Continual performance improvement

A critical part of the PDPR process is the continual focus on realising the full potential of our workforce through effective and focused staff development. Staff development should not be seen as something that only new staff or staff that are struggling or underperforming need.

A highly effective organisation would recognise that identifying development needs aimed at individual performance improvement is positive and not negative, it is also not directly linked to performance in role, as a highly effective individual would be pushing their own career development to maximise their personal potential for the future.

Having said this, if staff are under performing in the role and have been given the appropriate development and supported, the University has procedures to support managers in these difficult situations.

When performance falls short of expectations

There are many reasons why people's performance sometimes falls short of expectations and a variety of actions that Managers can take to rectify the situation and generate a positive outcome all round. However, each situation needs to be judged on its own merits and personal knowledge of what works best for different people will also need to be taken into account when deciding on the right course of action.

There are a variety of options to address a performance issue; training, coaching, counselling and formal disciplinary action. It is worth bearing in mind that disciplinary action should only be taken as a last resort and is subject to University policy guidelines. If in doubt, it is best to consult your HR Adviser.

When thinking about how to address poor performance, you will need to uncover the cause. It may help to consider the following:

- Previously demonstrated ability - Has the person previously demonstrated an ability to perform to the required standards?

- Review - performance standards - Does the person clearly understand what is required of them? Do they have a performance standard? Are objectives and measures clear and are they descriptive of what is sought? Have discussions about performance already been herd?

- Review personal factors - What external factors may be affecting the person? Is a lack of resources giving them frustration? Are objectives unclear or priorities changing therefore causing apathy or confusion? Are there interruptions and distractions, self-made or imposed, pointing to lack of concentration/interest? Are University policies/procedures impeding performance? Is your management style appropriate? Relationships with others? Job design not appropriate? Domestic/personal issues?

- Review motivation factors - Does the person want to succeed in their job? Do they feel able to use their talents? Does the behaviour required of them conflict with their values? Are their needs being satisfied? Are they aware of the consequences of continued under performance? Do they need more praise/recognition of their efforts? Is reward linked to performance? Is the job appropriate for this person?
• Review training issues - Does the person know how to do the job? Have they got the right knowledge and skills? Is there a need for on the job training; skills courses; guided experiences? Do they have background knowledge?

• Review coaching issues - Does the person need coaching and support? If they do, set goals, agree reality of current performance, explore options, decide on action, establish willingness, then observe the person carrying out activities or demonstrating how to use the skill. Praise and encourage the person’s efforts at improvement.

**Improving Performance**

If it is identified that an individual is under performing, the manager/reviewer should use the PDPR process to document this and set the necessary improvement objectives. This could happen at any time during the review year and the manager/reviewer should not wait to the formal review at the end of the year to raise issues if they have been identified beforehand.

If under performance is identified, the manager/reviewer must:

• Collate the appropriate evidence to demonstrate to the member of staff that their performance is not at the required standard.

• Inform and demonstrate to the member of staff that their performance level is unsatisfactory and that it is in the normal range for a Level 3 rating.

• Document the evidence and agreements that performance is not at the required standard.

• Document and set objectives for required improvement and agree an appropriate plan to meet them (development needs, change of focus, clearer performance expectations).

• Set and agree a realistic review period for improvement contained within the objectives set.

• Informed the member of staff that if improvement is not made it may impact future PDPR reviews and could end up in a formal process relating to under performance.

**Improved Performance**

If the cause has been diagnosed and addressed and performance has improved and been demonstrated then no further action is necessary.

**Consider formal action**

If performance has not improved, despite every effort, or the individual repeatedly drops into periods of underperformance, then formal action should then be considered, but before taking action check:

• That you are familiar with the relevant policies and procedures on managing under performance.

• That you have explored all other alternatives and have documented evidence that you have.
- That formal action is reasonable - is formal action what the person can reasonably expect in the situation? Have precedents been set in similar situations? Is the person being treated objectively? Is the person being victimised or made an example of?

**Disciplinary or Capability?**

It can often be difficult to decide whether a person's poor performance should be handled as a conduct or capability issue. In some cases a problem may appear at first to be a conduct issue, but later transpires to be one of capability or vice versa. Either way, the university manages issues relating to disciplinary/conduct or capability/underperformance within the same formal University disciplinary procedure. Note: it may be necessary to change between disciplinary on the grounds of conduct to disciplinary on the grounds of capability and vice versa if facts suggest that a different treatment of the situation is appropriate.

