



**A CLASSROOM
OBSERVATION
PROTOCOL**
GUIDELINES FOR
NUT SCHOOL
REPRESENTATIVES

National
Union
of Teachers



A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOL: NUT GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVES

PREFACE

Random and excessive classroom observations are a serious problem for many teachers. These guidelines are aimed at protecting members from the stress and unnecessary workload caused by excessive use of classroom and lesson observations.

The 2006 Performance Management Regulations (England and Wales) require each school governing body to consult all teachers within its school and to seek to agree a performance management policy with 'the recognised trade unions, having regard to the consultation with all teachers'. The performance management policy should contain the school's classroom observation protocol.

Agreement by school governing bodies on their performance management policies and classroom observation protocols should be reached prior to the start of the performance management cycle. Guidance from the Government on performance management and classroom observation, entitled 'Rewards and Incentives Group – Teachers' and Head Teachers' Performance Management', has been published alongside the regulations. It is referred to within the NUT's guidelines where relevant.

These guidelines, on the provisions which should be included in a schools' classroom observation protocol, take into account fully the Education (School Teacher Performance Management) (England) Regulations 2006.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Sinnott". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Steve Sinnott
General Secretary

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

1. There are two statutory requirements which require school governing bodies and head teachers to organise classroom observation.
 - As part of their responsibilities to carry out the school performance management policies determined by school governing bodies, head teachers are required to ensure that classroom observation arrangements established by a classroom observation protocol are in place.
 - Head teachers are required by the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document to put in place arrangements for the evaluation of standards of teaching and learning in their schools.

Together, these requirements embody the bulk of classroom observation.

2. The responsibilities of head teachers for evaluating standards of teaching and learning combined with the pressure on them to complete Ofsted self-evaluation forms have significantly increased levels of classroom observation. Many teachers experience classroom observation, therefore, as unplanned and excessive and are unclear about its purpose. The NUT's guidelines are intended to remove unreasonable classroom observation procedures.
3. Classroom observation should neither be a burden for the teacher concerned nor an opportunity to 'police' a teacher's performance.
4. The Regulations place a maximum of three hours on classroom observation except where evidence emerges that gives rise to concern about a teacher's performance. This at least makes clear that ordinary classroom observation under the Regulations is to observe performance which is generally satisfactory.
5. **The three hour limit on classroom observation under the performance management regulations is a maximum.** Classroom observation should be no longer than is appropriate for positive and constructive purposes. Classroom observation for the purposes of performance management, therefore, should be the subject of agreement between the reviewer and the teacher concerned on its objectives and its duration. It should be clearly treated as an opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate his or her teaching skills and receive constructive feedback.
6. The NUT believes that the three hour limit should be considered more than sufficient for classroom observation for all purposes. What should be viewed as a right and opportunity for teachers will otherwise be a burden which will defeat its objective. That principle is followed throughout this guidance.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION – THE REQUIREMENT TO CONSULT THE NUT

7. In each school the head teacher is required to consult all teachers at their schools and to seek to agree the formulation of a classroom observation protocol with the recognised trade unions, having regard to the results of the consultations. **The NUT expects the head teacher to agree with the NUT representative and NUT members within the school, the NUT's guidelines on the establishment of the classroom observation protocol.** The NUT's guidelines apply to classroom observation arising from performance management regulation requirements, to the statutory responsibilities of head teachers to evaluate teaching and learning, and to other forms of classroom observation.

NUT GUIDELINES ON SCHOOL CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROTOCOLS

8. These guidelines apply to all qualified teachers who teach within schools. A classroom observation protocol should be the subject of consultation with all teachers within each school. As indicated above, agreement should be reached between the head teacher and the recognised trade unions within the school on the formulation of the protocol. These guidelines apply to classroom observation carried out for all purposes.

Classroom Observation and Teacher Performance: A Summary of Statutory Requirements

9. Performance management is a statutory and contractual obligation, as set out in paragraph 76.4 of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2006. The Education (School Teacher Performance Management) (England) Regulations 2006 stipulate that the total period of classroom observation arranged for any teacher under the regulations should not exceed three hours per performance management cycle and that this time should be reduced on a pro rata basis where the teacher works part-time. The regulations state, "*where evidence emerges which gives rise to concern about the reviewee's teaching performance, classroom observations may be arranged in addition*".
10. In addition to being responsible for establishing arrangements for classroom observations for performance management purposes, head teachers are required to observe teachers carrying out their duties as part of their responsibilities for, "*evaluating the standards of teaching and learning in the school and ensuring that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained*" (paragraph 63.7 of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2006). This may include visits to classrooms while lessons are in progress.
11. These guidelines address these statutory requirements. In addition, they outline procedures with respect to the conduct of classroom observation for:
 - the purposes of Ofsted inspections;
 - the purposes of carrying out the local authority's statutory responsibilities;
 - the induction of newly qualified teachers; and
 - implementing capability procedures.
12. Attached to the guidelines is advice on the conduct of governor visits.

