Appraisal and Development Conversations (ADC)

Guidelines

Contents

1. Introduction

The University of Nottingham seeks to achieve a high-performance culture, where all staff are supported to be the best they can be. This will be facilitated through the Appraisal and Development Conversations (ADC) approach, which ensures that staff have clarity over their goals and responsibilities and an opportunity to reflect on achievements and areas for development, enabling performance to be supported and performance to be enhanced and managed effectively.

The ADC approach is aligned with the University's Strategic Framework (see section 3), which links the university's priorities as outlined in the Strategic Delivery Plans and Enabling Plans to those within the faculties and Professional Service Departments (PSDs). Each faculty/PSD has a three-year operational delivery plan (business plan) which provides context in the ADC for discussing individual contribution towards university priorities and directs future objectives. This engages everyone in the delivery of the University Strategy and helps us all to see how we collaboratively and individually contribute to achieving it.

The ADC approach is based on a conversational framework, encouraging regular conversations during the year, supported by a minimum of one annual ADC taking place. This approach aims to provide opportunities to:

- ✓ Reflect on delivery of the appraisee's role responsibilities, achievement of objectives and where not fully achieved, progress towards achievement alongside challenges, barriers and any support required.
- ✓ Discuss development and training as well as career aspirations and wellbeing.
- ✓ Agree future objectives, considering the strategic priorities of the faculty/school/department or professional service area and taking into account the appraisee's needs, ambitions and individual circumstance.

2. ADC process overview

The ADC cycle is aligned with the university's business planning cycle, meaning the annual ADC should take place from May to the end of September. Regular conversations, including 1:1s/check-in's, are encouraged throughout the cycle.

A summary of the topics discussed, and appraisee/appraiser comments should be recorded within the ADC form under these three broad categories.

Reflection Constructively review past activities and how achievements have been realised.	**Looking Forward** Discuss personal development and career aspirations including career advancement.	**Future Objectives** Agree future objectives which contribute to the priorities of the faculty/ school/department or professional service area.

2.1   Discussion topics (where applicable/relevant)

Reflection

✓ Constructively review delivery against the appraisee's core role responsibilities (as outlined within the role profile).

✓ Constructively review objectives and progress/achievements/delivery against objectives/goals (over the last 12 months, or longer/shorter where applicable) and how these contribute to the faculty/school/department or professional service area.

✓ What behaviours have been demonstrated in *how* objectives have been achieved as well as *what* has been achieved.

✓ Leadership and management aspects of the role.

✓ Health and safety aspects of the role.

✓ Impact of previous personal development/training.

✓ Wellbeing and work-life balance.

Looking Forward

✓ Personal development needs including informal and formal development requirements and opportunities (including self-directed online learning).

✓ Longer-term development and career aspirations, including promotion readiness (where applicable and support required to successfully achieve outcomes).

✓ Opportunities for coaching, mentoring, job shadowing and 360 feedback.

✓ Aims and considerations for wellbeing, work-life balance, and workload.

Future Objectives

✓ Overview of the faculty/department/school or professional service area's priorities identified in their operational delivery plans and how individual objectives will contribute towards achieving these priorities.

✓ Discuss and agree future objectives, taking into account workload and career aspirations and development needs (see section 4).

✓ Discuss how objectives will be achieved (through behaviours) as well as what will be achieved (through outputs).

Feedback

Feedback helps create a more personal connection between the university and its employees. Giving regular feedback helps to develop a culture of conversation and can also demonstrate that the university values their employees' efforts. Employees receiving regular feedback shows an increase in the level of engagement and satisfaction.

