**Setting Objectives**

Effective objective setting provides structure and direction to the University/Faculties/Schools/Departments and teams as well as people development.

The main purpose of setting objectives is to reflect the University objectives at a level where the individual member of staff can make their personal contribution. They should always fall within fair and realistic expectations of the role and must also be stretching enough to help to develop the skills and potential of the role holder with a view to improving their performance in either the short or longer-term. Objectives can fall in the following areas:

- Key elements of the job
- University/functional objectives
- Change, improvement or developmental objectives

Effective objective setting requires both the role holder and manager/reviewer to be flexible in their approach to the objectives they have agreed, and not to stick rigidly to defined targets that are no longer relevant or practical. Objectives of all kinds must be regularly revisited and reviewed, perhaps in the regular one-to-one meetings, in order to ensure they are still relevant and will still lead to the desired outcome.

Objectives should be informed by the needs of the University defined by the University plan/Departmental or School plans as well as clear role expectations appropriate to the level of the role holder’s position; this is determined by the University’s Job Family and role profile framework. Additional developmental and behavioural objectives may also be supported by the competency reference guide provided to support the management of behavioural competencies relating to ‘how’ work may be delivered.

**Ground Rules for Setting Objectives**

Many of you are familiar with the SMART acronym for setting objectives — very useful and highly memorable. These ground rules go a bit further, but you will still find SMART represented.
1. **Make them Specific**

Objectives should be a precise description of what the individual is expected to deliver, i.e. simple statements of required end results written as action statements - what the individual is planning to do.

2. **Agree Measures of achievement**

Results need to be measurable so that, at the end of the time period set for the objective, the reviewer and role holder can decide without argument whether the desired results have been achieved. Sometimes measurement can be easy, perhaps by using

- Quality, for example by accuracy or a defined measurable standard
- Quantity, for example by process volumes
- Timeliness, for example by meeting agreed deadlines, or
- Cost, for example working within agreed and defined budget

Sometimes establishing means of measurement can be more difficult i.e. when thinking how to measure customer/student satisfaction.

3. **Make them Achievable, but Challenging**

Constant failure to achieve objectives is depressing and demotivating, it is therefore important that they remain realistic at all times. However, if objectives are easily achievable the credibility of the system will suffer. People do develop by being stretched so an objective should be challenging whilst remaining within the expectations of the role. It’s important that the role holder can realistically achieve the objective with the resources that they have at their disposal.

4. **Agree Objectives Jointly**

Objectives, which can be proposed by both the role holder and the reviewer, should be discussed and agreed jointly wherever possible as it is important that the role holder feels though they can own the objective and be committed to it.

5. **Make sure they are Relevant**

The role holder’s objectives should be relevant to objectives of the University and the Faculty/function they work in and their role, this will ensure that the goals of the individual are aligned to the University goals.

6. **Review Progress Regularly**

Objectives should not just be agreed at the beginning of the year and reviewed at the end. They should be part of an ongoing process whereby the reviewer and role holder review progress and decide future steps jointly. Objectives need to be flexible. Regular reviews (one-to-one meetings) have a role to play in building this flexibility into the objectives agreed by the role holder and the reviewer. Objectives must be flexible because conditions affecting the University/Faculty/Department can change. Regular reviews enable the reviewer and role holder to monitor the relevance of individual objectives with changes in the department as a whole. Objectives can then be changed or adjusted where necessary.
This should include external factors that may be change the anticipated outcome. For example planning assumptions regarding anticipated research income may indicate a planned target value, however, on review if this value has not been reached, consideration should be given to external factors that the individual may not have been able to control and targets or plans adjusted appropriately.

7. Agree a Timescale

Always set a target date for the completion of the objective. A target deadline gives the role holder something to aim for and can help them to plan their work. It can also help the reviewer to ensure that what is agreed becomes an action, rather than just an intention.

8. Make sure the objectives are within the Role Holder's control

The role holder must be able to be in control of the outcome - if other factors come into play what is attributable to the role holder may be difficult to establish.

9. Support the Objectives with Action Plans

The role holder knows what they have to achieve, by when and how they are going to be measured, but do they know how they are going to go about achieving their objectives? Action planning can help.

10. Clearly Worded

Using clear unambiguous language can help. It has to be understood by both reviewer and role holder. When writing objectives beware of using the words listed below, even though they may look attractive and 'managerial':

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Justifiable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximate</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>Reasonable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>Optimise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allowable</td>
<td>Increase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>Satisfy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Liaise</td>
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Their main fault is that they are not sufficiently precise they may indicate a direction, but do not define how far (unless further quantified with specific performance indicators).

There are other words which should be avoided because they suggest that the objectives are more concerned with activities than with results (input rather than output). The list below shows some examples, with (in brackets) some substitutes which are probably better, but may not always be appropriate:
Example Objectives

The following are examples of general objectives that meet the criteria articulated above.

- To Achieve an average SET score of X or less across all modules delivered throughout the reporting period.

- To generate £xxxxxx in revenue from research income over the financial year. To be monitored through University’s finance data systems.

- To generate research outcomes and publications outputs equivalent to X* rating to be reviewed through number of publications generated and peer review.

- Train all employees in XYZ department on the new software, so that their transition to the new software is complete and they are using it effectively (less than 10% error rate, as evidenced by no more than 5 calls a day to the help line) by 1 October.

- Demonstrate proficiency in using PowerPoint by preparing and delivering Annual Budget Presentation by 15 August. Progress review at end of every month beginning April.

