

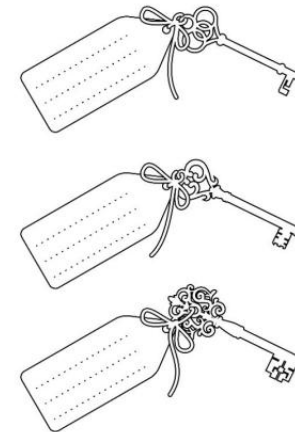
BAS Lesson Observations: Assessor Practice

What assessors do, and why

BAS-TEAP Joint Event 14th May 2026



The British Association of Lecturers
in **English for Academic Purposes**



contextualisation + constructive alignment + collaboration



The data

- A questionnaire survey of assessors May 2026
- 9 questions covering every aspect of the observation process, from pre-visit planning to what assessors actually do in the classroom.
- 15 assessors responded
- The following slides provide an overview of what the data tells us about how BAS observations work in practice. This involves a mixture of summaries of themes emerging and direct quotations (anonymised).

Some small caveats

- This is a quick initial analysis of the responses, quite ‘snapshot’ in nature in some instances.
- BAS assessors bring different professional backgrounds and areas of expertise to their visits. The survey reveals a lot of assessor consensus, but it also reveals some interesting variation in approach, which is exactly what would be expected from **a peer review scheme**. As a group, we seek to stay **calibrated** in all important dimensions, but **not rigidly standardised**.

These are the questions I asked

1. What role do lesson observations play in a BAS visit?
2. How important a component of the visit are the lesson observations?
3. How are BAS observations similar and/or different to individual teacher observations (i.e. of the type done annually within an institution for QA purposes or for e.g. for a TEAP qualification)?
4. As an assessor undertaking visit observations, what kind of things would be indicators of good practice on the course(s) you are accrediting? If possible, illustrate with some concrete examples.
5. As an assessor undertaking visit observations, what kind of things would be indicators of problems/issues on the course(s) you are accrediting? If possible, illustrate with some concrete examples.
6. How far, and in what circumstances, does weak teaching by individuals within a teaching team impact on the overall assessment of 'delivery' of the course?
7. What instructions should be given to institutions regarding what teachers produce as 'lesson plans' for observations? What contextual factors would affect what is asked for?
8. How do you approach making pre-visit decisions about the lesson observation schedule?
9. Once the visit has started, how do you approach the lesson observations? What do you do 'while observing'?

Q1: What role do lesson observations play in a BAS visit?

- **Triangulation of evidence:** observations serve to triangulate what assessors have already learned from documentation and meetings - they show whether stated course principles are enacted in practice.
- **The 'reality check' function:** observations are a necessary test of whether provision is working as claimed.
- **Cumulative picture rather than individual snapshots:** the value of observations is cumulative across teachers.

"They let you know if the core principles are being enacted and how well the students are engaged, what/how they are learning and how relevant the classes are to the students' context and study."

"Without observation, it's just a paper audit."

"BAS observations build cumulatively across teachers during a visit to provide a view into teacher preparedness, effectiveness of induction, group understanding of curriculum / teaching principles held by the course designers."

Q2: How important a component of the visit are lesson observations?

Universal
agreement from
assessors - **very
important**



"They are essential. Without lesson observations, the course cannot really be assessed properly."

"It's impossible to see how all the elements translate into reality if you don't observe the teaching in action, and ideally in person, not recorded."

But ...

"They need to be read as one component which is influenced by teacher support, course design, etc."

"It is important that everyone involved remembers how potentially stressful this is for the teachers, no matter how many times we reassure people that it's not about individuals."

Q3: BAS observations vs individual teacher observations

The course, not the individual teacher

Individual teacher observation

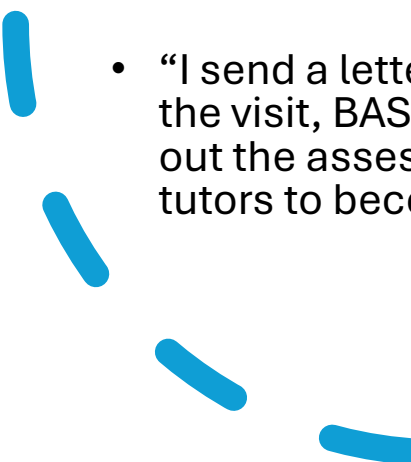
- Focuses on the individual teacher
- Provides individual, personalised feedback
- Linked to development planning for that teacher
- Typically, longer (45-60 minutes)
- Teacher expects to recognise themselves in the feedback

