

# ***Classroom Observation - ATL Guidance***

## **Introduction**

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Since the introduction of the teacher appraisal system, which came into effect on 1 September 2000 (The Education [School Teacher Appraisal] [England] Regulations), ATL members have become increasingly concerned with the number of observations of their teaching conducted by their line managers and senior management teams. Paragraph 15 (1) of the Regulations stipulates 'at least one' observation per cycle. However, the amount and frequency of classroom observations has intensified, largely as a result of the new OfSTED inspection regime which puts self evaluation at the basis of the school inspection. It is argued by some senior managers in schools that the teaching staff should be observed on a frequent basis in order for them to demonstrate to OfSTED that they have the knowledge necessary to maintain standards of teaching and learning across all subjects.

### **Poor practice in lesson observation**

ATL asserts that teachers should not be subjected to a performance management regime that places undue stress upon them, and does little or nothing to ensure that standards of teaching are satisfactory. This situation is most likely to occur when:

- Teachers are not given adequate notice of a proposed lesson observation;
- The purpose of the observation is not shared with the teacher who is to be observed;
- The focus of the observation has not been negotiated with the teacher who is to be observed;
- The observed teacher does not receive oral feedback within 24 hours of the observed lesson as a basis of an informed, professional dialogue between the teacher and the observer.

### **Good practice in lesson observation**

ATL asserts, therefore, that good practice during the observation of a member's lesson should consist of the following:

- Teachers are given adequate notice (at least three working days) of a proposed lesson observation;

- The purpose of the observation is shared with the teacher who is to be observed;
- The focus of the observation is negotiated with the teacher who is to be observed and the professional dialogue which ensues after the observation centres on the agreed focus;
- The teacher receives oral feedback within 24 hours of the observed lesson. This feedback is given as part of an informed professional dialogue in which the teacher's line manager accepts that the teacher has a professional knowledge of the pupils in the class, the curriculum and appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Observation of these good practice guidelines will ensure that excessive and unfocused observations of teachers do not occur. This will reduce teacher stress levels and, more positively, will enable a supportive, collaborative and professional dialogue between teachers and their line managers with regard to raising standards of teaching and learning.

### Capability procedures

ATL accepts that the very small number of teachers who are subject to formal capability procedures will undergo more frequent lesson observations, but the union asserts that line managers should follow these good practice guidelines in such cases.

### Classroom observation for other purposes

ATL distinguishes between observation for management purposes and for the teacher's professional development. Ultimately, the former is concerned with judgements which will influence career and pay progression, the latter with non-judgmental support. ATL strongly supports a new professionalism in which teachers can access and own continuing development. ATL believes mutually agreed observation of colleagues' classrooms, and the associated peer mentoring and coaching, to be a powerful CPD tool.

The only limits on this kind of observation, based on agreement, should be the time available for CPD to the participants. ATL is working within the Social Partnership for a contractual entitlement which will increase opportunities for this and other forms of CPD.

### ATL policy on classroom observation

**It is ATL policy that classroom observation for management purposes should be limited to one observation per year of no more than one hour in duration. This observation may be used a number of times, including for performance management and school self-assessment. Subject to opportunity there should be no limit to the number of mutually agreed observations between peers for coaching and mentoring purposes, as such observations do not form part of the teacher appraisal system.**

If you would like further information, or to comment on this briefing paper, please do so by contacting ATL on [policybriefings@atl.org.uk](mailto:policybriefings@atl.org.uk).

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