Requesting feedback

✓ Appraisees (employees) or appraisers (managers) may request feedback, throughout the year, to support the ADC discussion

✓ Appraisees or appraisers should give as much notice as possible when requesting feedback to ensure that constructive feedback is provided

✓ Appraisees and/or appraisers can discuss any feedback received during the ADC conversation

Providing feedback

✓ Feedback should be constructive, with examples based on your own observations

✓ The aim of this process is to help your colleague develop, so focus on giving feedback that is specific, relevant and actionable

2.2   Planning and organising

Ahead of the ADC meeting, review any relevant operational delivery plans for your area for context in the ADC meeting. Appraisees should share their comments on the ADC form with their appraiser in good time ahead of the meeting and both the appraiser and appraisee should consider the following elements:

- Share any further relevant feedback and information from colleagues, managers, staff, or students as applicable and where helpful to inform the conversation.
- Detail contributions, achievements and progress towards objectives and goals, considering any challenges and obstacles to progress and any particular achievements to highlight.
- Comment on how objectives have been achieved and work has been delivered and on any wider contributions made.
- Reflect on development and training activities that have taken place during the current ADC cycle and the outcome and impact of this.
- Plan adequate time for the ADC to take place and in a suitable location.

The appraiser should make any notes of key areas for discussion in the meeting, which may be included on the ADC form.

Getting the most out of the ADC

Appraisee	Appraiser
Before the ADC	
Reflect on progress towards objectives and goals, considering any challenges and barriers to delivery.	Consider how the appraisee's past and future objectives align to the operational delivery plan (including gathering feedback where helpful to inform the conversation)
Reflect on any development activities that have taken place during the ADC cycle and the outcome and impact of this.	Plan adequate time for the ADC to take place and a suitable location.
1. Reflection	
Prioritise the particular areas and topics to discuss and be prepared to have an open two-way conversation.	Facilitate a two-way conversation that is constructive and open, allowing the appraisee to contribute equally to the meeting.
Share achievements, challenges, and progress towards objectives, including how objectives have been achieved (behaviours) as well as what has been achieved (outcomes).	Provide balanced, clear, and constructive feedback on the appraisee's contribution and performance against the expectations of the role.
	Recognise contributions and achievements, including how work has been achieved (behaviours) as well as what has been achieved (outcomes).
2. Looking forward	
Discuss any development and learning needs in the context of current needs and future career aspirations.	Provide advice and guidance on the best way to access appropriate and relevant development and learning opportunities, along with support required to successfully achieve outcomes.

Review any other aspects of work including, for example, work-life balance, wellbeing, health and safety.	Review any opportunities and concerns and agree any next steps.
Discuss development in the short to longer-term and any additional development required to support opportunities for progression through promotion or career advancement as required.	Facilitate a conversation about development and career planning/aspirations (refer to section 5).

3. Future objectives

Jointly discuss and agree future objectives within the context of the relevant faculty/professional service department operational delivery plan (see section 3) and the role, needs and ambitions of the appraisee.

Note: Appraisers and appraisees may arrange a follow-up meeting to focus on future objectives or follow up on any points of discussion. These meetings should be arranged promptly after the initial ADC to ensure timely agreement and recording of objectives.

After the ADC

Mutually plan and agree an approach for future 1-1 discussions / a mid-year review.

Add comments and record objectives on the ADC form.	Review and add comments to the ADC form.

For further guidance for facilitating an effective ADC, the Discussion Guide for Appraisers found on the ADC web pages (nott.ac/performance-at-work) contains a bank of example questions to encourage reflection and goal setting.

For broader guidance on facilitating open conversations, please visit the Open Conversation Framework SharePoint. The framework provides a set of guidelines for approaching an open conversation, as an instigator or as a participant. In the framework you will find more information about the skills and behaviours that support an open conversation, and the culture that will enable open conversations to take place.

