

Peer Challenge – an Introduction

Peer Challenge is:

Review and challenge of the organisation’s Self Assessment findings (i.e. strengths, areas for improvement and ratings) conducted by a peer, normally from a similar organisation within the region.

This is used to:

- 1. Enhance the Self Assessment findings and therefore the improvement plan**
- 2. Improve the future Self Assessment process**
- 3. Share knowledge between organisations within the region**
- 4. Build a relationship to assist future sharing of practices & knowledge & joint working**
- 5. Develop recognition and confidence from internal or external partners that Self Assessment has been carried out in a comprehensive way, with an adequate degree of objectivity and transparency**

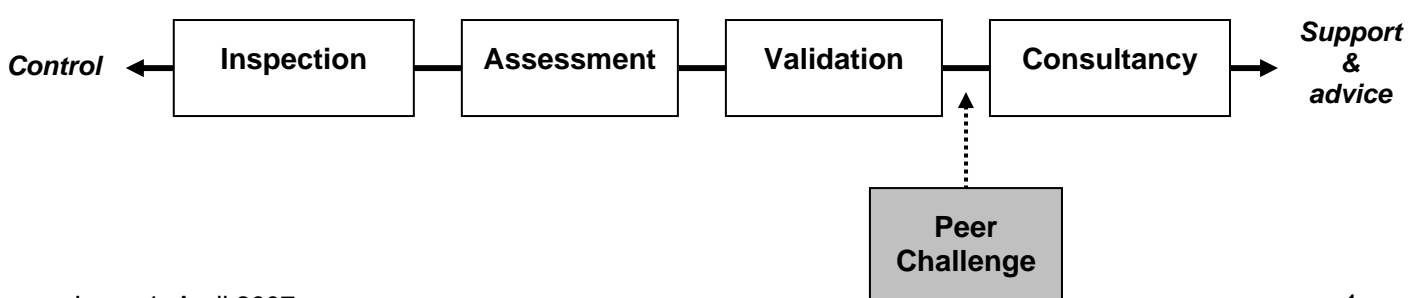
The Peer Challenge involves discussions with key members of staff on a one-to-one or group basis and reviewing documentation.

This is not:

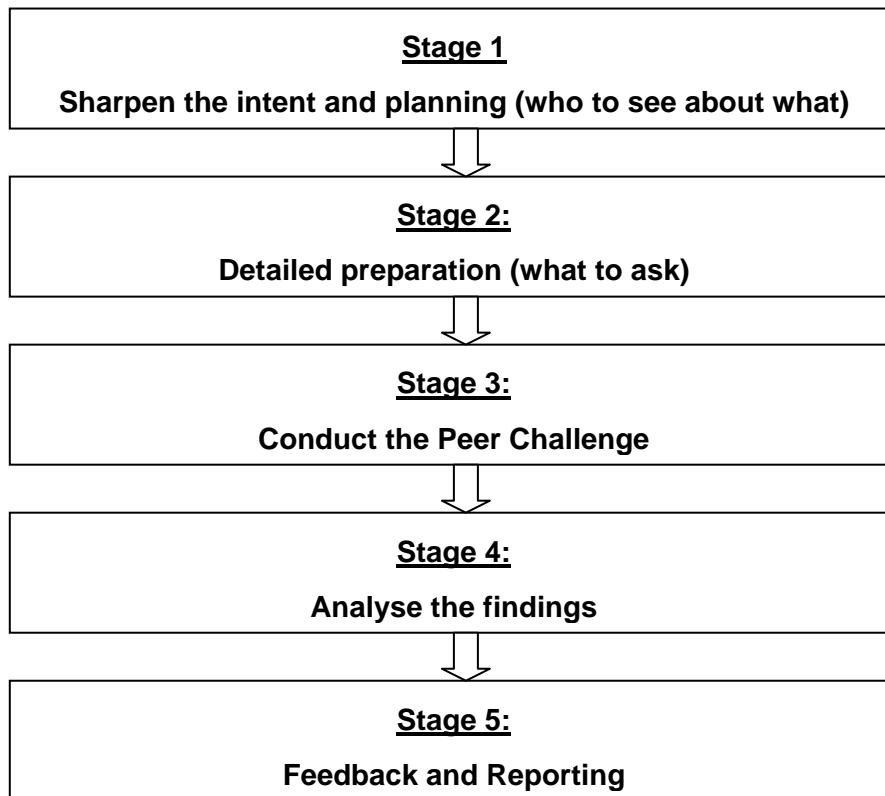
- Consultancy
- Value judgement
- Staff performance review
- Criticism
- Negative
- “Because we do it better”
- An ‘audit’ or ‘inspection’
- Trophy-hunting
- A paper-chase