BAS accreditation observation

- Focuses on **the course in action**, not the individual
- Builds **a cumulative picture** across the whole teaching team
- **No individual feedback given - to teachers or managers**
- Typically, shorter (15-20 minutes per class)
- Individual teachers are never named in the report

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- “BAS observations serve a different function: they are not about assessing/developing an individual but about understanding a programme and a context. I tend to view them as a whole rather than as individual observations and **I'm interested in what's 'normal' on a particular programme** rather than which class is best.”
 - “Teachers are usually observed individually in a BAS observation but teaching is **assessed collectively and holistically, considering teaching on the course as a whole**. Recommendations about teaching made by BAS assessors are also in relation to the course as a whole.”

But, on the relationship between BAS & TEAP:

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- “BAS observations are **informed by TEAP Competency Framework**.”
 - “I send a letter to the teachers prior to the visit. The letter: introduces both assessors; sets out the purpose of the visit, BAS and the observations; acknowledges the amount of work/stress involved for the teacher; points out the assessment is of the overall teaching in the department, not about individual teachers; encourages tutors to become familiar with the TEAP competency framework on the BALEAP website.”

Q4: Indicators of good practice

EAP distinctiveness and academic contextualisation

“... clear academic literacy development that serves the needs of those students in that context and not 'EFL with knobs on'. I look for teaching that treats students as individuals with individual needs, as well as teaching that respects students as university students/possible researchers.”

Constructive alignment

“... contextualising the class in terms of an upcoming assessment and showing how the learning serves that purpose; links between the EAP class and the future academic context.”
"Evidence that teachers are aware of the key aims of the lesson - not spending ages on what are clearly meant to be quick warmer/review type activities but focusing the students' attention and time on the main Learning Outcomes."

Teacher responsiveness and professional judgment

"Teachers lifting the materials off the page - teaching the students not the materials; teachers showing an understanding of the academic context that students will be going to"
"Evidence of the teacher being able to exploit unplanned learning opportunities."

Student engagement and agency

“... I'm also interested in the level of student enthusiasm and engagement across the classes and in how much reference there is to the students' future programmes, the wider institution.”
"Students interacting orally in English with each other and with the teacher ... a sense of energy and engagement within the classroom”.

Awareness of disciplinary variation

"I once saw art students being told not to use 'I' because it was not academic - but they had to produce both reflective/practice-based texts, and 'objective' essays. Balancing clarity for students and real-life complexity is the challenge."

So, overall ...



Are the students in good hands, in the context of this course and its aims?



Assessors are not asking whether this is a polished lesson performance. They are asking whether students are engaged, being academically challenged, and served by teaching that connects to their future studies.

Q5: Indicators of problems/issues

No academic context

Classes that could be from any general English course - no reference to students' future studies, disciplines, or the academic literacies they need.

Teaching the materials

Mechanical delivery of a coursebook or task sequence without the teacher's professional judgment being visible - no adaptation or responsiveness to the group.

Passive students

Extended periods with no active engagement, no thinking or producing, students following materials without evident purpose.

Generalised 'academic English'

Teaching that treats academic language as a single, uniform thing - not sensitive to students' specific disciplines or contexts.

e.g.

“'problems' might broadly be the opposite of the examples given above: Eg not making the assessment and/or future academic relevance of texts, tasks and discussions clear for students; not evidencing relevant genre / academic principle awareness... or poor classroom / learning management, where e.g. students are not being encouraged to question their responses, be critical, engage in textual analysis, learn from each other.”

“Focus by teachers on working through exercises and getting the 'right answer' and moving on; lack of understanding of academic discourse by teachers”

“Not being able to go beyond the exercises in a coursebook/materials given. Teaching without teaching in context, i.e. university/degree programme/focus on the academic literacies.”

Q6: How does weak teaching by individuals impact on the overall assessment of delivery?

- **“Weak teaching by an individual does not automatically lead to a negative assessment of course delivery, because accreditation focuses on the quality, coherence, and reliability of the whole provision rather than individual performance.”**
- **“If the weak teaching hasn't been picked up** by those responsible for the delivery of the course prior to the BAS visit, **and if the mechanisms in place** for regular observations and follow-up support/observation **are not sufficient** - that is when it becomes significant.”
- **“If there is a gap between the course principles, the learning outcomes, the curriculum and then what actually happens in the classroom** then this would be cause for concern and it **would influence quite a few of the criteria**”
- **“Where centres rely on large numbers of externally hired EAP staff and may not have a stable base of teachers with whom they can work year round, the quality of the teaching can be flagged but there may be genuine structural constraints/reasons for the shortcomings. The professional, educational and ethical issues are sector level.”**
- **“If students experience weak teaching, that absolutely impacts on the course**, so it is as important as any other element. Similarly, strong teaching can in some cases compensate for e.g. weak materials, weak course design, weak institutional support”



Overall ...