After the ADC

- Any additional comments should be added to the ADC form, to reflect the conversation and the final version should be shared between the appraisee and appraiser.
- Any development activities should be recorded, along with an indication as to when these will take place and who is responsible for progressing these.
- Appraisers should keep a note of development and training requirements to enable the collation of themes to inform planning for training and development provision within the university faculty/ school/department or professional service area.
- Personal development is the responsibility of the appraisee and therefore it the responsibility of the appraisee to agree steps for meeting any personal development needs identified (see Section 5 for more information).
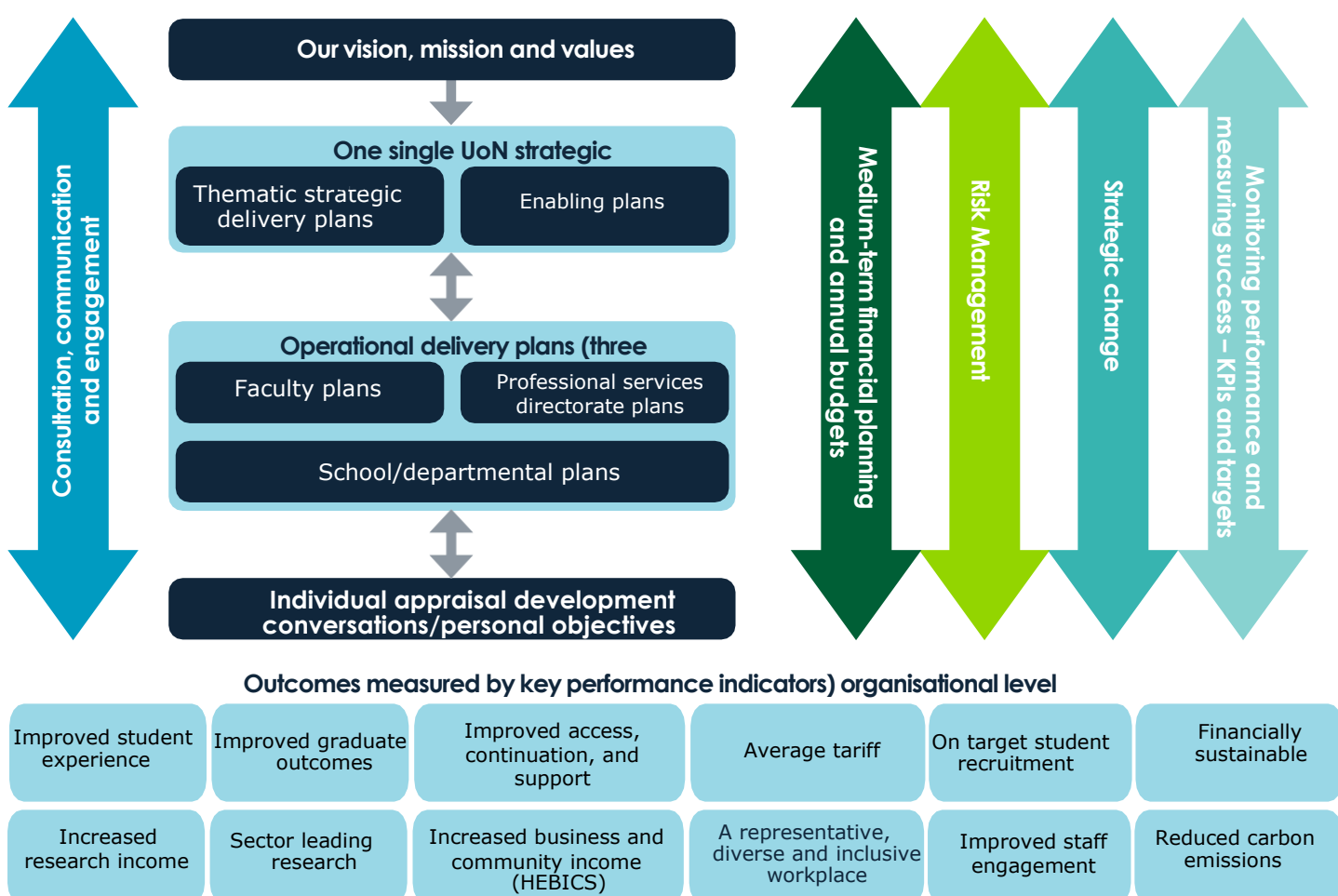
3. The University's Strategic Framework

3.1   How the University's Strategic Framework fits with ADC

The University of Nottingham Strategy drives all university activity and sets out what it wants to achieve. The Strategic Delivery Plans (SDPs) and Enabling Plans set out the priorities for the university and are supported by detailed business planning (see 3.2).

