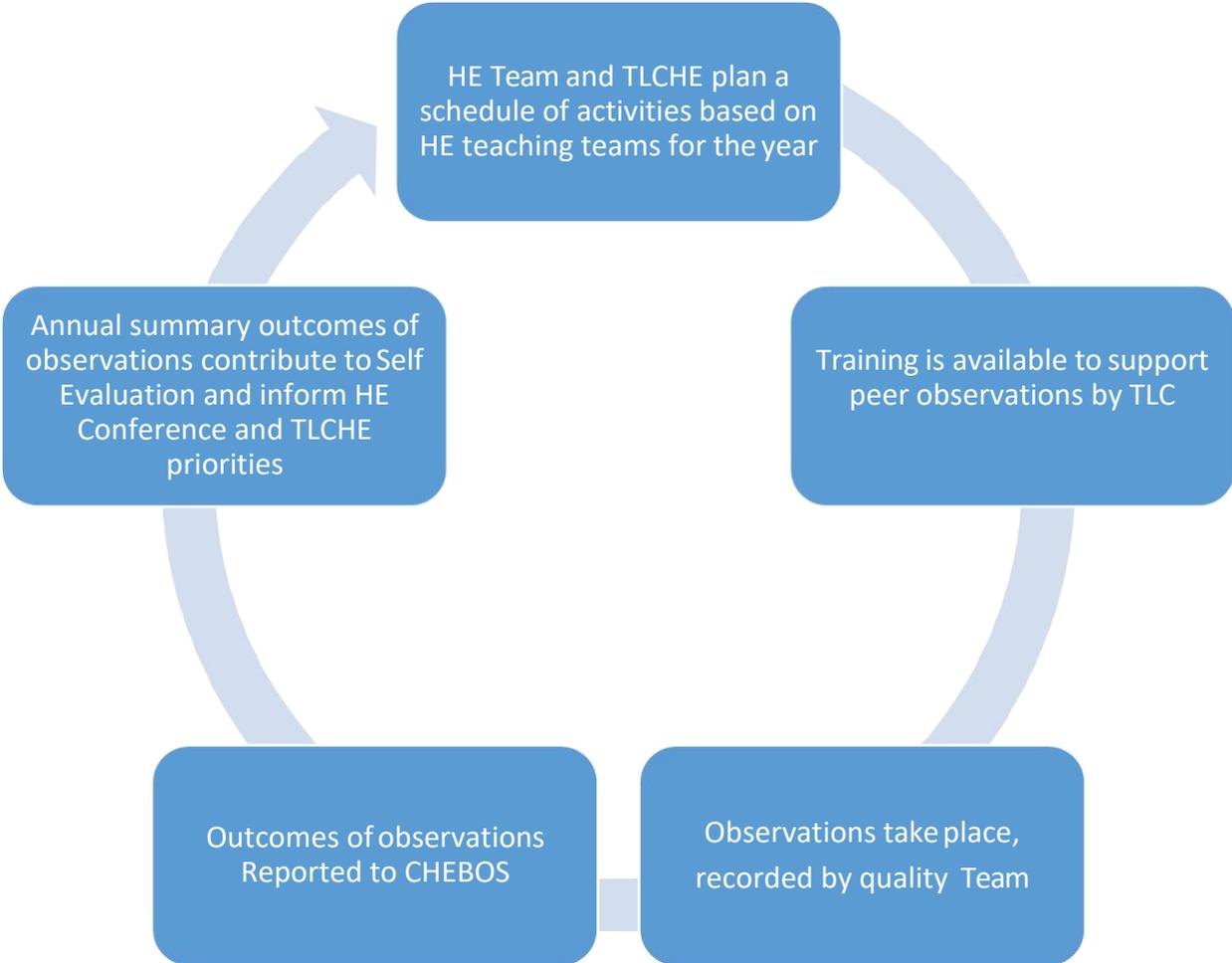
Feedback is not just limited to the action of giving and receiving it. Using the feedback to inform enhancement of your own teaching is the point of this exercise. That may be implicit in the observation process but, for the purposes of managerial necessity, it is important that it is documented in case it is needed as future institutional evidence of this activity taking place. Ideally it will form part of your professional development log and will count towards an application to the PSF in the longer term, if you haven't already achieved it.

## **5. REVIEWING THE POLICY**

This policy and procedure will be reviewed periodically and amended as deemed necessary by the HE Team in consultation with stakeholders from across the College, it is anticipated it may go through several revisions early on to ensure it is meeting the needs of the College and works effectively operationally for all involved. The College Higher Education Board of Studies (CHEBOS) will approve amendments.