- One weaker class is a snapshot, not a verdict. Everyone has difficult days. The relevant question is whether it reflects a pattern across the team.
- If multiple observations suggest a shared weakness - e.g. limited academic contextualisation - this is significant and will be reflected in the delivery criteria.
- Assessors are aware that many EAP units rely on large numbers of temporary or seasonal staff. Structural constraints are acknowledged - and recommendations can address them.

Q7: What instructions should be given to institutions regarding lesson plans?

- “I ask specifically for teachers **NOT to produce blow-by-blow plans with timings etc. It's not CELTA/DELTA.** I ask for something more narrative that contextualises the particular student group and where they are in the course. I also make clear that we don't want 'bells and whistles'. If the plan was to have students writing for a chunk of the class, teachers shouldn't change that. Students and their learning should always come first.”
- “Lesson plans can be **brief and concise**. It can be bullet points or annotated materials. It should include information about the lesson aims, an outline of the key stages of the lesson (so that the observer can identify which part of the lesson they are watching).”
- “**Institutions should provide standard templates that suit their context** - if they use observation plans for developmental/internal quality assurances, BAS should use those as our assessments are supposed to be context-driven.”
- “**I'm not interested in lesson plans** and usually don't request them. I'm only in the room for 10 minutes and **I'm much more interested in the atmosphere in the room, student engagement and how teachers are working with the materials.**”
- “**I personally think anticipated problems and solutions are also useful to see** and these can be a useful way to encourage teachers to anticipate issues with the actual content, not 'the computer might not work'.”

What plans should include: areas of agreement

Most respondents converge on the same core elements:

- Student/class profile (level, group composition, stage in course)
- Lesson aims and/or learning outcomes
- Broad outline of main activities
- How the lesson fits into the course/syllabus
- Any contextual information the observer needs to make sense of what they see

Materials should ideally be made available when assessors enter the room and that contextual factors (stage of course, upcoming assessments) should be noted

Q8: How do you approach pre-visit decisions about the observation schedule?

- **Allow the institution to lead, then review:** There is broad consensus among assessors the institution proposes an initial schedule and assessors review and modify it where needed.
 - “I let the course director lead, letting us know when would be the best day(s) to observe. We aim to see everyone, where feasible, but on large courses, we sample.”
 - “The Director of Studies is the best person to make initial decisions about observations as they know the staff, the timetable and are aware of the logistics. Observing lessons where, for example, students are scheduled to read silently for 15 minutes will not demonstrate the best of any teaching skills, so it's useful if Directors of Studies can select lessons which have the potential for teachers to show off their skills.”
 - “I allow institutions to draft the lesson observation schedule, but I request that we see a range of more-less experienced teachers, course/session types (if appropriate), locations (if appropriate and feasible), and other variables that are evident.”
- N.B. assessors should retain the right to see classes at short notice, not necessarily agreed in advance.

Q9: How do you approach the lesson observations? What do you do 'while observing'?

“Both lead and second assessor do the first observation together and discuss their thoughts in relation to the lesson, thereby serving as 'moderation'.”

“I simply take notes on what I see. I aim to be descriptive first, reflective and evaluative second. In onsite visits, I often sketch the way the teacher has arranged the room, how the technology is being used, how students are grouped, etc. This helps me remember details of classes, given that we might be seeing 8–10+ in a block.”

“I make sure I sit 'out of the way' but can see what's going on clearly. I do look at the students a lot to see how they are engaging and what they may/may not be learning - as that is my 'key evidence'.”

“Be open in that how one teacher approaches something may be totally different to another or to the way I might do it.”

“I try to take the class on its own terms and in the context of the lesson plan presented. As noted above, my guiding question is, given the course and what it is aiming to achieve, **'are the students in good hands?'**”

Discussion Questions

- How does BAS's approach to observations compare with observation practice in your own institution?
- What do you find most useful - or most challenging - about having an external pair of eyes on your course delivery?
- Is there anything about the way BAS uses observations that you would like to know more about?