The business planning process leads to the development and implementation of operational delivery plans that contribute to the achievement of the university's strategic outcomes and are measured by a set of key performance indicators (KPIs). These faculty/department operational delivery plans identify more localised priorities and areas of focus in the short to medium term.
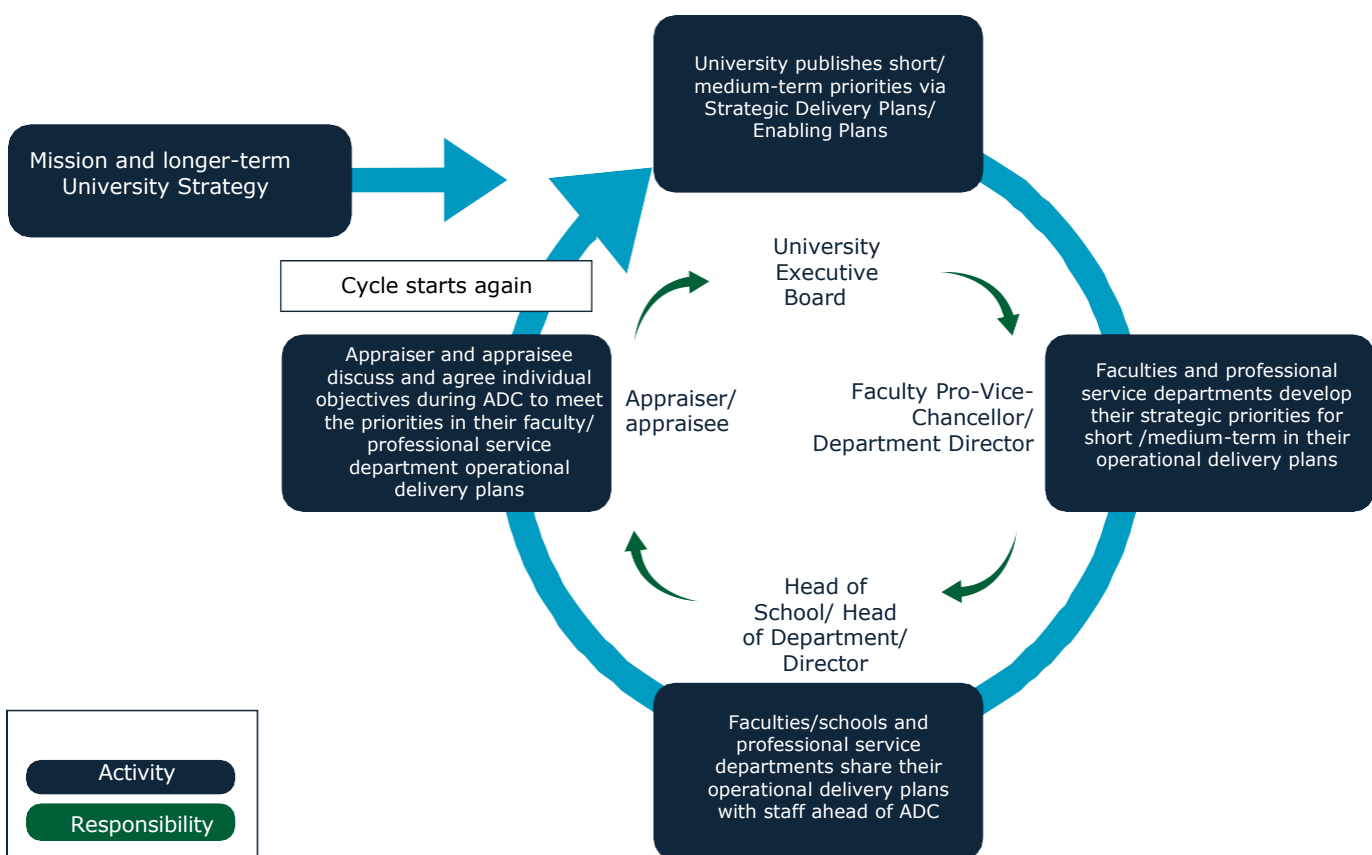
- The university recognises the importance of ensuring there are links between the university aims and priorities, faculty/school/department or professional service area plans and priorities, and the appraisee's objectives and areas of focus.
- To support this, appraisers and appraisees should use the faculty/professional service department operational delivery plans to underpin discussions about how individual objectives contribute to local priorities and areas of focus.
- This links how appraisee's work and achievements support the wider aims of their workplace and in turn how this supports the achievements of the university.