The Arrangements for Classroom Observation

13. Classroom observations should be undertaken strictly in accordance with the protocol of the school for the conduct of classroom observation. They should be supportive and developmental.
14. Classroom observation arrangements for the purposes of performance management should be agreed between the reviewer and the reviewee and should be set out in the performance review statement of each teacher.
15. In addition, the arrangements set out in the statements should specify that they should be used to gather information for school self-evaluation and for the purpose of enabling the head teacher to discharge his or her responsibility to evaluate teaching and learning within the school.

16. Classroom observation of qualified teachers should be conducted by other qualified teachers. All those who act as observers for classroom observation purposes should have adequate preparation and the appropriate skills to undertake observation and to provide constructive feedback and support.
17. Sufficient timetabled release time should be provided to enable the reviewer or observer to give proper time to the task and to enable verbal feedback to be provided as soon as possible. Verbal feedback by the reviewer should be given immediately and in any case no later than the end of the next school day. Planning, Preparation and Assessment time should not be used for this purpose.
18. The reviewer should complete a short written record of the observation, feedback and any subsequent follow up work. The observation record should be sufficient to meet the needs of each teacher and the school. It should summarise the focus, what was learned from the observation, the feedback given and any subsequent actions or other follow up. The record should not lead to unnecessary workload for either the reviewer or reviewee. The record of the observation should be made available to the reviewee within five working days of the observation. The reviewee should make, and where necessary, record any comments he or she may have on the record of the observation.

The Expectations and Time Allocations for Classroom Observations

19. Classroom observation can be conducted in such a way as to achieve a range of objectives at the same time. Often there is no need for classroom observation to be conducted separately for different purposes. In particular, both classroom observation for the purposes of fulfilling performance management requirements and the requirements on the head teacher to ensure that teaching and learning is evaluated, can be conducted at the same time.
20. Local authority advisers, inspectors and consultants may be invited by head teachers into schools to conduct classroom observations. The purpose of these observations should be made clear to the teachers who are being observed and agreement sought with the teachers on when and whether they should take place. If they are invited in to provide information to head teachers on the quality of teaching and learning then such observations are covered by the protocol's time limits set out below.
21. It should be noted that the performance regulations specify that the total period of classroom observation arranged for performance management purposes **"shall not exceed three hours per cycle¹"**. The Government's guidance emphasises that the amount of classroom observation *"should be regarded as a maximum not a standard"*. The Government's guidance states further that, *"performance management arrangements are integral to fulfilling this duty, (e.g., the head teacher's duty to evaluate the standards of teaching and learning within the school) and head teachers may consider the classroom observations they agree for performance management are sufficient and that drop-in should not be needed"*.
22. Classroom observations should be multi-purpose. Therefore classroom observation for the purposes of performance management and evaluating the standards of teaching and learning should not exceed a total of three hours within each performance management cycle.

¹ Emphasis by NUT

23. Classroom observation for the purposes of performance management should be limited to one observation of a maximum of 60 minutes in length per performance management cycle, subject to the reviewee choosing to request a further observation within the three-hour maximum.
24. Classroom observation conducted by head teachers or delegated to other staff for the purposes of carrying out the statutory duties of head teachers to evaluate standards of teaching and learning, should be limited to a maximum of two additional observations per year. The maximum number of times each teacher experiences classroom observation for the purposes of performance management and the evaluation of standards of teaching and learning should be three per performance management cycle.
25. The performance management regulations indicate that if concerns arise during the review cycle or the circumstances of the reviewee change, then the amount of classroom observation agreed at the beginning of the cycle can be revisited. Any additional classroom observation should be agreed between the reviewer and reviewee. It should be recorded in a written addition to the review statement. Classroom observation for performance management purposes should not exceed a total of three hours in any event. The amount of classroom observation for evaluating the standards of teaching and learning would be reduced to fit within the three-hour maximum in these circumstances.
26. Those who undergo classroom observations for the purposes of performance management and evaluation of standards of teaching and learning should have at least five working days' notice before the observations take place. Teachers in part-time employment should be given notice of their planning and review meetings which is both reasonable and conforms to the intention of the advice for teachers in full-time employment. Unannounced drop-ins for the purposes of monitoring teaching and learning are unacceptable.
27. Teachers carrying out classroom observations for the purposes of performance management should carry out one lesson observation only per year for each member of staff within the area of their responsibility.
28. Teachers and head teachers who have been given the responsibility for carrying out classroom observations for the purposes of performance management should receive sufficient and appropriate training before carrying out those responsibilities.
29. There should be a reasonable amount of time between classroom observations irrespective of the purpose of those observations. Classroom observations generated by requirements on the school should not take place immediately after an inspection conducted by Ofsted, for example. A bunching of classroom observations, albeit for different purposes, is unacceptable. The primary purposes of each classroom observation should be specified as should any specific aspects of the teaching performance of the reviewee that should be evaluated during each observation.
30. The head teacher should consult on the pattern of classroom observations which teachers can expect annually. Agreement should be sought by head teachers with their teaching staffs and their recognised organisations on these arrangements.
31. Teachers should be observed on an equitable basis. In any one school, the number of classroom observations per year within each performance cycle should be the same for every teacher.

