



# PDR: Research Staff: Reviewees

Radcliffe Department of Medicine



UNIVERSITY OF  
OXFORD

A GUIDE FOR  
RESEARCH STAFF  
HAVING PERSONAL  
DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS

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## INTRODUCTION

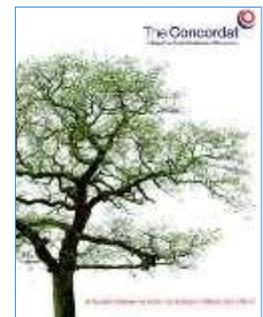
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This booklet is for those research staff who have, or who would like to have, Personal Development Reviews (PDR). Its aim is to explain the thinking behind PDR, to answer the question '*what's in it for me?*' and to look at what you need to do to get the most from PDR.

You should also be aware of the *Concordat*, which is the agreement between key research funders (such as the research councils) and research fund spenders (such as the University).

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/vitae-concordat-vitae-2011.pdf>

The University has based its Code of Practice on the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff<sup>1</sup> on the Concordat and a copy of this can be found on the University website. This document sets out the principles and practice that the University will follow when employing research staff.



For more support on PDR, speak to your local personnel and look at the departmental or Oxford Learning Institute websites.

<http://www.rdm.ox.ac.uk/career-progression-and-training-overview>

<http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/index.html?page=1>

These websites include information on and links to career progression and training, RDM's Career Development Committee and Mentoring Scheme, details of support available for research staff including the Careers Service, training courses available, regrading processes and contract types, and the annual reward and recognition scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/cops/rsemp-career/>

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# Career Progression and Training Overview

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From this link <http://www.rdm.ox.ac.uk/career-progression-and-training-overview> on the 'Working at RDM' web pages, you'll find lots of information on how RDM and the University can help support and develop your career:

- [Career Development Committee](#)
- [Personal Development Review](#)
- [Mentoring](#)
- [Career Development and Training Courses](#)
- [Support for Research Staff](#)
- [Careers Service](#)
- [Contract Types](#)
- [Pay Scales](#)
- [Reward and Recognition Scheme](#)
- [Regrading Procedure](#)
- [Oxford Academic Career Path](#)

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## WHY HAVE PDR?

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Nearly all large and medium-sized organisations in the UK have some sort of appraisal. Why? Because it makes a difference, in one study, it was shown that those hospitals with an effective appraisal system have fewer deaths<sup>2</sup>. An appraisal might not save your life, but it *can* make a difference by giving you the chance to discuss your work and aspirations with your PI and identify your development needs.

It has been said that PDR is simply what effective PIs do naturally; they listen to their staff, they find out what's going right and wrong. They try to help keep things going smoothly, whether that's through helping you to learn something new, by finding ways for you to explore a role you'd like to get into, or just saying, 'Thank you. Well done.' There is a lot of truth in the idea that many good PIs do this naturally. But even good PIs forget, and not every PI is a good manager. Few, if any, became a PI because they wanted to manage; they wanted to do research at a high level, so being an effective manager is something they may well be learning, just as you are continually learning in your research role. Having a PDR system provides a framework for PIs to help them manage staff, and to help them give you the support you need.

PDR can be particularly useful to research staff because many are on fixed-term contracts and need to compete in a tough market for jobs. Whether they want to stay as researchers in Higher Education, move into industry, or move into teaching, it is vital they look at the broad range of skills they will need in order to succeed.

For the University, PDR is important because it helps make sure everyone's able to do what they're supposed to do, and are able to do new things. It also makes sure that your job fits into the scheme of things; so that what you do helps your department and research group achieve its goals.

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<sup>2</sup> West M, Borrill C, Dawson J, Carter J, Anelay S, Patterson M, Waring J (2002) The link between the management of employees and patient mortality in acute hospitals. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(8), 1299-1310

#### **WHAT PDR IS NOT**

PDR is not the place to manage performance in the sense of 'handling performance problems'. If something has been unsatisfactory about your work it should have been dealt with as and when it emerged, just as any praise should have been given to you as and when you did something praiseworthy. Neither should have been saved up for a once-a-year meeting.

One of PDR's guiding principles is the **principle of no surprises**. The principle of no surprises is that *no performance issue discussed at the PDR should be entirely new to either person taking part*. For example, there is little point in a PI telling you, "Your work four months ago was not up to scratch" at the annual PDR meeting.

They should have said it four months ago so that the issue could be discussed and sorted out at the time. And there is equally little point in you telling your PI, "You didn't give me enough support last year" at a PDR meeting. That should have been said a lot earlier.

