

## Virtual Observation Framework: Academic Year 2020-21

Publication date: 15 October 2020 (v1)

**This guidance should be followed if there are no opportunities for in-person tutor visits in session 2020-21.** It forms part of a [suite of guidance](#) which seeks to offer support in the context of Covid-19.

### ***Purpose***

- To contribute to the support of students, teachers and lecturers during academic year 2020-21;
- To provide exemplification of ‘virtual observations’ in support of local partnership discussions;
- To outline various steps which should be considered before implementing a ‘virtual observation’ approach;
- To establish a framework in support of national approaches to ‘virtual observations’

### ***Definition***

A ‘virtual observation’ is understood within the context of approaches which seek to enhance the support offered to schools and students by university tutors (cf. [Enhanced Support and Alternative Assessment Approach Academic Year 2020-21](#)). It is defined as the use of electronic approaches to support the process of observation and reflection on practice as part of the assessment process; in contrast to in-person observation. Whilst it is helpful to consider what a ‘virtual observation’ might involve, this needs to be considered within a broader multifaceted assessment approach. The in-person university tutor visit is not simply a process to judge student ‘performance’. It provides a rich opportunity which enables university tutors to also observe pupil learning, engage in conversation with pupils and understand the context in which the student is placed. The virtual observation is helpful in enabling a form of observation to occur in the absence of an in-person university tutor visit.

This paper provides concrete examples of the different forms that this might take, which can range from: joining an online lesson (cf. 3.3.2 [COVID-19 Guidance](#)); using a mobile device to record a lesson or learning segment; to the use of specialist learning observatory packages. Central to any of these approaches is the student’s own critical reflections on practice and collaborative dialogue about this between university, student and in-school supporter.

Assessment of professional practice relies on a partnership approach. Observation of professional practice by the in-person university tutor visit is one of the methods used to assess student teachers as part of their professional placement. The value and strength of the on-going observations, both informal and formal, by the in-school supporter are of critical importance in 'normal' times. In these exceptional circumstances, these observations remain a core part of the assessment process, together with dialogue between university tutor and in-school supporter, underpinning the summative assessment process (cf. [Enhanced Support](#)).

### **Scope**

Subject to exception through GTC Scotland accreditation or approval, this paper is valid within the context of Covid-19 in academic year 2020-21 only. It encompasses professional placements within Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

### **Background**

Following the publication of the joint guidance, [Enhanced Support](#), this document explores a range of approaches to 'virtual observations' as partnerships consider ways in which students will be supported and assessed, where an in-person university tutor visit cannot take place (Cf. [Enhanced Support](#)).

While the approaches explored in this paper arise out of necessity (Covid-19), others have explored 'virtual observation' before, for example:

- Kane, Gehlbach, Greenberg, Quinn, and Thal (2015), Harvard Centre for Education Policy Research, [The Best Foot Forward Project: Substituting Teacher-Collected Video for In-Person Classroom Observations First Year Implementation Report](#)
- Lofthouse and Birmingham (2010), 'The camera in the classroom: video-recording as a tool for professional development of student teachers' (<http://ojs.cumbria.ac.uk/index.php/TEAN/article/view/59/70>)
- Orlova (2009), 'Video Recording as a Stimulus for Reflection in Pre-Service EFL Teacher Training' (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ923452.pdf>)
- Calderhead and James (1992), 'Recording Student Teachers' Learning Experiences' (<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877920160101>)

### **Potential approaches to virtual observations: Exemplification**

The following options replace the in-person university tutor visit; in-school supporter observations should continue as per usual practice.

All options outlined provide exemplification of potential assessment approaches. The approach agreed will be determined by local factors, programme needs and partnership arrangements.

## Exemplifications of potential assessment approaches

Approach	Focus/process	Limitations
Virtual remote observation	The student teacher digitally records (audio visual failing which audio-only) one lesson, potentially observed by the in-school supporter in person and the university tutor remotely.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording may only provide evidence of teaching; there is a requirement for increased evidence of learning as part of the summative assessment.</li> <li>● It is unlikely this facility will be available in all schools and/or appropriate across all teaching and learning contexts.</li> <li>● Availability of technology involved for both schools and universities.</li> <li>● Ability to record with sufficient quality and scope to capture teaching and learner engagement.</li> <li>● GDPR compliance and appropriate permissions.</li> </ul>
Digital recording of a teaching episode	The student teacher digitally records (audio visual failing which audio-only) a lesson or section of a lesson, which is observed by the in-school supporter in person and is shared with the university tutor through an appropriate digital platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording provides evidence of teaching; there is a requirement for increased evidence of learning as part of the summative assessment.</li> <li>● Ability to record with sufficient quality and scope to capture teaching and learner engagement.</li> <li>● Resources to upload video files which may be quite large.</li> <li>● GDPR compliance and appropriate permissions.</li> </ul>

<p>Detailed recording and analysis of a series of teaching and learning interactions</p>	<p>The student teacher records (audio visual failing which audio-only) a number (5-6) of short teaching and learning interactions (2-4 minutes), these are summarised and teacher/ learner dialogue is analysed. Analysis of the teaching and learning interactions along with appropriate plans and extracts of the outcomes of learning are shared with the university tutor and the in-school supporter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording provides evidence of teaching; there is a requirement for increased evidence of learning as part of the summative assessment.</li> <li>● Ability to record with sufficient quality and scope to capture teaching and learner engagement.</li> <li>● Resources to upload video files which may be quite large.</li> <li>● GDPR compliance and appropriate permissions.</li> </ul>
<p>Recorded and analysed teaching and learning episodes</p>	<p>The student teacher digitally records (audio visual failing which audio-only) short (10-15 minutes) parts of lesson episodes, either from the same lesson or different lessons, over a period of around three weeks. The student teacher reflects on and analyses the recorded episodes, both the recording (if possible) and analysis along with appropriate plans and extracts of the outcomes of learning is shared with the in-school supporter and university tutor.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording provides evidence of teaching; there is a requirement for increased evidence of learning as part of the summative assessment.</li> <li>● Ability to record with sufficient quality and scope to capture teaching and learner engagement.</li> <li>● Resources to upload video files which may be quite large.</li> <li>● GDPR compliance and appropriate permissions.</li> </ul>

School closure – remote engagement	The student teacher engages learners through an online platform, in-school supporter and university tutor added to the platform as class members. Professional conversation after lesson, which informs the summative (joint) placement report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recording provides evidence of teaching; there is a requirement for increased evidence of learning as part of the summative assessment.</li> <li>● Must ensure GDPR compliance</li> <li>● Potential issues with digital platforms (e.g. gaining access).</li> </ul>
------------------------------------	---	--

***Selected Potential issues***

1. Local authority does not have parental permission in place to record learners and is not able or willing to facilitate this;
2. Student teachers may be more anxious about being recorded and due to technical issues that may arise;
3. Availability of time and staffing resource to support implementation of ‘virtual observations’;
4. The availability and applicability of digital resources: in-school devices may be more acceptable but may require learning by the student.

***Selected Implementation considerations***

1. Engage with all relevant partners, as early as is practicable, to gain buy-in;
2. With any recording of lessons, safeguarding and GDPR guidelines must be adhered to;
3. Some approaches will require professional learning to support implementation.