Guidance Note for Managers

Managing Unsatisfactory Performance

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Guidance Note for Managers

Managing Unsatisfactory Performance

# Background

This guide for managers lays out the key considerations in dealing informally with issues of unsatisfactory performance.

Managers are responsible for setting achievable, measurable and appropriate standards of performance and for communicating these effectively to staff. Line managers therefore have a critical role in ensuring that staff are encouraged and enabled to perform effectively and to behave appropriately and in line with the University’s Values.

Good performance management uses a combination of formal and informal methods to allow staff to perform effectively and to achieve their potential. This includes comprehensive induction, ensuring role clarity through clear job descriptions, effective Accountability and Development Reviews (ADR) and provision of appropriate training, development and support as well as proactive management and supervision of staff.

Staff need to be clear about management expectations with regard to performance. As a manager, you are responsible for clarifying your expectations, setting realistic and achievable standards and making sure staff know what is required. Standards should be set with appropriate reference to the job description for the post, departmental and organisational performance standards, and should be capable of being measured. Staff have a contractual responsibility to achieve a satisfactory level of performance and should be given support and encouragement to reach it.

Good two way communication is key to managing effective relationships with staff. It is important that regular feedback on performance is provided to all staff, whether this is negative or positive. Regular discussion with staff about performance on an informal basis will help to identify any problem areas and allow appropriate action to be taken promptly. This is particularly important during a probationary period, where regular meetings and discussion should take place to review progress.

# Dealing with performance issues

Concerns about performance should be raised as soon as possible after they occur, or when they become evident, to ensure they do not become bigger issues that are more difficult to tackle. It is not necessary to wait until the next formal review or ADR meeting before raising concerns. By making staff aware of your concerns it gives them the opportunity to address them and for you to work together to resolve any issues.

Minor problems which arise on a day-to-day basis are usually best resolved in discussion between the manager and the member of staff with the intention of supporting an improved and sustained standard of performance. With support, and by drawing attention to the fact that there is a problem, performance will often return to expected standards. Where there are on-going issues that are not addressed through regular feedback and support then a more structured approach will be required.

# Considerations

When you have concerns about a member of staff’s performance, consideration should be given to the possible causes as this will help you to address the situation appropriately.

The following questions may help you when considering poor performance, identifying possible causes and how to address it:

* Are the requirements of the role clear and is there an up to date job description detailing this?
* Have objectives, standards and expectations been adequately communicated?
* Is the workload reasonable and manageable?
* Have significant changes occurred in job content?
* Have proper facilities and equipment been provided?
* Has adequate support, supervision and training been provided?
* What other support might be required? E.g. training and development, mentoring, coaching, occupational health support or counselling.
* Are there personal factors that should be taken account of? E.g. ill health, domestic circumstances.
* Could the underperformance be as a result of negative impact of others’ behaviour? E.g. as a result of perceived bullying or harassment.
* Are there wider organisational or team issues that might be impacting on performance e.g. high level of sickness absence within a team, unclear priorities etc.

You should gather sufficient information to ensure that you can make fair and informed decisions.

# Holding an informal performance meeting

When addressing ongoing performance issues with a member of staff it is important that this is approached in a constructive manner with the aim of supporting the individual to resolve any issues. The discussion should be aimed at encouraging and motivating the member of staff to improve their performance to an acceptable level. You should also be able to give specific factual examples of issues that are of concern and criticism should be constructive, with the emphasis being on finding ways for the member of staff to improve and for the improvement to be sustained.

Informal meetings should normally be held on a one to one basis with the member of staff and their manager and adequate time should be set aside for the meeting and a venue should be selected that provides adequate privacy to discuss issues.

During discussions you should be clear about the improvement required, how performance will be reviewed and over what period. The member of staff should fully understand the outcome of the meeting and that if an improvement is not made or sustained, more formal processes will need to start.

# Key steps

1. Explain the purpose of the meeting and give the member of staff the opportunity to ask any questions.
2. Advise the member of staff that their performance has fallen short of the standard expected for their position / grade and outline the impact of this.
3. Demonstrate and explain the grounds and/or evidence for this view providing factual examples of under-performance. The Job Description may help you to focus on objective aspects and, where appropriate, the job level descriptors may provide additional help.
4. Explore the reasons for under performance and give the individual the opportunity to explain their performance and to raise any concerns they may have about the job.
5. Discuss whether there is any appropriate support, training or development that could be provided to address the issues and facilitate improvement.
6. Set out clear and realistic performance standards and expectations going forward, and how you will monitor them.
7. Following discussion and taking into account the member of staff’s input, set realistic timescales for improvement and confirm how and when you will monitor and review progress.
8. Highlight that if there are on-going issues then this may be addressed formally.