During probation, you should have probationary reviews, rather than PDRs. These reviews should take place at the mid-point of your probation and then just before the end of your probation. Although these are not PDRs, the format will probably be very similar - looking back to any tasks and priorities agreed, evaluating how you have done against these, and looking forward to the next review.

**WHAT PDR IS:**

- **Personal** - it is about you as a person, not just about your job performance, and it helps link your needs and goals with the needs and goals of the department and the University;
- **Development** - it is about any development or changes you might need to help you do your job well and to develop your potential, if you want to;
- **Review** - it looks backwards, to learn lessons, and then looks forward to the year to come and to any new challenges.

PDR ensures that any aspects of your work that might have gone less well are dealt with openly and honestly, and that you receive constructive feedback and support, together with the recognition and encouragement you deserve when things are going well. It increases your PI's awareness of their staff as individuals, and helps staff understand the challenges facing their team, their PI and their department or work area. It helps you learn from the past and plan for the future.

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# THE PDR PROCESS

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Think of PDR as having three steps or stages:

1. Preparation for the annual meeting
2. The annual review meeting
3. Follow-up actions and meetings.

You will find flow charts of each of these stages in the appendix.

## **STAGE 1: PREPARATION**

Preparation usually starts when your PI receives a reminder from personnel that PDRs must be completed by a certain date. Typically, your preparation then consists of:

1. You and your PI agreeing a date, time and location for the PDR meeting.
2. You downloading or your local HR/PI sending you the PDR form. They might also send you:
  - a copy of your job description,
  - a reminder of any objectives you had last year
  - a reminder of any goals or objectives your department is keen to achieve.
3. You should discuss with your PI how you will complete the form. You may complete the form and send it to them before the agreed review meeting. You may decide to use the form as a basis for reflection and then complete it during or after the review meeting.

Whatever method you decide you should remember that the time taken to reflect on the form before the meeting will ensure you get the most from your PDR. You should also remember the *principle of no surprises*.

If you have agreed to fill in the form in advance of your meeting, you may wish to send the form to your manager who can look at the form and may send you their suggested additions or thoughts, so that when you get together for the meeting, you both have a good idea of what to cover.

It helps if you have made a few notes during the year against each of your objectives or main activities about what went well and what didn't go so well.

## **STAGE 2: THE REVIEW MEETING**

The meeting should be business-like but informal. It should take place somewhere where you can discuss your work in confidence.

You will need to discuss who will complete the form and if it will be done during the meeting, or afterwards. If the form is to be completed after the meeting, brief notes will need to be taken to ensure the meeting is recorded.

The meeting should be flexible, and should be more of a discussion than an 'I think this, you think that' exchange. The main point of the meeting is that you talk, rather than write, so the writing-up may be left until later.

Quite often, the conversation goes back and forth, but your PI should listen more than talk, unless you prefer them to lead - that's up to you. They should encourage you to reach your own conclusions or come up with your own ideas on the best way forward on any topic.

The record of the meeting asks for comments under the following headings:

### ***A. Taking stock and objectives for the review period.***

This is asking you to look back at last year's objectives and say what you think your main achievement was against each (Where did you get to? What stood out for you as successful?)

If you don't have a job description or objectives, you can list the main parts of your job, as you see them, and comment against these.

What might have helped or hindered you in the achievement of your objectives? It might have been that new work, or a change in priorities, meant that some objectives could not be given the time needed, or that some resources were not available. Or, you may have found a way of doing something that is worth sharing and that might help others do the same task.

When it comes to looking at the year to come, you might feel that an objective that was not fully achieved last year is worth carrying forward. You would probably discuss why it didn't get done and make sure the same obstacles didn't get in the way again, if possible.

### ***B. Personal review***

Does your job description still describe what you actually do? If not, what has changed and why? PDR is not the place for re-grading jobs, but if it reveals significant deviation between your job description and the work you actually do, the PDR meeting may prompt a reassessment of your role and grade. In general, however, this part of the record form simply checks to see if any slight amendments are needed to your job description.

You can also use this section to expand on areas that were not directly linked to your objectives, are there any accomplishments of which you are particularly pleased? Also think about if there were any difficulties. Were there any issues which impeded your development, and if so, how could these issues be addressed?

### ***C. Looking forward***

This topic looks ahead to the year to come. Your PI should give their thoughts on what the department or team's priorities are, and how you might contribute to these.

Can you identify objectives that help you focus on your priorities and key areas? What do you think is important to achieve next year against the main areas of your work? How might these fit with those of the team as a whole and the department?

In addition to objectives against key areas and priorities, there may be other objectives that are not directly related to parts of your job description. For example, your PI might want the team to work together to improve something, or want to try a different approach to a task. Or, you might agree an objective linked to your aspirations. Although objectives may not be directly related to your current work, managers should be receptive to such development objectives and realise that enabling you to develop in this way helps create good working relationships.

