

Observations*

If you teach in schools either directly or through third parties like Music Services, Music Hubs or Co-operatives, your work may be observed from time to time. This is still the case even if you are contracted as a worker and it may also occur for self-employed contractors. The following information is a guide on how to prepare for the experience and what to expect.

Will I be told in advance?

Yes, you should be given advance notice, in writing, of all observations including walk-ins and other 'informal' methods of observation. You should also be told the following:

- Who the observer is (usually the Head Teacher or line manager)
- Guidance on expected standards
- Support in setting reasonable and achievable objectives (part-time staff should have fewer objectives than full-time staff)
- When and how you will get feedback (ideally straight after the session).

What is an observer looking for?

The observer will be looking at your teaching and the students' learning to see if it meets the desired standard. They will also be looking for ways in which the lesson could improve.

An observer wants to see how you help the learner. They may be asking themselves questions like:

- Is the teacher getting the best out of their student?
- Is the teacher talking stopping their student from responding?
- Is their student engaged or bored?
- Is the teacher responding to their student?
- Is the teacher challenging or stretching their students?
- **And, above all:** is there music happening in the lesson from beginning to end?

Dos and don'ts on the day of the observation

Do ...

- Arrive in good time
- Ensure your timetabling is working and students are going to arrive promptly
- Have your relevant paperwork and records neat and available
- Be positive with your students and follow your usual lesson format
- Keep the pace moving.

Don't ...

- Do something completely new with the students
- Change the format of your usual lessons – this will throw your students
- Talk too much
- Forget who the students are or ask them what you did last week.

* It may also be described as 'appraisal', 'performance management' or 'quality assurance'.

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What should feedback include?

Ideally it should be given verbally on the day and followed up with a written report. There may be one or two suggestions for your development. Try to stay open and avoid being defensive about this process.

What is the worst case scenario?

Schools can identify issues to do with the quality of teaching as a way to move teachers onto a capability process. It can, though not always, result in dismissal.

If you feel under pressure or bullied, contact your regional office for advice as soon as possible. Never try and sort these things out alone – the school doesn't need to know you're getting our advice unless you want them to.

Can I refuse to be observed?

If you work in schools through a third party (Music Service/ Music Hub) there is no legal requirement for you to be included in the school's appraisal process.

You should ask at the outset what their policy is on observing lessons. Please have your contracts checked by the MU's Employment Contract Advisory Service (ECAS) www.musiciansunion.org.uk/Home/Advice/Education/Contracts/Should-I-sign-this-contract