3.2   Structure of the University's Strategic Framework

Outcomes measured by key performance indicators) organisational level

Improved student experience	Improved graduate outcomes	Improved access, continuation, and support	Average tariff	On target student recruitment	Financially sustainable
Increased research income	Sector leading research	Increased business and community income (HEBICS)	A representative, diverse and inclusive workplace	Improved staff engagement	Reduced carbon emissions

3.3 The business planning cycle

It is important for appraisers and appraisees to be familiar with their faculty/school/department or professional service department's (PSD) priorities as outlined within the relevant operational delivery plan. Your faculty/PSD will publish their operational delivery plan as part of the ADC planning process.

3.4 Using faculty/professional service department operational delivery plans

The faculty/professional service department operational delivery plans are designed to underpin discussions between the appraisee and appraiser about how the appraisee's personal objectives contribute to the wider areas of focus of their workplace and to consider achievements against these areas in review discussions.

Some roles and specialist areas of work will require individually specific or discrete objectives and areas of focus. Other roles may benefit from similar or consistent objectives where very similar roles and role types exist.

Not all priorities included in the operational delivery plans will be relevant to all appraisees and therefore the appraiser and appraisee should always discuss appraisee objectives in the context of the role being undertaken.

4. Setting Objectives

As part of the ADC process, the appraisee and the appraiser should discuss and agree future objectives.

4.1   Purpose of objectives

An objective is a statement which describes what an individual, team, or organisation is hoping to achieve. The purpose of developing objectives as part of the ADC process, therefore, is to ensure there is shared clarity over expectations and priorities that the individual will be working towards during the year or agreed time period. Agreeing clearly defined goals and expectations of outcomes is fundamental to the success of our agile working approach.

Objectives should align with the current and future university, faculty/school/department or professional service area's objectives and priorities as outlined within the faculty/professional service department (PSD) operational delivery plan. Future objectives should be discussed within the context of the operational delivery plans and should be appropriate to the level and nature of the appraisee's role.

4.2   Considering and agreeing objectives

During the ADC, the appraiser and appraisee should jointly agree future objectives, considering the strategic priorities of their workplace as detailed in the faculty/PSD operational delivery plans and take into account the appraisee's needs, ambitions and individual circumstances. More information about considering individual circumstances can be found on the ADC FAQs document.

Objectives should provide adequate stretch to help appraisees develop skills and experience in both the short and longer term.

Consideration should be given to *how* work is delivered and achieved (which may focus on behaviours and ways of working) as well as *what* is delivered and achieved (focusing on outputs). The Agile Working initiative provides guidance, training, and ideas about supporting outcome driven ways of working.

4.3   Reviewing progress regularly

Objectives should not just be agreed at the beginning of the year and reviewed at the end. This is to recognise that circumstances may change during the ADC cycle, whereby it is necessary for the appraisee and appraiser to review objectives and to agree to amend or update them as needed to ensure they remain SMART (e.g. where an objective which focused on delivery of a project which was in-scope at the beginning of the ADC cycle is postponed mid-year, it would be reasonable to review objectives at that time as that objective is no longer relevant). This can include adding new objectives.

Where adjustments are identified as being needed, these should be discussed and agreed between the appraisee and appraiser.

Adjusted objective(s) should be updated on the ADC form and shared between the appraisee and appraiser. With this in mind, objectives should be flexible and should be reviewed regularly during the year (e.g. during 1-1 meetings) to ensure that they remain relevant and will still lead to the agreed outcome(s).

Please note while there are circumstances where it would be appropriate to amend objectives during the performance year, this should always be with regard to any new or amended objectives being reasonable with consideration for both the needs of the university and what

are fair and realistic levels of expectation of the appraisee.

Progress against objectives should be regularly discussed and reviewed between the appraisee and appraiser, this will ensure that any potential barriers to progress can be discussed, and any support or development identified can be facilitated early to assist the progress towards the achievement of the objective(s).