It is better to have three or four well-written and important objectives than ten rather trivial ones just

for the sake of having them. So what is a 'well-written' objective?

The key to a well-written objective is to try and make it **SMART**, which means making it:

**Specific** - pin down exactly what you want to do and by when, what resources are needed.

**Measureable** - put in a date and quantities or quality if these can be applied to the task.

**Achievable** - neither too easy, nor too hard. If you do not believe it can be done, you probably won't be motivated to try.

**Relevant** - it should obviously relate to your job or to your development or aspirations

**Timely** - you should set a time for the achievement. By when should it be done?

Here is an example of an objective that is *not* **SMART**:

*Improve my writing.*

As it stands, this objective doesn't say what is wrong with the writing (so how does the person know what 'improve' means?) and it doesn't say by when, or by how much the writing should 'improve'. A SMARTened version of the objective might look like this:

*Reduce the number of punctuation errors in my weekly reports to the Steering Committee to not more than two per report by the end of September.*

Suddenly, you can see what the problem is, you can see what is meant by 'improve', you know what aspect of 'writing' we are talking about, and you know by when you are going to bring about the improvement.

**D. Career Development and any training or other support required.**

This section prompts you both to think about any training and support that you might need in order to meet new challenges or changed priorities. Bear in mind that the vast majority of development in the workplace is *not* from training courses. Quite often, learning and development takes place as a result of talking to someone, watching them work, or even by trying out something for yourself. Support might take a wide range of forms, from regular meetings with your manager, to working alongside another member of your team for a

while. Or, it might be that you need a specific resource, such as a piece of equipment or software. Sometimes, it may be that a training course is needed, in which case, try and find a relevant one and discuss it with your manager.

What help do you need in order to achieve your objectives? The help may be in the form of training, advice and guidance, equipment, or adjustment of the work done or working environment. It is important that you identify any resources or support you need so that you have a good chance of achieving your agreed objectives. For example, if you were thinking of retiring, but wanted to ease out gradually, you might want support in reducing your hours. 'Reasonable adjustments' may be made to the way your work is done or when it is done to enable you to be successful, such as changes in hours or in how you do your job.

#### ***E. Summary***

This section is for anything which you feel has not been covered elsewhere. You don't have to fill this in, but there may be something you want to note that you felt has been missed, or you just want to add your own summary statement. If your manager's manager is reviewing the PDRs, they may also add something here.

#### ***F. Summary of development and training needs (optional)***

Any development agreed during the review meeting is summarised on this notification section. By listing the requests centrally, personnel can look at the development needs of the department as a whole and can identify any trends or patterns, or any needs that might be met as a group.

As a result of the review meeting, you should know exactly what your priorities are for next year and what you need to achieve to contribute to your team and to the department. You should also have identified any development needs you have.

### **STAGE 3: FOLLOW UP**

When the form is complete, you and your PI sign it to say it is a true reflection of the meeting. Keep a copy for yourself and ensure either you or your manager has sent a copy to personnel where it will be kept in a confidential file. On your copy try to jot down notes every now and then against your objectives. You will find this makes preparation for the next PDR easier.

In many ways, the follow up is the most important part of the PDR as this covers the more important task of achieving the goals and holding regular one-to-ones to discuss progress and any issues arising during the year.

During the year, you should meet with your PI on a regular basis to discuss progress and any support you need, and to check that your agreed development is taking place. How often you do this will depend on your objectives and workflow, but, ideally, should not be less than once every couple of months. These one-to-ones can be quite short and informal. Without regular one-to-ones, your PI will not be aware of issues until it is too late and you cannot get the feedback you need.

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## THE TIMING OF REVIEWS

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The department has an annual cycle for PDRs, but researchers on fixed contracts may find that, as a result of this annual cycle, they have no more than one or two reviews during their contract.

This is because PDRs do not start until after the probationary period. If, for example, you are on a three-year contract and had a six-month probationary period, your first PDR may not happen until nearly 18 months into your contract. You would then only get one more review before the end of your contract.

Because of this, we encourage PIs to rethink the PDR schedule and perhaps include a 'mini-review' at the mid-point stage. You should discuss the likely timing of PDRs with your PI so that they help meet your needs within the timeframe of your contract. It may well be that your contract is extended, but, often, this is not known until quite near the end date and you should therefore work on the assumption, as far as PDR is concerned, that your current contract end date will hold.