As a result of the Peer Challenge, the organisation adjusts the identified strengths, areas for improvement and ratings without losing *ownership* (it is still their work). The organisation gains insight into the effectiveness of its Self Assessment process and the continuous improvement values and habits held by the team.

Peer Challenge versus Inspection, Assessment Validation and Consultancy



The Peer Challenge Process



The Impression Created by the Peer Challengers

The impression created by you during the Peer Challenge will have a significant impact on its success. This impression will affect people's thoughts and feelings and therefore their approach to TAES. It is important that people view the Self Assessment and improvement planning as the basis for continuous improvement and the Peer Challenge as a valuable part of this, rather than as an externally enforced 'check' or 'added extra' or 'trophy hunting'. The major difference between inspection/audit and Peer Challenge is not in the process or technique; it is in the impression created by the Peer Challenger.

Remember that you create an impression as soon as you speak on the telephone or walk through the door and this continues the whole time you are working with the organisation. You create various impressions through a mixture of your:

- Body language (approximately 65% of the total impression)
 - Verbal tones (approximately 30% of the total impression)
- and
- The words you use (approximately 5% of the total impression)

For most of the time, most of us communicate without realising it. We cannot not communicate; we can only choose to become more aware of the impact of our communication on others and to refine how we communicate as a result.

During the Peer Challenge, work towards creating the following impression all of the time:

- Interested and enthusiastic about the organisation and its service
- Courteous and helpful
- Trusting
- Calm
- No *one-upmanship*! Impartial and not judgemental – establish all the facts first, draw conclusions later! Not defensive or offensive
- There to assist continuous improvement of the organisation – you are on their side! Instigate discussions with the various people within the organisation in order to review and challenge the Self Assessment. Ask open questions to achieve this, such as ‘how’, ‘what’ or ‘when’ (not ‘why’, as this can be unclear and can provoke a defensive reaction). As soon as you are seen, heard or felt to be ‘quizzing’ staff, this will be perceived as threatening. The people involved in focus groups or interviews should have an enjoyable time talking about the way they work, rather than a stressful time answering questions. For most of the time you will be quiet, guiding the conversation and allowing people to speak.

Feedback is vital in achieving effective communication. This could be received from peers or the organisations that you validate. Remember there is no such thing as ‘criticism’ only feedback! Feedback should be treated as though it was a Christmas present:

- Receive it enthusiastically with thanks (real not pretend thanks!)
- Take it home and try it on for size
- If it fits and is useful, keep it and wear it regularly
- If it doesn’t fit and is not of use, take it back to the shop!...and replace it with something of greater value!!

The Key to Successful Peer Challenge

The first and one of the most significant steps to achieving an effective Peer Challenge is to examine, challenge and sharpen your ‘intent’. On a regular basis remind yourself of your role and what you will achieve through the Peer Challenge. Compare this to what you are actually thinking and achieving. Remember:

The Peer Challenger is a part of the Self Assessment team, albeit a challenging one! The primary goal of the Peer Challenge is to help the organisation complete an accurate Self Assessment and value-adding improvement plan and to improve the future Self Assessment process. This will lead to improvements in the way the organisation works and therefore to improved results for the community.