6. APPENDICES

6.1. Peer Review and Observation Process Diagram



**Stages in HE Learning Observation**

Stage	Process	Supporting documentation	By Whom
1	HEMAR aligns HECOT with those in scope Observer notifies Teaching Practitioner of the intended observation		Observer and Practitioner
2	Carry out observation	Form 1a	Observer and Practitioner
3	Meeting the students	Form 1b	Observer
4	Observer makes value judgments reflecting the Appendix 1 and 2	Form 1c	Observer
5	Practitioner reflects on observation	Form 2	Practitioner
6	Professional discussion takes place	Form 3	Observer and Practitioner
7	Observer reflects on their practice	Form 4	Observer

## HE Learning Review – Observation of Teaching and Learning Form

<b>Name of Teaching Practitioner:</b>	
<b>Name of Observer:</b>	
<b>Job Role of Observer:</b>	
<b>Date of Observation:</b>	
<b>Programme Title:</b>	
<b>Module Title &amp; Level</b>	
<b>Topic/subject of the session</b>	

**Part 1a: To be completed by the observer during the observation.**

<b>Comments on:</b>	
<b>Learning Environment</b>	
<b>Comments and description of the session observed (non-evaluative):</b>	

**Part 1b Summary of the students' feedback:**

See appendix 1 for guidance areas to consider

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**Strengths**

**Areas for Development**

**Part 1c** Make evaluative comment using the Characteristics statements in appendix 2 as guidance and consider the following aspects: Teaching and Learning; Subject Matter; Assessment; Professional Values; Scholarly Activity

See appendix 1 for further guidance.

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**Part 2: Reflection to be completed by the practitioner after the observation and emailed to the observer prior to part 3 taking place.**

Please take some time to reflect on the session you have observed.  
 Make evaluative comment using the Characteristics statements in appendix 2 as guidance and consider the following aspects: Teaching and Learning; Subject Matter; Assessment; Professional Values; Scholarly Activity  
 See appendix 1 for further guidance.

Strengths	Areas for development

**Part 3: Summary to be completed at the professional discussion by the practitioner and observer. (Post Observation Meeting)**

Action Plan for Development				
<i>Action Point</i>	<i>Area for Development</i>	<i>How can this be achieved?</i>	<i>Who can support you?</i>	<i>By when?</i>

Action Plan for Sharing Best Practice				
Best practice is defined as an example of innovation or skill that greatly enhanced a specific aspect of the teaching, learning or assessment.				
<i>Action Point</i>	<i>Area for Best Practice</i>	<i>How can this be shared?</i>	<i>Who can support you?</i>	<i>By when?</i>

#### **Part 4: Reflection by the observer on own practice**

Please take some time to reflect on the session you have observed.  
What have you learnt as result of observing the session that might help inform your own practice?  
*This maps to Core Knowledge (K6) within the Professional Standards Framework.*

## Appendix 1: Aspects to consider when evaluating HE taught sessions

<p><b>Planning for Learning:</b>  <i>This maps to 'Areas of Activity' A1 and A5, 'Core Knowledge' K2 and potentially 'Professional Values' V1, V2, V3 and V4 within the Professional Standards Framework</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Evaluate the quality of the session plans; possibly including course documentation, how well it links to the learning outcomes and level of study.</li> <li>✓ What teaching theory/pedagogical approaches are going to be used? How is scholarly activity of the lecturer going to inform the session?</li> <li>✓ Are there opportunities for recognizing equality of opportunity and diversity for learners?</li> <li>✓ Request to see the Schedule of delivery - does it make explicit links back to the module/ intended learning outcomes (ILOs)? How well are students being enabled to meet the ILOs?</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Areas of Activity: Teaching and Learning:</b>  <i>This section maps to the 'Areas of Activity' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (A1-A5).</i></p> <p>Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to the quality/effectiveness of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Teaching approach and feedback to learners as part of the session</li> <li>✓ Learning environment; physical and how the group/lecturer interact</li> <li>✓ How students are supported during and, if relevant, outside of the session</li> <li>✓ Evidence of use of scholarly activity to inform teaching; are the students made aware of it?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Core Knowledge: The Subject Matter, Assessment and Quality:</b>  <i>This section maps to the 'Core Knowledge' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (K1-K6).</i></p> <p>Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The subject material; relevance, quality and appropriateness to the level of study</li> <li>✓ Appropriateness of the methods of teaching to the subject area and level of study</li> <li>✓ Engagement of students in the session; how well do they appear to be learning?</li> <li>✓ The use of appropriate technologies to enhance the learning and the value it adds to the session</li> <li>✓ Methods used to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching within the session</li> </ul>	<p><b>Professional Values: Approach and Context:</b>  <i>This section maps to the 'Professional Values' dimension in the Professional Standards Framework; (V1-V4).</i></p> <p>Please provide evaluative comments that include reference to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Respect of individual needs of learners and diversity of the student body; how does their approach demonstrate this?</li> <li>✓ Evidence of pedagogical approaches used and their effectiveness</li> <li>✓ Use of evidence-informed approaches and the outcomes from research, scholarship and CPD that overtly inform the session</li> <li>✓ Acknowledgement of the wider context in which the students operate; regarding the broader subject base and/ or as citizens in a wider community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Feedback:</b>  <i>This maps to the Professional Standards Framework, Core Knowledge (K5).</i></p> <p>Possible areas to prompt students to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Do they feel that the sessions are helping with their own learning and independent study?</li> <li>✓ Do they know what is expected of them before, during and after the session?</li> <li>✓ Is this a typical session?</li> <li>✓ Are they aware of other skills that might have been supported through the session today; other than just the subject knowledge – e.g. communication, team working, leadership, planning, organizational skills , or industry specific skills</li> <li>✓ Are they normally able to access the materials from sessions via the VLE?</li> </ul>		