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## USEFUL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AT EACH STAGE OF YOUR CONTRACT

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### DURING INDUCTION

#### *The Induction Checklist for new staff:*

- What do I want to get out of this experience as a researcher at Oxford?
- Where do I see myself being in five or ten years' time? What are the implications of that for my career and professional development while I'm here? What opportunities do I need to look for?
- Do I understand the terms of my contract, including the fixed-term nature of it?
- Have I seen a copy of the University's Code of Practice for the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff?
- Have I looked at the staff handbook on the university website?
- Have I completed my initial induction? Do I know what induction procedures there are in the department/group? What have I been sent or given? What do I need to know about? Who shall I ask? (My supervisor? The departmental administrator? A colleague?)
- Do I know about research and publication protocols and codes of practice in my group and department, and in the University generally? Do I know what training is available from the University on research integrity?
- How clear am I about what is expected of me in this project?
- Do I know what the Careers Service offers specifically for researchers?

- Do I know what the Oxford Learning Institute and my division offer (e.g. induction seminars, seminars on teaching)?
- Do I know what the University and College Union offers for research staff?

**DURING THE MAIN PART OF YOUR CONTRACT**

***Questions Research Staff should ask themselves during the main part of the contract:***

- How is my work progressing? Have I asked for feedback from my supervisor or from colleagues? What am I doing well? What could I improve? How am I working on these?
- How well am I attending to my career? What opportunities have I taken (e.g. conferences, publications, grant applications, teaching, training events and networking)?
- How well am I attending to my personal development? Have I had a personal development review meeting?
- What are my achievements? What are my goals? How do I see my future beyond the end of this contract? What action am I taking towards this?
- Have I registered with the Careers Service for Researchers?

**DURING THE LATER STAGES OF YOUR CONTRACT**

***Questions Research Staff should ask themselves in the last third of their contract period:***

- What are the prospects for my continuing employment on this (or a different) project? (Do I want to stay?)
- What discussions have I had with my supervisor about this? What communication have I had with my departmental administrator? What action am I taking to secure the job that I want when this one finishes?
- Have I familiarised myself with university procedures relating to the expiry of fixed term contracts?
- Where else can I get advice and support? In particular, have I checked what advice for researchers is available to me from the Careers Service or from divisional resources?

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## WHAT IS 'DEVELOPMENT' ?

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By 'development' we mean any growth in skills, knowledge or understanding that leads to you becoming more capable within your current setting or within the field of research as a whole. The University's *Code of Practice for the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff* says we will promote both 'personal and career development'.

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4. Researchers' personal and career development are recognised and promoted at all stages of their career, and individual researchers share the responsibility for their own personal and career development. Researchers should pro-actively engage in their own personal and career development.

In effect, this is our promise to research funders, and says we will be aware of what individual researchers see as their goals and that we will support them in achieving these, *as far as is practicable*. This calls for some common sense. What are the goals? What options are there to support the development needed to achieve these goals? What are the resources available? There are always boundaries, but the existence of limits should not encourage a default position of 'that is too much trouble'. You need to explore with your PI what can be done and, where resources do not allow some needs to be met, are there alternatives?

Bear in mind that 'development' takes many forms. Only a small percentage of development occurs through formal training courses; most development happens in the workplace by doing, by being coached, or by observing others. In an academic research context, development will also include things such as networking at conferences, assisting with grant applications, reviewing papers, receiving guidance on contributing to papers, giving presentations, attending meetings of various bodies, explaining research to non-specialists or schools, or supervising students. It could also include mentoring from your PI or from others, shadowing someone to see how they work or searching the internet for information.

Always try to find out what the options are so that when you discuss your development, you have some ideas of how that development might be best achieved.