Following the meeting the key points of discussions should be confirmed in writing to ensure that both you and the employee have the same clear understanding of what was discussed at the meeting. This can be done by an email marked ‘strictly private and confidential’. Invite the individual to comment on the content of the notes and, if they disagree with them, reflect on whether you feel able to change the notes or confirm to the individual that you will append a written commentary on the areas of disagreement.

The discussions and documentation should be managed confidentially. Where concerns about performance become more persistent or are of a more serious nature it may be appropriate to develop and implement a performance improvement plan (example provided below in appendix 1).

# Following the meeting

You should ensure that any support that is agreed at the meeting is implemented accordingly.

Schedule a follow up review meeting to discuss progress within a reasonable timescale, probably within 1-3 months for support staff but possibly longer for academic professional staff, depending on the issues and whether performance is improving or not. Regular dialogue should continue with regard to performance in the intervening period.

If in the intervening period it is apparent that performance is not improving, and you have discussed the examples of this with the member of staff, it may be appropriate to bring forward the follow up review meeting. If a member of staff is unable to achieve a satisfactory level of performance even after a reasonable opportunity to improve, and with training and coaching assistance if required, further more formal action should be considered in conjunction with the HR Manager for your area. The level of action will depend on the significance of the performance issues and the extent of any improvement.

Where there is disagreement about the existence of or significance of the performance issues, staff should be made aware that it is your job as manager to set reasonable performance standards and that you are not satisfied with the standard of performance. Where formal processes are invoked, staff members do of course have the right of appeal against the issue of a disciplinary warning.

# Conclusion

With the help of this guide, the University seeks to help line managers to informally support their staff to enhance performance which is deemed to be unsatisfactory. However, ultimately, if a member of staff, following support and warnings as part of a more formal process, remains unable to meet the performance requirements of the role, then a dismissal may need to occur. In such cases, a fair process, including evidence of, for example, developmental support, enhanced supervision, clarification of performance expectations and monitoring over an appropriate period, will be required. Line Managers utilizing this informal framework in the first instance will be able to show that they have fairly supported the individual with a view to achieving satisfactory performance and with formal processes up to and including dismissal only being required when individuals remain unable to fully and competently perform within their role.

# Appendix 1 – Guidance on Developing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

1. Consult your HR Manager for advice prior to and during the development of the PIP. Consider also consulting the Organisational and Staff Development Unit (OSDU).
2. Involve the member of staff in discussion to develop the PIP and take their views on board as you develop the content of the PIP.
3. Identify the minimum satisfactory level of performance required in the particular aspect of the job/role and compare this to the current capability of the member of staff.
4. Specify the overall performance improvement objective(s) to be achieved ensuring relevance to job/role. Where appropriate, separate out the constituent elements into detailed performance improvement objectives.
5. Consider the range of available approaches to enabling the required improvement; select the most appropriate method of development given budgetary and time constraints and the learning style of the member of staff.
6. Clarify practical matters such as cost and who will bear it, who will supervise the development process and assess its effectiveness and what timescale will apply and document this information.
7. Identify what the success criteria will be and how the learning/improved performance will be measured.
8. Ensure that the performance targets and development needs are achievable. Where the member of staff has significant improvement needs development against these should be undertaken in manageable steps.
9. Plan progress reviews on a regular basis as appropriate during the period of the PIP, identifying further action as required.
10. Identify any further support required for the member of staff during the course of the PIP as required.
11. Undertake a final review at the end of the PIP period and record the outcome. Where a satisfactory performance level is attained and maintained confirm this in writing to the member of staff. Where the level of performance is not satisfactory identify further action required in conjunction with HR and confirm in writing to the member of staff.

**Anonymised examples of Performance Improvement Plans for a range of jobs are available from HR.**

# Performance Improvement Plan

**Name:**       **Post Held:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Overall Performance Objective**  What is the aim of the Improvement Plan? | |  | | | |
| **Detailed Performance Objectives** | **Method of Achieving Required Performance Standard** | | **Success Criteria** | **Review** | **Outcome** |
| What are the specific issues to be addressed? The overall performance objective should be broken down into manageable elements | What must take place to enable the performance to improve? What are the practical implications of this? | | How will you know when a satisfactory level of performance is attained? | When and who will undertake the regular reviews? What progress is expected at different review times? Is there any additional action to be taken? | When will the final review be undertaken and by whom? What is the outcome? |
|  |  | |  |  |  |

**Discussed between**:

Member of staff:

Manager:

**Date:**  Click here to enter a date.