



University  
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Resources

# Using the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

## Guidance

## Guidance – Using the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

### Introduction

The Managing and Supporting Performance Policy sets out a full structured process for addressing issues of underperformance and stresses the importance of proactive management in order to prevent underperformance from occurring or encouraging very early resolution of issues through routine or day-to-day management.

Where performance levels do not improve at an early stage despite intervention, then a more structured discussion should take place guided by, and recorded on, the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The form can be used at an informal level then, in cases where there is no improvement, can remain with an employee for the duration of the process (including into the formal stages).

This guidance note provides additional guidance on the use of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) form throughout the Performance Management Process.

### The Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

The Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is intended to both guide and record performance related discussions. The form acts as a mechanism to ensure that there is full clarity on the nature of the performance issue whilst prompting exploration of any contributory factors before encouraging dialogue around specific improvement objectives and any support required in order to ensure they are achieved successfully. The PIP itself is not a formal sanction but is instead a constructive tool to support performance improvement.

Performance Improvement Plans typically run for a set monitoring period as outlined in the full Managing and Supporting Performance policy.

During the formal stages of the Performance Improvement Process, the PIP may run concurrently with a written warning.

### When to use the PIP

#### Informal Stage

When a performance issue has been identified, the PIP can be used as early as the Informal Performance Discussion during the informal stage of the Performance Improvement Process. It would however be expected that any issues will already have been raised at least once through routine management (e.g. through a one-to-one meeting) and an employee

given an early opportunity to improve their performance before reaching the Informal Performance Discussion.

### Formal Stages

Subsequent PIPs may then be issued at the formal stages of the process should the matter progress as outlined in the Managing and Supporting Performance Policy. The form has been designed for iterative use, so should a matter progress to a formal stage and require a further PIP to be put in place then a new form should be completed accordingly and attached to the form(s) used at the earlier stage(s) in order to maintain a continuous record.

The [Process Diagram – Performance Improvement Process](#) gives an overview of the full process.

## **How to use the PIP**

Whilst the form ultimately records the discussion(s) that take place, it also serves as a useful guide (alongside the associated guidance notes) to structure the discussions between managers and employees.

The form is split into two parts. Part A should be used to guide and record the main performance discussion itself, be that at the informal or formal stages. How and when the form is completed is a matter for managers to consider. E.g. at an informal meeting, they may complete it there and then with the employee whilst at the formal stages it may be more likely that the PIP is issued after the hearing, at the same time as the hearing outcome. Part B is intended to guide and document any review meetings which take place in follow up to the main performance discussion (e.g. review meetings which take place throughout a monitoring period).

The specifics of the form are explained in more detail below:

## **Part A**

### Summary of Performance Issues

This section should document the identified performance issues in an objective manner, linking to any evidence where possible (attached separately if appropriate). Examples may include copies of documents showing repeated errors over a period of time, or notes of earlier discussions in relation to underperformance alongside examples of continued failure to improve. Other relevant documents may include job descriptions or lists of objectives or targets.

It is important, if an employee is to be able to improve their performance, that a clear explanation is given of where they are not meeting expected standards.

### Reasons/Contributory factors affecting performance

It is also important that a discussion takes place to establish whether or not there are any contributory factors which may be affecting an employee's performance. Such information will play an important part in how the employee is then supported to make the required improvements. Contributory factors might include medical, work-related or domestic matters and should be explored sensitively but openly. It is important that this information is passed to managers to ensure that appropriate support is put in place and in some cases, further advice may be required (e.g. Occupational Health referral).

### Improvement Objectives

This section should be used to describe the required improvement in the form of objectives. The other columns across the row (noted below) then capture additional detail in relation to each objective. An example improvement objective may be "Improve numerical accuracy during the monthly reporting process". Any objectives set should be relevant and achievable within the time period in which the employee's performance is being monitored.

### Standard Required/Measures/Targets

This section allows for more specific details to be captured in relation to the expectations around the improvement objectives, in order to refine it and ensure clarity over what is required. Examples may include requiring a particular volume of work to be done, or requiring errors to be reduced to X%.

### Support/Training Agreed

It is important that any required support/training is fully discussed between managers and employees. Where relevant and effective support can be provided, this can often help the employee to overcome any barriers to effective performance. Support could be wide-ranging, from making adjustments in relation to any disclosed medical conditions identified earlier in the discussion through to providing additional training, arranging for mentoring or setting up more frequent one-to-one meetings.

### Target End Date

Target end-dates should be noted for each objective. These end dates may align with the end date of the associated monitoring period, but in some cases may be shorter (e.g. an objective may have a target date of 2 weeks' time due to a particular piece of data reporting which is coming up).

## Part A – End of Form

The rest of Part A provides space to document additional relevant information including how long performance will be monitored for (i.e. the end date of the appropriate monitoring period as outlined in the Managing and Supporting Performance policy), how often review meetings will take place (e.g. weekly, fortnightly etc), any comments or observations the employee might wish to record and finally the signatures of both the manager and the employee.

## **Part B (for follow up/review meetings)**

### Part B – Start of Form

The early part of Part B of the form simply allows space to review any developments since the last meeting with regards to any support, adjustments or training put in place (and to note any still to be arranged). This may include documenting the effectiveness of any support provided and reflecting on whether any changes are required or whether or not any further support is required.

In line with this, space is also provided to note any comments in relation to any underlying reasons/contributory factors as these may have changed in nature since the previous discussion. This ensures that they remain a focus of any performance improvement discussions in order to ensure employees are fully supported to improve their performance.

### Improvement Objectives

The objectives from Part A should be referenced in part B to ensure that the discussion remains focussed on the required improvements as discussed in the earlier meeting(s).

### Update on Progress

Feedback should be given (and recorded) in relation to each improvement objective. This should be given with specific reference to any targets/measures/standards agreed at the first meeting (and recorded on Part A of the form).

### Next Steps

Depending on progress made (and other relevant factors), the next steps may vary and should be recorded here. In some cases, further improvement may be required and if so, expectations should again be clearly outlined to the employee. In other cases, the required improvement may already have been made, prompting a shift in focus to maintaining performance rather than improving it.

### Target End Date

As per Part A, the target end-date should be noted again (and in some cases may be reviewed or rescheduled as appropriate to the circumstances).

### Part B – End of Form

The rest of Part B provides space for a general summary of progress to be made as well as an opportunity for employees to note any comments or observations they have. The overall end date for the monitoring period can then be re-stated for clarity as well as the date of the next review meeting.

## **Storing Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)**

Performance Improvement Plans should be retained securely at a local level as they are a live document which Managers will require to access and refer to so long as an employee is being managed under the performance improvement process. Once the performance improvement process has concluded, PIPs should be sent to the relevant local HR Team for saving on the employee's career file.