## Appendix 2: Graded characteristics of HE taught sessions (can be used as statement banks)

### Characteristics of a 'Commended' Session:

The session is **very professional** within an **appropriately scholarly learning environment**. Students are actively being supported to **work towards becoming autonomous** and are **highly motivated and engaged**. **Academic standards are** seamlessly **upheld** by the session being in alignment with the level descriptors and directed towards achievement of the learning outcomes.

- ✓ **Relationships** within the group **are facilitated effectively** with students demonstrating high levels of mutual respect.
- ✓ It is evident that **students are highly motivated; attendance is high**, with all or very nearly all students present. Students are **engaging consistently well** with the session and demonstrate **unflinching readiness to share ideas** within the learning environment
- ✓ Teaching is strongly aligned to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in terms of the **level of the teaching being appropriate and enabling students to work towards meeting the learning outcomes** detailed within the approved course documentation.
- ✓ **Research and scholarly activity undertaken by the lecturer enhances the session**. Teaching is supported by excellent range of **subject relevant, evidence-based** materials.
- ✓ **The session is appropriately challenging**, allowing students to take control of their own learning with regard to the level of study.
- ✓ **The teaching materials and approach demonstrates consistently accurate and appropriate levels of good academic practice**. For example slides with quotes are referenced in line with expected standards, such as Harvard Referencing.
- ✓ **Students are encouraged to excel as independent learners**, it is strongly evident that the teaching is designed to support learners in becoming more autonomous.
- ✓ **The dialogue from the lecturer demonstrates formative feedback** that supports learning.
- ✓ Teaching contributes to supporting **interpersonal and professional behaviours** and other transferable skills that contribute towards **graduate attributes**.

### Characteristics of a Session that 'Meets Expectations':

The session is **professional** within an **appropriately scholarly learning environment**. Students are being supported to **work towards becoming autonomous** and are **motivated and engaged**. **Academic standards are upheld** by the session being in alignment with the level descriptors and directed towards achievement of the learning outcomes.

- ✓ **Relationships** within the group **are facilitated** with students demonstrating mutual respect.
- ✓ It is evident that **students are motivated; with most students in attendance**. Students are **engaging** with the session and **show some readiness to share ideas** within the learning environment.
- ✓ Teaching is aligned to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in terms of the **level of the teaching being appropriate and enabling students to work towards meeting the learning outcomes** detailed within the approved course documentation.
- ✓ **There is some evidence that research and scholarly activity undertaken by the lecturer informs the session**. Teaching is supported by **subject relevant, evidence-based** materials.
- ✓ **The teaching materials and approach demonstrates consistently accurate and appropriate levels of good academic practice**. For example slides with quotes are referenced in line with expected standards, such as Harvard Referencing.
- ✓ **Students are encouraged to become independent learners**.
- ✓ **The dialogue from the lecturer demonstrates formative feedback** that supports learning.
- ✓ Teaching contributes to supporting **interpersonal and professional behaviours** and other transferable skills that contribute towards **graduate attributes**.

### Characteristics of a Session that 'Requires Improvement':

The session requires development within the scholarly learning environment. Students may not be becoming autonomous and may not be making adequate progress. They maybe a lack of engagement and/or motivation. Academic standards are at risk of not being upheld, and the session has limited alignment to the level descriptors.

- ✓ Insufficient evidence of **scholarly or professional** activity having a significant impact on teaching and learning. Evidence that content is not aligned to support learning and teaching at an advanced level.
- ✓ Evidence of insufficient attention to **health and safety or ignorance of college policies or procedures**. Risks are not identified or dealt with in a timely manner.
- ✓ Insufficient evidence of any support for students with their study skills.
- ✓ Insufficient evidence for any **integration of ICT into course design**. No evidence of any VLE.
- ✓ Insufficient evidence for any **assessment criteria**.
- ✓ Insufficient evidence of any appropriate feedback. Evidence for confusing or unclear feedback. Evidence for unreasonable delays in providing feedback.
- ✓ Insufficient evidence of effective teaching or evidence of **teaching methods that obstruct achievement** of the intended learning outcomes. Any evidence of failure to address specific E&D issues. Evidence for racist, sexist, ageist or homophobic abuse by a tutor or a student is left unchallenged.

## 7. REFERENCES

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