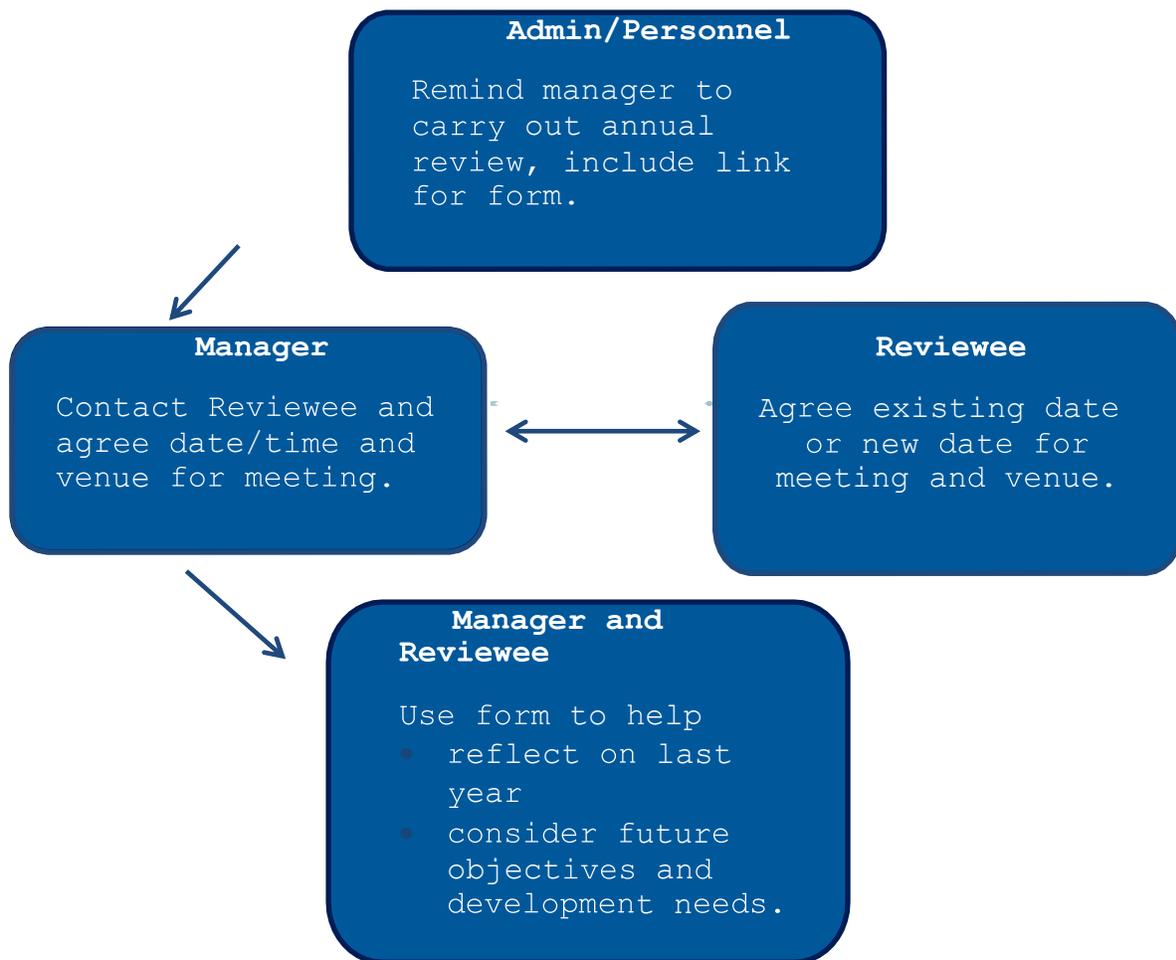
You should also look at the Researcher Development Framework (see [www.vitae.com](http://www.vitae.com)) to help you identify the underlying skills and abilities that underpin being a professional and capable researcher.

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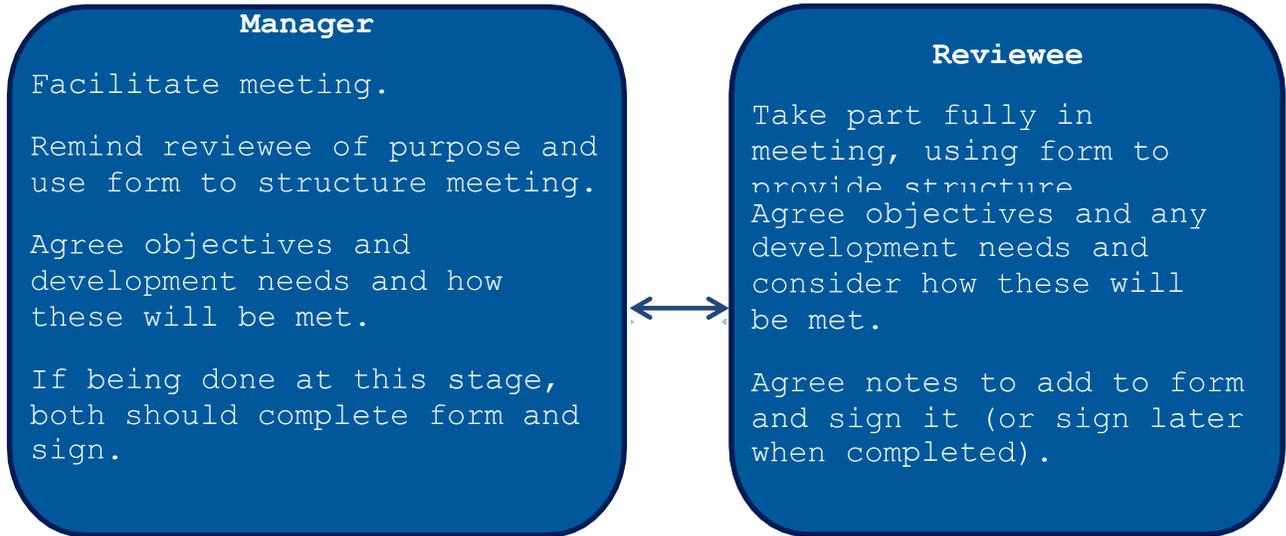
# APPENDIX 1: PROCESS FLOW CHARTS