The following comparison may help you decide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capability</th>
<th>Disciplinary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Either:</td>
<td>Or:</td>
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<tr>
<td>The person is making an effort, but is not achieving the required improvement.</td>
<td>The person does not make enough effort.</td>
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<tr>
<td>They have received relevant training, but they do not appear to have acquired the necessary skills.</td>
<td>They are not applying skills they have.</td>
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<tr>
<td>They ADMIT that they are not achieving the required standards.</td>
<td>They do not agree on the problem identified.</td>
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<tr>
<td>They cannot obtain relevant qualifications.</td>
<td>They are not interested in obtaining relevant qualifications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not seem able to get there.</td>
<td>They are not willing to get there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low output of work.</td>
<td>They do not seem interested in improving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term sickness.</td>
<td>Unauthorised absences.</td>
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Within the University, capability and disciplinary are both managed within the formal disciplinary process, although how a manger may approach each issue may be suitably different (get advice from your HR Adviser before beginning). It is important that you do not miss any stages out, the timeframe may alter according to individual circumstances.

Before entering a formal process you would be expected to demonstrate that performance improvement and development plans have been in place as part of the PDPR process and that formal notification has been given to the role holder that failure to improve will result in formal disciplinary proceedings.

(See University Disciplinary Procedures at: [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/performanceatwork/disciplinaryprocedures/index.aspx](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/performanceatwork/disciplinaryprocedures/index.aspx))
PDPR Special Cases

1. Staff starting midway through the year

All staff should have a formal review regardless of service, however, only staff who are in post prior to 1 May would be eligible for a pay increase relating to any review rating given. Even if staff have recently started in post, it is important to meet to discuss progress, set objectives and agreed development plans.

2. Changes of reporting Manager/role during the year

If the role holder has had more than one manager or reviewer during the reporting year, the most recent reviewer must take responsibility for completing the PDPR appraisal (providing they have undertaken this role for a period of at least four months). If these criteria cannot be met, the person who has been the reporting manager for the longest period in that reporting year should carry out the appraisal. In difficult circumstances, a suitable senior manager is responsible to act as mediator.

Completion of the report will involve consulting the other reviewer(s) and reviewing the information available as appropriate.

Immediately after an in-year change in role or change of reviewer, a review meeting between the role holder and the 'new' reviewer should take place. This would follow a closing review meeting with the previous reviewer that would take place just before the new role or line of report comes into effect.

Should a role holder take on a new role part way through the reporting year, however, with the reviewer remaining the same, the reviewer should carry out a review meeting to bring the former role to a close. In addition, at the review meeting the reviewer’s expectations and standards for the role should be communicated clearly.

3. Reports on staff with two reporting managers

In some cases, a role holder will work for more than one manager/reviewer, e.g. supporting two research projects, or in the case of a team secretary or team administrator managed by a job share manager. In this situation, one of the managers should be appointed as the reporting reviewer at the beginning of the year, who will take full responsibility for PDPR appraisal. They should consult the other managers(s) involved, but the PDPR should not be completed 'by committee' - the discussion between the reviewer and the role holder should simply take these other comments into account.

4. Absence for a substantial part of the reporting year

The general rule is that a review should only be carried out on the performance observed, which means that staff should be reviewed on the work they have actually done. Lengthy periods of sick leave/maternity leave etc. should not result in the role holder being marked down. The PDPR should make it clear if this is based on part of the year only, or if absence is the reason for some objectives not being completed.

However, where excessive reoccurring short-term absence itself is the reason for any under-performance issues, this should be managed as part of the sickness absence policy, of which it should be made clear that continual absence may impact their PDPR review if improvements are not seen.
5. Temporary dips in performance

The PDPR appraisal should be based only on the performance actually achieved and observed, rather than on what might have been had the circumstances been different. However, this need not apply if there is evidence that mitigating personal circumstances led to what was a temporary dip in performance. In such cases, the reviewer should take all the circumstances into account in completing the review and note the PDPR form appropriately.

6. Reports on Trade Union Representatives

Carrying out union duties must not count against elected trade union officials since their work is a key contributor to the UON industrial relations process. Learning can be gained from such activity and this can be recorded if appropriate.

7. Fixed-term appointments

When staff are appointed on non-permanent contracts there should already be a role profile to support the recruitment. If they are appointed for at least six months, the reporting manager should discuss and agree the role profile, objectives and training needs with the role holder, and complete the PDPR appraisal as normal.

8. Promotion, temporary promotion and deputising

Staff who are given substantive promotion during the year should be treated as those who have changed their role or reviewer mid-year. At the end of the reporting year, the current reviewer (of the higher role) should take the earlier period into account when making an overall assessment for the year. This is particularly important in cases where the individual performed very well in the lower post for most of the year, before being promoted into a higher role in which they may still be developing when the annual PDPR is due.

Staff who are on temporary promotion and are still in the higher role at the end of the reporting year should be treated in the same way as substantive promotees. Unless they have been working in the temporary role for over nine months of the year, they will need to be assessed in both roles and an overall assessment agreed which reflects the whole period. Staff who have been on temporary promotion for at least three months of the year, but have already reverted to their substantive role, should receive an interim PDPR review when they revert and this should be taken into account in overall assessment at the end of year.