

Guidance for managers on performance management

The purpose of the performance management policy is to support managers and staff in addressing underperformance through clear communication. Managers should aim to raise issues of underperformance with staff as soon as they arise, and in many cases the issues will be addressed through the informal stages.

Informal stages:

Raise any concerns directly with the individual at the earliest opportunity. Minor issues should be dealt with on a day-to-day basis, however, if these are sustained or there are more serious concerns, ask the staff member to meet with you. Hold the meeting at a time and in a place where you can give the individual your full attention without interruption. Listen carefully to the individual and encourage honest and open discussion using open questions e.g. “why do you think this has become a problem?” Respect confidentiality and only discuss the matter with those who absolutely need to know. Developing an action plan to address the issues and agreeing this with the staff member is important.

Points to discuss with individual:

- Strengths as well as weaknesses. Be specific about both, giving examples.
- Explore any underlying reasons for the underperformance e.g. workload, health, pressures outside of work.
- Anything which might help. This could be support from you as their manager and/or pointing the individual towards other sources of support.
- Be clear about what satisfactory performance would look like, i.e. what your expectations are, in what timeframe and how this will be measured.
- Make a brief note of the points you have discussed and, wherever possible, agree these and give a copy of this to the individual so there is no room for confusion or forgetting details. This can easily happen, particularly where the individual is upset or angry.

Timescales:

For teaching issues, review period needs to include scheduled teaching of appropriate volume and nature to give true picture of impact of support provided and ability to improve e.g. over a term. NB a review period over the summer is unlikely to be representative

For research issues, milestones should be set rather than expecting a publication within an unreasonably short timescale. Milestones could be that person is appointed a mentor, demonstrates engagement with that person or support, forms research ideas and plans, produces drafts, submits high quality research measured by internal quality checks.

Attitude or behavioural issues could potentially be considered over a 3 month review period, with an escalation if these become more severe or show no sign of improvement in spite of support

Points to consider:

Most issues can and should be handled informally by honest and open discussion.

Always consider the volume and type of work. For example, where large volumes of teaching have been allocated compared to other staff, or they are teaching a new area for the first time, their ability to develop or conduct research will be limited so research output will be affected.

Whether others are being treated in the same way or whether others in similar roles and with similar experience are being treated differently. If so, individuals will feel picked on or singled out unfairly. It is also important to consider equality issues, to ensure that there is no indirect discrimination (e.g. not considering the impact of maternity leave on women's careers or the impact of a disability on career progression).

Do:

- Approach performance meetings with the aim of securing improvement to acceptable standards, not as a way of penalising a person.
- Bring up problems 1-1 as and when they arise rather than storing them up.
- Invite the person to a meeting, allowing enough time to discuss problems fully.
- Arrange to meet in a location which allows for a confidential discussion without interruptions.
- Wherever possible, schedule the meeting at a time when you and the staff member have the energy and the ability to listen i.e. not sandwiched in the middle of other complex meetings or lengthy teaching sessions.
- Listen with an open mind and without pre-judging the problem or the outcome.
- Remember that raw data such as teaching scores or customer feedback are an indication of a problem, but not necessarily evidence that there is an issue.
- Meet regularly with the person to allow discussion, flag problems and check progress, not just at formal review meetings.
- Specify the issue, giving an example of acceptable standards.
- Provide the individual with enough detail for them to understand the problem, e.g. give student feedback comments not just scores.
- Draw up a performance improvement plan which outlines objectives, timescales and support, and agree this.
- Summarise meetings held, agreements reached, progress achieved and any barriers identified. At informal stages, make a brief note of the key points and either email or give a copy document to the individual to record the discussion. At formal stages this will be more detailed and formalised.
- Reflect on comments made and consider whether support measures are appropriate for the person and the circumstances. If it isn't working, change the approach, if possible and practical.
- Maintain confidentiality, not discussing the problems with others.
- During formal stages, document the problem and gather examples/information to refer to e.g. feedback scores, other staff comments/complaints (with their permission).
- Consider whether expectations have been communicated and consistently applied.
- Check that the support provided is working.
- Seek out support from HR.
- Seek training on effective approaches to handling poor performance.

Do not:

- Put off raising issues that are impacting on other staff, students, quality and productivity.
- Make assumptions about the cause of a problem. Listen and respond to what the person says.
- Set unrealistic timescales for improvement or set timescales for improvement over a quiet period, when it is unrepresentative or would not allow any improvement to be measured.
- Rush into a formal process without attempting to tackle problems informally first.
- Micro-manage. Find an appropriate balance between monitoring performance and allowing the person to prove their ability.
- Be unreasonable. Make sure expectations are in line with others, not harsher than others.
- Wait for a review meeting if things get even worse, meet sooner.
- Be vague. Give concrete examples of occasions where individual performance has fallen short and had a negative impact.

Support suggestions (for Academics)

Research support:

- Mentoring by successful researchers within or outside subject area.
- Internal quality review of research prior to external submission.
- Grant writing skills support.
- Support preparing for funding review panels, e.g. interview skills, communication skills.

Teaching support:

- Advice from CLIPP, e.g. on improving teaching delivery.
- Teaching observations with critical feedback provided either via CLIPP or experienced teachers within own School.
- Language skills support, particularly for non-native English speakers, where students give feedback on problems understanding a lecturer either verbally or in written material (or both), via CELCA referral and 1-1 language coaching.

Other support:

- Attitude/behaviour issues, people management, interpersonal problems, time management, prioritising addressed by SGD training sessions or tailored 1-1 support.
- Technical inability, e.g. to use Blackboard, email etc via SGD courses or learning by following a local expert.
- Appointment of a coach or mentor whether internal or external to the School, Department or even external to the University.
- For failure to communicate with students or with other staff members, give examples of acceptable behaviour e.g. expectation of contributing to team meetings, re-stating expectations on time it should take to respond to a student query.
- Where ill health is or could be a factor, talk to HR about getting Occupational Health advice.

Sources of support for managers:

- Talk to HR for advice, guidance and coaching on handling the problem.
- Talk to HR about sourcing specific support for the individual.
- Where health may be a factor, talk to HR about an occupational health referral.