4.4   Developing meaningful objectives

One well known method of setting meaningful objectives is the SMART framework:

Specific	A precise description of what the individual is expected to deliver
Measurable	For example, by quality (by accuracy or a defined measurable standard), quantity (process volumes), or cost (working within an agreed budget)
Achievable	Realistic, whilst still providing a degree of 'stretch'
Relevant	To the details contained within the faculty/professional service department operational delivery plans and to support individual and team development
Timely	A target date for completion

While the SMART method can work well for goals with clear, measurable outcomes, it may not fit every objective or be suited to every individual's way of working. Goals that are vague or hard to measure can be tricky to express using SMART. Plus, not every aspect of SMART may be easily achieved within all objectives.

There are other objective setting approaches that you may wish to consider, eg:

- PACT (Purposeful, Actionable, Continuous, Trackable): used for longer-term ambitious goals focused on the process rather than a fixed outcome.
- CLEAR (Collaborative, Limited, Emotional, Appreciable, Refinable): emphasizes involving others and ensuring emotional investment with the goal.
- WOOP (Wish, Outcomes, Obstacle, Plan): focuses on planning for obstacles which can be used to help address barriers (real or perceived) that may hinder success.
- OKR – Objectives and Key Results: defines what needs to be achieved and the key measurable outcomes that will indicate success.

The appraisee should consider what objective setting process genuinely works for them. Some individuals will respond well to detailed step-by-step logical planning with clear numerical targets, whereas others will be more motivated by defining a 'big picture' vision to work towards or setting exploratory questions to answer.

Whatever approach is used, it is important that the appraiser and appraisee have an open conversation about what objective setting method works for both the individual and the needs of the role.

5. Considering development conversations

A central aspect of any ADC should be around development and learning. This can take many forms, including both development within the appraisee's current role and longer-term career aspirations, and could include conversations around:

- ✓ Exploring what the appraisee finds most and least satisfying about their current role and why.
- ✓ Discussing future career and performance aspirations (see section 5.2 below).
- ✓ Reflecting on any strengths and areas for development (knowledge/skills/behaviours) in line with role requirements and career/performance ambitions.
- ✓ Exploring opportunities for learning and development to support development ambitions, or requirements of the role, within the next 12 months (recognising the value of both formal and informal learning opportunities)
- ✓ Identifying specific actions required to achieve career goals and timeframes to achieve these, including how progress will be shared and tracked, e.g. through a Personal Development Plan (PDP).

Development can come from many different areas and appraisees should take responsibility for reflecting on their own development and for understanding what is available to support future development.

However, the role of the appraiser is equally important in considering what development areas may need to be discussed and what may be available to appraisees to support their development.

It is recognised that not all development conversations take place during the formal annual ADC nor with the appraiser. Often, the most impactful development conversations can be those which take place with peers and other colleagues, which often take place throughout the year. The appraisee may reflect some of these conversations back in the ADC.

5.1   Identifying learning and development opportunities:

Learning and development does not just have to be focused on attending classroom style training courses. Informal development opportunities could include on the job learning, job shadowing, access to role models and/or mentors who can provide support and development opportunities. The use of coaching, where you can be supported by a qualified coach, can also be a powerful developmental tool.

You should also have a conversation discussing the importance of compliance training to ensure that both essential university wide training is complete along with any specific training required for the role.

For information about centrally provided learning and development opportunities at the University of Nottingham, please visit the Professional Development pages on the website (nottingham.ac.uk/hr/resource-finder/sub-categories/hr-learning-dev.aspx).

5.2   Supporting career development and progression

The ADC provides an opportunity for the individual to discuss their career development. This could be focused on developing within their existing role or their future career aspirations. For example, this could include, but is not limited to, discussing:

- ✓ Career readiness to apply for future career options (eg Academic Promotion, future roles within the team or across the university).

- ✓ Developing the existing role through diversifying or deepening knowledge or developing areas of responsibility (in line with their job level).
- ✓ Identifying 'stretch' opportunities for professional development in line with progression and career ambitions.
- ✓ Highlighting opportunities to explore future career possibilities, eg through informal job shadowing, cross-department projects or being part of internal or external networks.
- ✓ Developing professional networks and reputation across the department, institution or externally.