The Conduct of Classroom Observations

32. Teachers should be made aware of the purpose or purposes of any proposed observation before it takes place. Observations should not take place in a negative atmosphere. They should be conducted in a supportive and professional manner and should be neither intrusive nor threatening.
33. Classroom observations:
- should be undertaken with professionalism, integrity and courtesy;
 - should involve objective evaluation;
 - should be reported honestly and fairly;
 - should involve accurate communication about its purpose and outcome;
 - should be conducted in the best interests of the pupils at the school; and
 - should ensure that information gained through the observation is confidential to the reviewer and the reviewee.

Before the Observation

34. The purpose or purposes of any observation should be made clear before it takes place. The reviewer or the observer conducting the observation should respond positively to any reasonable request from the reviewee/observed teacher on when the observation should take place. Sufficient time should be allocated within the school day to enable the participants in the classroom observation to discuss and agree the arrangements for the observation. The information and arrangements should be available to and accepted by both the observer and the observed beforehand. The information and arrangements should include:
- the reasons why the observation is taking place;
 - the procedures to be followed;
 - an agreement about the recording of any evaluation outcomes made and their reporting;
 - a discussion about the aims and objectives of the lesson; and
 - where relevant the identity of the person or persons from who further information may be obtained if required.
35. All teachers should be given at least five days' notice of the observation of any lesson.
36. The checklist below should be used for discussions between the observer/reviewer and the observed/reviewee.
- Has the purpose of the observation been made clear?
 - What is the focus of the observation?
 - Which lesson or parts of lessons are going to be observed?
 - Has there been an opportunity for the teacher being observed to describe the context of the lesson?

- What level of involvement should the observer/reviewer have in the observed reviewee lesson?
- Has a format for recording the observation been agreed with the observer/reviewee?
- When and how should feedback be given?
- What use should be made of any information arising from the observation?

During the Observation

37. During the lesson or lessons, the observer or reviewer should respond positively to any reasonable request from the teacher being observed. The observer should act in an unobtrusive, sensitive and in as professional a manner as possible.
38. Reviewers or observers should indicate what is required including where they wish to sit and the copy of any lesson plans.
39. The first few minutes of any lesson are always the most unsettled. The lesson observation should be a substantial part of the lesson, not just the first few minutes, therefore.
40. Each observed teacher should have a verbal feedback followed by a written feedback. At the verbal feedback, the teacher who has been observed may correct any factual errors on the part of the observer. These should be taken into account when the final plan or statement is agreed. The written feedback should be an accurate reflection of the agreed verbal feedback.
41. Feedback should include all the positive aspects of the lesson and practical advice for realistic improvements.
42. Teachers should have access to all written accounts of the observation after their lessons.

After the Observation

43. The feedback following the observation should be well balanced and constructive. Where possible, feedback should be given at the time and in the manner agreed during pre-observation discussions.
44. Feedback may take a number of forms. In the case of classroom observation which falls outside the requirements of performance management, a brief discussion after the class has been dismissed should be sufficient. In the case of classroom observation for the purposes of performance management, feedback should take place within the normal school day, and in an appropriate environment which ensures confidentiality. Timetabled release time should be provided as soon as possible to enable the reviewer and reviewee to organise time for a discussion on the outcomes of classroom observation. In addition, the reviewer should be given sufficient time within the school day to put in written form the conclusions agreed with the reviewee on the outcomes of the classroom observation. Time for preparation and feedback for classroom observation for performance management purposes should be made available in addition to, and not part of, PPA time.
45. Teachers should be allowed to read any notes arising from the observation before any discussion takes place. They should have the opportunity to record their own comments if they wish.

