Skills Guide

Making the most of your PDR

Before you start

Make sure that you:

- Have looked at What is PDR?
- Have found out how your department/faculty’s scheme works and what paperwork you should use (talk to your Department Administrator or HR Officer)
- Know who your reviewer is and when your PDR will happen

All resources and skills guides are available on the Personal development review pages. You may also find it helpful to read the Frequently Asked Questions for Reviewees.

Preparing for your PDR

- Assess your previous achievements honestly. If you think you could do something differently or better then your reviewer will appreciate your candour and you have the starting point for a useful discussion
- Try to get part one of your PDR form to your reviewer in good time (at least a week before the meeting) so that they have the best opportunity to prepare
- Be ready to hear that your reviewer suggests changes to part one: this is the agenda for the meeting and it is important that you both contribute. If you are not sure why a suggestion has been made, then ask
- If you need some support with drafting objectives, see the agreeing objectives skills guide
- Some items on that agenda may be more significant to you than others, so make a list of the key points that you want to cover and take it into the meeting with you as a prompt
- If there are any aspects of PDR that are worrying you, raise them with your reviewer in advance so that they can factor this in to their own preparation. If you would rather talk to someone else, try your HR Officer or a critical friend who will help you think through what you want to say and how
- Aim to go in to the meeting expecting a constructive discussion and in a neutral frame of mind that considers all possibilities. Starting a conversation in a closed state of thinking may not lead to productive outcomes. Role model what you want and expect positive results!

In the meeting

- Take notes and expect your reviewer to take notes too. This is simply to aid memory. It can be surprising to realise how quickly memory of a meeting can fade so don’t leave it to chance
- If you need to, clarify a point by asking follow up questions
- Reflect/ say things back to your reviewer to check understanding – it can be easy to persist in a conversation where reviewee and reviewer are talking about different things without realising it
- Seek ideas from your reviewer as well as generating your own: it encourages a two way dialogue if both of you feel you can be creative
- Adopt a problem solving approach rather than bringing a list of problems into the meeting and expecting others to solve them or bringing things into the meeting that could have been resolved or raised earlier: both of these can be frustrating for reviewers
• If you hear something difficult, try to avoid reacting quickly or defensively- give yourself time to think and explore what is being said. One way of buying yourself a bit of time to think is to ask for some more information
• Talk about what you agreed to discuss: avoid springing surprises on your reviewer
• Summarise what you have discussed/agreed before you both leave

If you think this might be a difficult conversation, then try the skills guide before you have the meeting.

**Asking for learning and development**

• Start by looking at the developing yourself resource
• Thinking about your learning needs for the role you are in now. Your reviewer should be keen to know that you have the skills needed to succeed in your current role, so if you feel you need to learn to do something differently or better now, bring examples of when you feel challenged and what would help you
• Be prepared to think creatively about learning solutions. Not all learning happens on a training course. The 70:20:10 principle suggests that 70% of the most impactful learning happens on the job (we learn best by trying, making mistakes trying again, watching others, experimenting etc.) 20% happens in social situations and only 10% in a training room or on an online course
• Some of the options you could consider are: reading, work shadowing, a formal secondment, a visit to another team, a stretching role in a project or a mentor
• Whatever you agree as a learning solution, make sure that you both know who will do what to organise, how this solution will help you achieve your learning objectives, what success looks like and how you will embed what you have learned at work. Much valuable learning disappears on returning to work if we don’t put energy and commitment into practice.
• If your PDR form doesn’t have a place to record your learning plan, you might find it helpful to use the template learning and development plan.

**Talking about career development**

If you want to talk about career aspirations in your PDR, you may find it helpful to read the career conversations for individuals skills guide. This includes asking for development to help you achieve the next job.

**After the meeting**

Your reviewer should ask you to write up the notes of the meeting. Make sure you send these back within two weeks if possible. If you leave it any longer, neither of you will remember what was said. The temptation will be to not do it at all, and you will find yourself starting from scratch in a year’s time, when your next PDR is due.

Occasionally you can’t agree on the outcomes. In that case, look at your department’s process for seeking agreement. Ask your HR Officer or Department Administrator for advice,

**To summarise**

There are two people in a PDR conversation, two points of view and two sets of needs. You have an opportunity to make your contribution positive, constructive, forward thinking and solution focussed. If you do, then the likelihood of an effective PDR is increased.