This should be led by the appraisee. To facilitate this, it is important to create an open environment where the appraisee feels comfortable and supported to discuss future options, achieved through non-judgmental open questioning, and good listening skills.

For further suggestions for how to best facilitate an effective development conversation, please refer to the appraiser discussion guide on the ADC web pages (nott.ac/performance-at-work).

Please note whilst we encourage all appraisees to discuss and identify development goals in line with the expectations of their current role, it is important the appraiser doesn't force the appraisee into considering future career plans if are not ready/interested to consider career progression.

5.3   Using the ADC to support academic promotion (Academic staff)

For academic staff, the ADC can be an opportunity to discuss readiness and preparation for academic promotion, either in the short or long term.

The appraisee could use this as an opportunity to reflect on:

- ✓ How are they performing at their current level?
- ✓ Where do they feel they are currently meeting the criteria for the next level?
- ✓ What opportunities are there for development to meet further criteria?

Where appropriate, the appraiser should be prepared to give constructive feedback about their readiness for academic promotion and collaboratively discuss options for development. This should be based on the academic promotion criteria to ensure a fair and balanced discussion takes place.

To support this conversation, refer to the academic promotion criteria.

6. ADC links to other processes

The normal expectation is that capability and disciplinary issues should be discussed and dealt with as and when they arise. However, it is recognised that there may be exceptional cases where issues are identified through the ADC that are better dealt with as capability or conduct matters. The ADC may be the starting point for such discussions, but matters should then be managed through either the capability or disciplinary process. Where such instances have arisen during the year, they may be noted in ADC as part of the reflection process and as part of future development discussions (where appropriate).

6.1 Capability and performance improvement

6.1.1 Raising capability or performance concerns during ADC

Capability concerns should be raised at the point at which they are identified. If circumstances arise where the appraiser identifies potential capability issues through the ADC, i.e. these have not yet been identified and raised earlier in the year, these issues should be discussed during the ADC and notes of the conversation should be documented. The appraiser should then refer to the Capability Procedure for the next steps (nottingham.ac.uk/go/capability-policy).

Role responsibilities, objectives and behaviours should be reviewed, and feedback given as to where they have not been achieved or where behavioural issues have been observed. The appraisee should be given appropriate objectives, support and training to assist them in making adequate progress towards the expected performance requirements of the role.

Where capability issues have been discussed at the ADC, or where significant concerns have been identified, the appraiser should seek advice from the HR Employment Relations Team. It is likely that the Capability Procedure (or Performance, Development and Improvement Plan for O&F Staff) should be applied in seeking to address the concerns (nottingham.ac.uk/go/capability-policy)

6.1.2 The role of ADC when active capability/performance management is underway

Where an appraisee is already within a capability/performance process, the ADC should still take place and will normally be held with the Progress Review Manager involved in the Capability Procedure (see Section 2.1 and 4.3 of the Capability Procedure). Objectives for both ADC and the Capability Improvement Plan should be the same or similar, and monitoring against these objectives should continue through the capability process following the annual ADC meeting. The ADC will take into account any relevant matters that might have impacted on the achievement of objectives for the year under review, including where these relate to capability. The ADC should capture an overall reflection of the appraisee's year.

6.2 Conduct

6.2.1 Raising conduct issues during ADC

The normal expectation would be that conduct issues would be identified and discussed as and when they arise, rather than at the ADC, unless this corresponds with the timing of the ADC meeting. If, as an outcome of discussions at the ADC meeting, the appraiser feels the issue is sufficiently serious then they should refer to the Disciplinary Procedure and seek advice from the HR Employment Relations Team.

7. Appraiser allocation and resolving issues

The allocation of suitable 'best fit' appraisers takes place as part of the planning for ADCs. In the O&F, Technical, APM and Childcare Services job families, the appraiser is normally the line manager of the appraisee.

In the R&T job family, where direct line management structures may not be in place, the faculty or school allocates appraisers based on 'best fit' to enable a meaningful and constructive conversation to take place.

An important part of the planning for ADCs is ensuring that appraisers are identified and allocated for every member of staff.