46. Feedback should identify the positive points arising from the lesson and constructive advice on any areas for improvement.
47. Discussion of the professional needs of each teacher should be built into any feedback and used to identify opportunities for support and continuing professional development.
48. Plans or statements arising from observation should be kept in a secure place and remain confidential to the reviewer or observer, the reviewee or the observed and the head teacher.
49. Reports of classroom observation can be retained for up to six years. The decision on whether to make such observation reports available more widely should rest with the reviewee.

Ofsted Inspections

50. Classroom observations may be initiated by Ofsted, or by a local authority that has identified a need to intervene as part of its statutory duties. Such observations should be proportionate, reasonable and fit for purpose. Classroom observations which fall within the protocol should not take place within ten working days after a classroom observation conducted by Ofsted inspectors or after an observation conducted for statutory purposes by a representative of a local authority.
51. As part of an Ofsted inspection, classroom observation is used to gain evidence to inform inspectors' judgements on the quality of teaching and learning provided by the school. Participation in an Ofsted inspection, including classroom observation by Ofsted inspectors as part of their responsibilities, is a statutory requirement. The NUT has provided detailed guidance for members on all aspects of the Ofsted inspection process, including observation of teaching. This is available to download from the NUT website: www.teachers.org.uk.

Peer Observation and Professional Development

52. Developmental peer observation and observations for professional development purposes agreed between teachers should not involve judgements of teacher performance. In these circumstances no clip-board is required; just a friend. Peer observation involves a teacher observing the practice of another teacher and each learning from the other. It is a practical way of teachers supporting each other's practice and knowledge about teaching and learning. Peer observation should take place on a voluntary basis with teachers choosing to work together. Such observations should not involve the fulfilling of statutory requirements to complete performance management reviews or the carrying out of the head teacher's duty to evaluate teaching and learning. If peer observation is being used for these purposes, it falls within the three-hour maximum.
53. The NUT's professional development guidance, *An A-Z of Peer Coaching* is available to download from www.teachers.org.uk/resources/pdf/A-Z-peer-coaching.pdf. In addition, the NUT and General Teaching Council for England (GTC(E)) have published jointly the document *The Teachers' Professional Learning Framework: A Guide to Peer Observation*. This is available to download from the GTC(E) website www.gtce.org.uk/pdfs/peer.pdf.

54. Classroom observation may be part of a programme of professional development provided by a local authority to schools as part of improvement programmes, such as the Primary and Secondary Strategies. Head teachers may also consider classroom observation as being part of their own professional development. Where such professional development is converted into observations of the quality of teaching and learning within a school, this does not fall within the definition of professional development for the purpose of this protocol. The amount of time for such observations fall within the protocol's classroom observation time allocations instead.

Induction

55. Observations are an important part of the statutory induction process for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Teachers undergoing induction are not subject to classroom observation for the purposes of performance management. The protocol applies to inductees with respect to arrangements for the prevention of bunching of observations and to the need for all teachers to be informed of the purpose of observations prior to the observations taking place. Detailed NUT guidance on NQT induction is available to download from the NUT website: www.teachers.org.uk.

Capability Procedures

56. The number of teachers subject to capability procedures at any one time is very small compared to the overall number of teachers. Head teachers should initiate such procedures as a last resort only. Capability procedures are covered by a separate National Agreement and are not part of performance management arrangements therefore.
57. In the event of a head teacher deciding to introduce capability procedures for a teacher, the teacher concerned is advised to contact his or her union immediately for advice. Further information on capability procedures is available to download the NUT website: www.teachers.org.uk.

Governors

58. Governor visits are different from statutorily required and professionally generated observations of lessons. They do not fall within this classroom observation protocol for the purposes of observing teachers who are not head teachers. Separate guidance from the NUT is available to its head teacher members on performance management and on its relationship to the governors who are the designated performance reviewers of head teachers.
59. Individual governors may wish to visit classrooms to become familiar with the school or to observe specific aspects of the curriculum. Such visits should always be by prior arrangement and follow procedures agreed and specified by the head teacher and the governing body following consultation with the teaching staff. Such procedures should specify that governor visits are not professional observations. Governors should not evaluate the work of teachers. No report by a governor evaluating the work of a teacher or teachers should be presented to the governing body.



