



1. Introduction

Active performance management can be challenging and can require ongoing input from you via regular dialogue, however, getting this right can help support the employee get back on track quickly when dealt with early and effectively.

2. Communication and planning

Ideally, all employees should understand what is expected of them, if this is not clear, then they may not even realise they are underperforming.

Ask yourself these questions when considering an under performance conversation:

- Has the employee been told explicitly what is expected of them?
- Do they understand what the consequences are from under performance?
- Are they given regular and clear training/support?
- Are you confident that they understand they are under performing?

If you feel that they are not even aware their own performance is below standard, you may want to approach the conversation differently, focusing on education rather than confrontation in the first instance.

3. Avoid emotional confrontation

An emotional argument is unhelpful and no one benefits, try to keep calm as you approach the topic(s).

3.1 Be prepared

Gather as much verification and materials before speaking with the employee. Vague commentary like “you aren’t doing a good job” is not useful, be as specific as possible.

3.2 Be specific

The discussion should leave no room for misinterpretation. You should be sending a clear message and explaining your expectations in a way that is easily understood.

3.3 Deal with underperformance as soon as possible

If you do not deal with an underperforming employee urgently, then you are sending a message that the performance is acceptable, setting an unhelpful precedent for both the employee and colleagues. Try to speak to the employee as soon as practical once the issue has come to your attention.

3.4 Understand external factors

If the capability issue has suddenly appeared, it could be the result of external factors such as the employee’s personal life.

Circumstances such as moving house, relationship issues, a new baby, family illness or relationship problems or bigger issues such as mental wellbeing or general health can all have an impact. It is important to consider any external factors as this will influence how you approach the conversation.



4. How do I approach a meeting about capability?

When you meet with an employee to discuss under performance you need to agree what the issues are and what needs to change, what needs to be put in place to support the employee and what action each of you will take. You should agree further meetings to review progress and confirm the discussion/actions in writing.

5. Who should attend meetings about under performance?

These meetings should be between you and the employee, where possible.

Your employee may ask if they can bring along their trade union representative or work colleague. This is permissible and in many cases may be helpful.

6. What might happen as a result of these meetings?

Raising capability issues with employees can be challenging and people react in different ways.

Many will immediately take on board the feedback you give them and you will very quickly see the necessary improvement.

A minority may get emotional, shout, cry or become aggressive. Some may even leave the meeting. They may go off sick citing workplace stress. They may also accuse you of bullying and in some extreme cases may raise a grievance against you.

The vital thing to remember is that irrespective of the reaction it should not stop you dealing with the issues. It is important to remember that managing capability effectively is not bullying. Retreating from the process is likely to result in the situation becoming more difficult.

7. Where performance issues haven't been addressed in the past

When performance issues are long standing and have not been addressed in the past, the initial conversation can be awkward. The perception of the employee may be that their performance standards are acceptable. In this situation, it is important to ensure that the initial conversation focuses on what support can be offered to the employee to help them improve their performance and a clear commitment is made to the employee as to the support on offer.

8. Dealing with on-going capability when roles change

Occasionally an individual will decide to apply for and is successful in changing role within the University when they are in a formal capability process and/or have a live capability warning on file. Under these circumstances, a capability warning will remain on file and in may be appropriate for the Progress Review Manager to continue to support the capability review process. Alternatively, it may be more suitable for an alternative Progress Review Manager to be assigned. In these circumstances, please contact the HR Employment Relations Team for further advice and guidance.

9. Additional Resources

- [University's Counselling Service](#)
- [Counselling Self Help Resources](#)
- [Training and Development](#)
- [HR Employment Relations Team](#)
- [Performance at Work](#)
- [Dignity at Nottingham](#)
- [Equality & Diversity Index of Support](#)