- Develop and implement an action plan to reduce error in cost accounting for departments, resulting in accurate accounting reports within two weeks of the monthly close.

- In consultation with Human Resources, develop an under performance corrective action plan for employee XYZ, so that within 90 days either the employee's performance meets and sustains agreed standards or employee is subject to action through the appropriate University procedure.

- Specify all project objectives and key deliverables, with milestones for XYZ project by 1 September.

- Develop a Benefits Realisation Plan for XYZ project for submission to MB by 30 September.

- Support the University’s public engagement agenda by actively engaging in the University’s work placement initiate. To be achieved through supporting a work placement and acting as a mentor in the workplace for six months.

- Balance staffing lists and reconcile budget to expenditure monthly by the 20 of the following month.

- Respond to all calls from the customer query line within two hours of receipt, and resolve or have a plan to resolve all complaints within 48 hours of receipt.
• Interpret monthly financial reports and analyse budget and expenditure data to identify imbalances and trends, and develop and implement strategies for resolving any problems so discovered.

• Maintain the University web site for the department, meeting with the team at least once a month to discuss enhancements and/or problems with the current sites, and ensuring that they are updated with appropriate information at least weekly.

• Conduct no less than quarterly one-to-one meetings with your staff and forward written summaries of topics discussed to me (line Manager).

• Ensure that all employees in your department receive timely performance reviews and all have Personal Development Plans and that all staff within your area of responsibility receive their PDPR annual review within the sign off period with no unauthorised delays.

• Manage staff and staff resources to ensure that there is adequate clerical and management staff within the allotted Full-time Equivalents (FTE) and budget for the department.

• Create and implement a development plan for each of your direct reports in an area which will further their effectiveness in their current position, to be reviewed with me twice during the year.

• Develop test and implement XYZ product to internal IS Standards by 1 August.

• Process all purchase orders to ensure that 100% of available rebate is secured. Monitoring quarterly against annual target.

• Produce a paper for the MB on the Programme Support Office by the end of July identifying related University risks and Issues and providing clear options and recommendations.

• Research, design and implement a service review based on the principles of the lean management. Deliver recommendations to the management team including evidence as to whether they will deliver real service delivery benefits by 31 August.

• Develop Customer Satisfaction Survey to measure performance of marketing across the University. Create a report detailing baseline position and develop an action plan to tackle under-performance. Deadline to be agreed.

Setting Objectives in a Balanced Way

The Balanced Scorecard

An approach to strategic management was developed in the early 1990's by Drs Robert Kaplan (Harvard Business School) and David Norton. They named this system the ‘balanced scorecard’. Recognising some of the weaknesses and vagueness of previous management approaches, the balanced scorecard approach provides a clear prescription as to what organisations should measure in order to ‘balance’ the financial perspective. The balanced scorecard is a management system that enables organisations such as The University of Nottingham to clarify their vision and strategy and then translate them into action. It provides feedback around both the internal processes and external outcomes in order to continuously improve strategic performance and results.
When fully deployed, the balanced scorecard transforms strategic planning from an academic exercise into one of tangible delivery.

Kaplan and Norton describe the innovation of the balanced scorecard as follows:

"The balanced scorecard retains traditional financial measures. But financial measures tell the story of past events, an adequate story for industrial age companies for which investments in long-term capabilities and customer relationships were not critical for success. These financial measures are inadequate, however, for guiding and evaluating the journey that information age companies must make to create future value through investment in customers, suppliers, employees, processes, technology, and innovation." The balanced scorecard suggests that we view the organisation from four perspectives, and to develop metrics, collect data and analyse it relative to each of these perspectives:

- The learning and growth perspective
- The business process perspective
- The customer perspective
- The financial perspective
To continue this approach through the management of staff, objectives set should reflect and be a balance of the four different perspectives.

For example

1. For a Researcher 'balanced' objectives might be:

**Financial**
To generate £xxxxx in revenue from research income over the financial year. To be monitored through University’s finance data systems.
Customer
To achieve an average SET score of X or less across all modules delivered throughout the reporting period.

Processes
To develop a research project that meets the scope and objectives defined by the funding body and publish work at the appropriate standard to meet the wider stakeholder needs of the University (X* and above).

Learning & Growth
To develop collaborative working skills through the development and implementation of a clear stakeholder map by 30 July that will ensure research is appropriately challenged and informed as it progresses.

To make an effective contribution in the direct mentoring of two early career researchers, to improve the overall quality of research delivered. Achieved through regular discussions and feedback throughout the research project. To be judged at the end of financial year and project end by HOS in conjunction with Professor for area of expertise.

2. For a team administrator 'balanced' objectives might be:

Financial
Develop and implement an action plan to reduce error in cost accounting for the department, resulting in accurate accounting reports within two weeks of the monthly close.

Customer
Respond to all calls from the general department query line within two hours of receipt, and resolve or have a plan to resolve all complaints within 48 hours of receipt.

Internal Processes
Collate accurate information relating to type of work and time spent on work progressing through the administration team. Identify the work that takes the most time and provide suggestions as to how this could be improved to increase team efficiency by up to 10%.

Learning and Growth
Provide input in to your own Personal Development Plan, identifying new skills or areas of development that will improve your performance in your current role (identify how you think these skills may be developed (training, exposure to new tasks, team feedback, work shadowing).

Demonstrate proficiency in using PowerPoint following your recent training by preparing the Annual Budget presentation to the agreed format and content by 1 June. The presentation must look professional and meet the requirements of the standard University brand.