7.1   More than one appraiser

Individual circumstances may result in an ADC taking place with more than one appraiser. This may be due to a range of circumstances and may include (but not be limited to), the appraisee having more than one role at the university, the appraisee having been seconded during the year or having worked on a particular project for a substantial amount of time whereby they were reporting into a manager who is not their normal line manager, or where two appraisers are more appropriate to provide a holistic/comprehensive and meaningful ADC.

7.2   Resolving issues

Exceptionally, there may be occasions where issues arise before, during or after an ADC meeting. In these exceptional circumstances, both the appraiser and appraisee should aim to resolve any issues informally and to a satisfactory resolution.

7.3   Appraiser allocation

If the appraisee feels there is a substantial conflict of interest with the allocated appraiser, then they should raise this with the appraiser's line manager as soon as possible and prior to the ADC meeting. The appraiser's line manager will consider the circumstances and make a decision as to whether the appraiser is appropriate. The appraiser's manager will confirm their decision with the appraisee.

7.4   Objective

If there is conflict regarding the assessment of performance output or appropriateness of objectives as a result of the ADC, then the appraisee and appraiser should discuss this in the first instance, aiming to resolve the issue. If the appraisee feels that the issue has not been resolved, then the matter should be referred to the appraiser's line manager who will make an assessment of the circumstances and take any appropriate steps to remedy the situation and provide feedback to the appraisee.

8. Supporting resources

ADC support materials:
- **ADC web page (Form, ADC Information Video, ADC Discussion Guide, FAQs):** nott.ac/performance-at-work

Learning and career development resources:
- **Learning and Development:** nottingham.ac.uk/hr/resource-finder/sub-categories/hr-learning-dev.aspx
- **Central short courses:** nottingham.ac.uk/csc
- **Staff Career Development Hub (Moodle):** nottingham.ac.uk/go/staff-career-development-hub
- **Performance management resources:** nottingham.ac.uk/go/LMA-learning-resources
- **Resources on coaching and mentoring:** nottingham.ac.uk/go/LMA-coaching-mentoring

University values, behaviours and ways of working:
- **Open Conversations Framework:** uniofnottm.sharepoint.com/sites/OpenConversation
- **Agile Working:** uniofnottm.sharepoint.com/sites/Agile

Procedures:

- **Academic Promotion**:
  nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/promotionandregrading/promotion
- **Capability guidelines for managers (R&T, APM, Technical, Childcare Services):**
  nottingham.ac.uk/go/capability-policy
- **Estates and Hospitality Employee Handbook:**
  uniofnottm.sharepoint.com/sites/EstatesandFacilities

9. Appendix

Examples of different objective types aligned to wider operational and strategic priorities

Examples of specific objective types

- A researcher's objectives will primarily focus on the university Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategic Delivery Plan and there may be very specific research objectives agreed, reflecting the specialist area of work or discipline.

- A project manager may have specific objectives agreed to reflect particular projects identified as necessary in support of the wider faculty/school/department or professional service area's priorities identified in the faculty/professional service department (PSD) operational delivery plans. Focus on behaviours may be the same as other project manager's within the team where identified as a particular priority.

Examples of similar objective types

- An administrative team who undertake similar work activities may have the same or similar objectives to support the operational priorities identified in the faculty/PSD operational delivery plans.

- All staff within a department may have a specific area of focus on a particular behaviour, as identified as a particular priority.

Examples of contribution objective types

- It may be necessary to reduce financial overheads within an admin hub and, therefore, everyone within that area may have a focus to identify ways to be more financially sustainable and implement any necessary actions to do this, for example, smarter working practices.
- There may be a focus on increasing international reputation and engagement, therefore, objectives could be included in how to achieve this (depending on specific roles and responsibilities).
- There may be a focus on improving customer service, therefore, objectives could be included in how to achieve this (depending on specific roles and responsibilities).
- Specific objectives here could relate to leadership and management activities, depending on the specific role being undertaken.

Examples of culture and climate objective types

- There may be a focus within an area on inclusivity. In this instance, all appraisees may have objectives relating to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within the wider work context.
- There may be a focus within an area on creating and implementing initiatives and activities to support and improve employee engagement. In this instance, appraisees may have objectives in how to achieve this.

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