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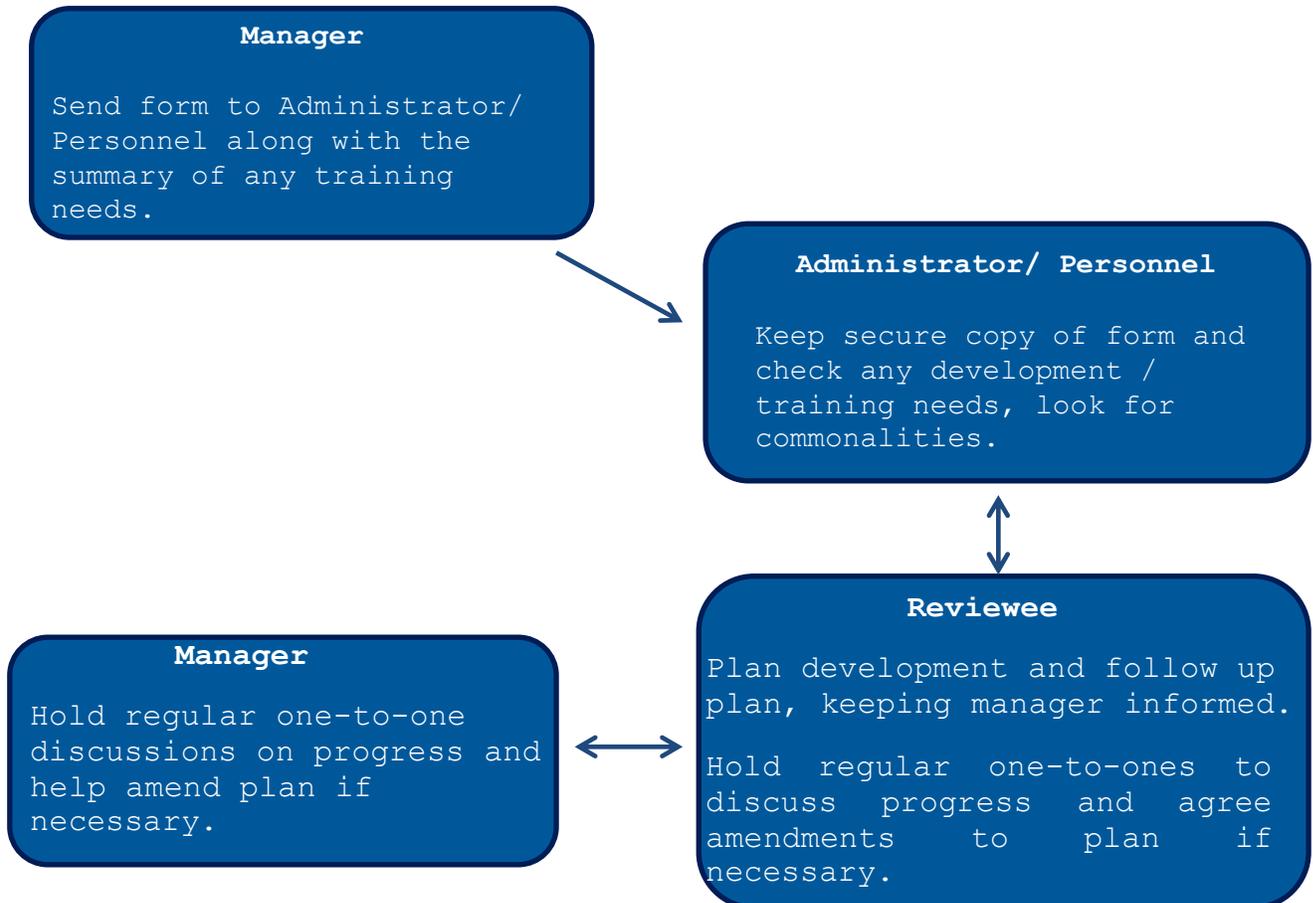
## STAGE 1: PREPARATION



**STAGE 2: THE ANNUAL REVIEW MEETING**



**STAGE 3: FOLLOW UP**



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## APPENDIX 2 : HINTS AND TIPS

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These hints and tips are drawn from people who have carried out several PDRs.

