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Resources

Managing Performance Issues Informally

Guidance

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Introduction

The Managing and Supporting Performance Policy sets out a full structured process for addressing issues of underperformance. This guidance note focusses specifically on the management of performance issues at an informal stage.

Good performance management uses a combination of formal and informal methods to allow staff to perform effectively and achieve their potential. Whilst relevant mechanisms such as induction processes, ensuring role clarity through clear job descriptions and effective implementation of Performance and Development Reviews (PDR) are all vitally important to building a culture of high performance, none of these replace the need for the effective day to day management and supervision of staff.

Good two way communication is key to managing effective relationships with staff. As part of this, it is important that regular feedback on performance is provided to all staff, whether this is negative or positive.

Maintaining Good Performance

As mentioned above, robust induction processes and clear and relevant job descriptions help set out expectations of an employee in their role. The annual Performance and Development Review (PDR) then provides the opportunity to set out expectations (objectives) for the coming year, whilst reflecting on the previous year's performance and discussing any identified development needs.

Outside of these mechanisms, typical day-to-day management is essential to ensuring that:

- Employees are aware of how they are performing against set objectives
- Employees are aware of any changes to their objectives or what is required of them
- Any issues or concerns can be raised at an early stage, either by the manager or by the employee
- Relevant advice is sought before any concerns are escalated
- Adjustments or adaptations, if required, are made at an earlier stage

Regular open and honest dialogue allows for such matters to be raised and discussed and in the majority of cases should prevent underperformance from occurring or worsening.

Addressing Underperformance Informally

The majority of cases of poor performance, if addressed early enough, result in no need for formal escalation. The informal stage therefore aims to bring concerns to the attention of the employee and resolve the issues quickly and effectively wherever possible to ensure they don't become bigger issues that are more difficult to resolve. Managers do not need to wait until the next formal review or PDR meeting before raising concerns.

Holding an Informal Performance Meeting

Informal meetings will typically be held on a one to one basis with the employee and their manager.

Performance related discussions are of a sensitive nature and as such, should be carried out in a confidential and sensitive manner, away from other colleagues.

When addressing ongoing performance issues with a member of staff it is important that this is approached in a constructive manner with an aim to support the individual to resolve any issues. The meeting should be aimed at encouraging and motivating the employee to improve their performance to the required level.

Managers should ensure they are prepared for the discussion by gathering the necessary information/evidence relating to the underperformance. This may include notes of previous discussions/meetings, the job description for the role, evidence of complaints or specific examples of unsatisfactory work.

The [Form – Performance Improvement Plan](#) should be used to guide and record discussions at this stage. A non-exhaustive list of key considerations is listed below. These complement the Performance Improvement Plan Form and should be used as a guide when holding an informal discussion.

Key Considerations

1. The purpose of the meeting should be explained to the employee (including the fact that key details will be recorded on the Performance Improvement Plan) and they should be given the opportunity to ask any questions
2. The employee should be informed that their performance has fallen short of the standard expected and specifics of the performance issues should be summarised by the manager

3. The manager should outline the evidence of underperformance, which may include documents or records such as job descriptions or lists of agreed objectives which focus on quantitative or measureable aspects
4. The manager should communicate the impact of the underperformance and explain why improvement is important
5. The reasons for underperformance should be explored with the employee, with consideration given to the following:
 - Are the requirements of the role clear?
 - Have objectives and expectations been adequately communicated?
 - 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 or counselling)
 - Are there any other factors (e.g. personal) which should be taken into account?
 - Is there an underlying medical condition affecting the employee's ability to do their job?*
 - Are there wider organisational or team issues that might be impacting on performance?
 - Are there any concerns that the employee wishes to raise themselves?

**Where an underlying medical condition or disability is identified as contributing towards the underperformance, or where it is unclear, additional advice should be taken from Human Resources. A referral to the University's Occupational Health Unit will normally be appropriate in such circumstances in order to obtain further information. In such cases, discussions should still take place as outlined below in order to ensure that the manager fully understands the position and that full support is given to the employee, however adjustments may have to be considered in conjunction with HR advice in terms of how the performance issue is managed.*

6. Having explored the causes or factors contributing to the underperformance, as well as agreeing and recording any required support mechanisms, managers should outline and reinforce the performance standards and expectations of the employee going forward, including communicating to the employee that their performance will continue to be monitored for (typically) the next 3 months
7. Managers should ensure the employee is aware of any next steps, including any review meetings or possible outcomes (i.e. progression to the formal stage) should the underperformance continue

Following the meeting the key points of the discussion should be confirmed within Part A of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and shared with the employee for their own records.

Managers should implement (or begin work on implementing) any agreed actions or supports immediately.

Ongoing Performance Monitoring and Review

Following the informal performance discussion, review meetings should take place as appropriate to discuss progress in relation to the Performance Improvement Plan and to make any adjustments as required.

Part B of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) should be used to guide and record follow up discussions and should be duplicated for each discussion as appropriate.

At review meetings, managers should consider the following:

- The activities undertaken by both the employee and the manager since the last meeting should be summarised
- Feedback should be provided to the employee on their progress
- Any underlying reasons affecting performance, identified at the first (or earlier) meeting(s), should be revisited
- Any set improvement objectives should be revisited with progress specific to that objective discussed and any next steps agreed
- Any supports already in place should be reviewed (including their effectiveness) and any further modifications or new supports/adjustments should be discussed if required
- Employees should have the opportunity to record their own notes or concerns
- The dates of any further review meetings should be agreed

Review meetings should take place as required in line with the agreed monitoring period.

In most cases, informal discussion(s) backed by a Performance Improvement Plan should lead to the required improvement, however where performance issues remain then the matter should be escalated to the formal process outlined within the Managing and Supporting Performance Policy.

Where performance improves to a satisfactory level, the employee should be notified of this and that their performance will revert to being managed as per normal arrangements (i.e. no longer subject to the performance management process).