### PREPARATION

"Some people have difficulty completing the review form. If you're stuck, ask a colleague or your manager to help. The most important thing is not how much you write, but that you think about last year and think about what you want to achieve in the year ahead. The form is there to help them you through what you want to say. You might not need to (or be able to) answer every question."

"Send your completed form to your PI before the meeting. It saves time, and means you both know what the meeting will focus on."

### THE ANNUAL REVIEW MEETING

"Don't agree to do your review in the reception area. My manager did my last one in our reception area. What does that tell you?"

"Funny enough, I don't like it to be too informal. I know I'm there for work and not just for any old chat. But I also wouldn't like it to be too formal ... it's not an interview, is it? My PI is good at just getting the right feeling ... business-like, but also relaxed."

"Everyone's different. Some people like their managers to take more of a lead, whereas some want to go through whatever they've put on the preparation form and kind of lead it. Different things work for different people ..."

"Leave enough time. Even if you think you don't have a lot to say, make sure you allow plenty of time just in case it turns out there's quite a bit to talk about."

"Last time, my boss emailed me a completed form and said, 'Here's your PDR. Change anything you don't like and then sign it and send it back. What's the point of that? I said I needed a meeting.'"

**FOLLOW UP**

"I like to keep a copy of my objectives handy so I can have a quick look before one-to-ones; otherwise it's impossible to remember what I agreed ..."

"I always jot down a few notes at one-to-ones. Over the year, you can quite often see a picture ... the story of year if you like"

"I did once disagree with something written on the form, and left a comment saying so. It didn't come to anything more because it wasn't a big point. Other than that, it's usually not hard to agree."

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## APPENDIX 3: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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***Who should do most of the talking at the review meeting?***

You should. At worst, it should be 50/50. Remember, it is your PDR. But, everyone is different, and some people just find it easier if their manager takes the lead.

***What if my PI can't meet my expectations with regard to my development?***

We want to try and help people fulfil their potential and achieve their goals, but there are always limitations. If your PI cannot help you meet an expectation, ask them to explain why not and to say what they can do. There are always considerations of time, budget and work demands, but the demands of work should not obliterate all else, or else morale will fall and so could the quality of the work done.

***What if my job is fairly repetitive, so there's not a lot new to learn, or I don't want promotion, or I was going to retire soon. Is there any point in having a PDR?***

Yes. Even if your job is fairly repetitive and there's not a lot you can change, you can still help your PI identify things that could be improved, or at least let them know everything is working pretty well. And even if you don't want promotion, it's still valuable to discuss what goes well and less well in your job, and hear what the priorities will be for the year ahead. And if you're close to retirement, that's quite a development! Your manager might be able to help smooth the way.

***I've had a few problems at work. Will PDR just be a repetition of 'you need to improve' conversations?***

The PDR annual review meeting should not be used as the main place to address performance that is not up to standard in some way. This should be addressed as and when it arises. The review meeting can discuss what happened, the progress made and any work still to be done, but it is not the place to raise an issue of poor performance for the first time or to go over exactly the same ground. It's the place to sum up what happened, what was agreed and what else needs to be done, and to identify any further development needed.

***What if I work for more than one manager, or what if I am officially managed by one person but spend a lot of time working for someone else?***

Generally, the line manager is responsible for ensuring that the PDR annual review meeting takes place, but more than one manager can be involved. If there is more than one line manager, then both should participate, depending on how much of the time is spent with each. Your manager might seek feedback from other managers involved in managing you, or even hold a joint review meeting with the agreement of the individual.

***Who should decide on the objectives for the next year?***

You and your manager should both take responsibility for thinking of possible objectives, and then discuss these suggestions during the annual review meeting. Your PI should ensure that you know what the team and department objectives are, and any changes on the horizon that are not confidential, so these can be taken into account.

***What if things change during the year and the objectives no longer apply or are no longer quite right?***

Agree new or updated objectives. Things do change.

***What if you do not want to participate in PDR?***

Try and discuss what the issue is that is preventing you from making the most of PDR with your manager. Staff sometimes feel their job is too mundane to warrant a review or to write objectives for, or else they say they just want to 'come to work, do a good job and go home', which is fair enough. But everyone has frustrations at times about their work, or ideas on how things can be improved, and PDR gives everyone the chance to discuss issues and ideas and be listened to. At the very least, it gives you the chance to talk about yourself and any factors that affect your work. Give it a chance and give it time.

***Do I have to talk about my aspirations?***

No, only if you want to. Some people may want to move on, others may be thinking of going to another research group. Others may want to have more responsibility, learn something new or take on a greater challenge. Your PI can only help if they know about these things, but it is up to you to decide if you want to talk about them.

***Is feedback one way, or can I give my PI feedback as well?***

It is a good idea for your PI to ask for feedback. If they are unsure what to ask for, suggest that you tell them what you would choose if there was one thing they could ask you to continue doing, stop doing and start doing (see the appendices for more on giving and receiving feedback).

***Why doesn't PDR link directly to reward, such as merit pay?***

There are other processes for deciding if and when a change in remuneration is warranted. PDR may well draw on the same evidence and is a good way for you to think about what this evidence might be. But we want to avoid having more than one process for deciding reward levels. Also, many organisations have found that if they discuss development and reward in the same review, fewer people agree they have development needs, leading eventually to reduced performance (which, in turn, makes it less likely they will get greater rewards). The review can, if you wish, be put forward as part of the case for a change in reward.

***What about re-grading; can this be discussed in PDR?***

Much the same response applies to this as given for change in reward. The annual PDR meeting is not the time to focus on re-grading, though it may provide evidence that there has been a change in role that needs to be looked at using the re-grading process, and one of the outcomes of the PDR may be to agree to look at the case for a re-grading exercise.

***What if I am on probation?***

For those on probation, a review discussion should be held no later than mid-way through their probation period. Probationary reviews differ slightly from PDR as their main purpose is to help you settle in and to see if you are right for the job.

***Do the 1:1 meetings that happen throughout the year need to be formal?***

Not unless you want them to be. Nor is there any agreed timing for these. Because of this, there is a danger they are forgotten, or irregular. Some managers put one-to-ones in their diary at regular intervals (e.g., every 6-8 weeks) to make sure they happen and that all staff get them. Other managers have frequent contact with staff

individually anyway and use some of this time to discuss the work and progress against objectives informally.

***My department's PDR process is not the same as my friend's department. Why?***

The University does not have a single, imposed system. Instead, Personnel Committee agreed a set of principles for departments to follow, and these principles allow for some local variations to meet the needs of the department. In practice, the differences tend to be minor and anyone moving from one department to another would see many more similarities than differences.

***Is it true that some departments do not have a PDR system?***

The majority of departments do have PDR, but some are yet to introduce it, though this is gradually changing for various reasons, including:

- Upward pressure, particularly from those who come from other organisations and who are surprised to find there is no appraisal system in place in their new department.
- Downward pressure from the University leaders, who recognise PDR is a powerful way of ensuring everyone pulls in the same direction.
- External pressures, from government and funders, who want to see how we make use of and develop the resources they help to fund.

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## APPENDIX 4 : GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

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### *Giving Praise*

Your PI should appreciate any thanks you want to give for their support over the past year. Remember to let them know exactly what you found helpful, by giving examples.

For example: "I found it very helpful that you allowed me to do Project X in my own way after we had discussed it, and only come to you when I had queries."

### *Giving Criticism*

If you want to ask your PI to do something differently, or let them know about something you didn't find helpful, the most effective way to raise this is to be factual and constructive about your criticism, and give examples.

For example: Instead of saying "You're not supportive enough," give information which will help your reviewer know what you want them to do differently:

"You asked me to make the changes to the database just before you went on holiday, which meant that I was unable to talk to you about the queries I had. It would have worked better, I think, if you had let me know about this a week or so earlier, so that we could have discussed it more."

### *Receiving Praise*

It's important to accept thanks or praise that is offered. After all, you wouldn't want your manager to stop giving you thanks because they felt you didn't want to hear it! Try to avoid self-deprecating remarks such as, "it was nothing ... anyone could have done it." A simple "thank you" is all that is needed.

### *Receiving Criticism*

Your PI may identify aspects of your work where they feel you have not made enough progress. This can sound like criticism, and when we feel we are being criticised, it is natural to for it to raise uncomfortable emotions. However, if you allow yourself to get angry or defensive, it will be more difficult to discuss with your PI how to move on and address any issues.

When you feel yourself reacting badly to criticism, take

a deep breath. This will help to take the edge off the feelings and the pause will prevent you from speaking without thinking. You might suggest taking a short break to give you time to digest the feedback.

If you feel you are being criticised unreasonably, try to ask questions to find out more about your reviewer's reasons for making the comments.

Hopefully, any criticism you receive will be constructive - it will help you identify exactly what it was about what you did that was perceived to be wrong or in need of improvement, and it will focus not on the past but on what can be done to put things right.

None of us like being criticised, but if your PI provides information which you can act upon, this will help your development. If you disagree, try to give your reviewer information which explains your viewpoint without becoming defensive.