

United Synagogue Performance Appraisal & Employee Development Scheme



This guide to Performance Appraisal:

- explains what appraisal is and its contribution to the performance management process
- looks at how to conduct an appraisal
- considers the skills appraisers and appraisees should develop for successful performance appraisal

Training is essential to this process

The following is a guide to Performance Appraisal. Carrying out an Appraisal is a skill and requires training. If you have not received training on the United Synagogue Performance Appraisal Scheme please contact the HR Department to organise a training course.

What is performance appraisal?

Performance appraisal is an important part of performance management. In itself it is not performance management, but it is one of the ranges of tools that can be used to manage performance. It is important that you as a manager understand your role in the performance management process and how this contributes to the overall aims of performance management.

The performance appraisal or review is essentially an opportunity for you to meet with your staff and engage in a dialogue about his/her performance, development and the support required from you as the manager. It should not be a top down process or an opportunity for one person to ask questions and the other to reply. It should be a free flowing conversation in which a range of views are exchanged.

Performance appraisals usually review past behaviour and so provide an opportunity to reflect on past performance, as well as, to a certain degree predicting future behaviour. To be successful the review should also be used as a basis for making development and improvement plans and reaching agreement about what should be done in the future.

To work well the Performance Appraisal should focus on an individual's strengths, how these have been applied to their individual successes and achievements of organisational objectives. Feedback on less successful achievement should be given with care and only if justified with examples. Consider carefully whether achievement of a specific objective is essential to the success of the role particularly when an individual has not excelled because it is not his/her area of strength before giving constructive criticism.

When should a Performance Appraisal be conducted?

A performance appraisal should take place once per year in December/January and be followed up by an Interim Review meeting in June/July each year.

How to conduct a performance appraisal

The five key elements of the performance appraisal are:

1. **Measurement** – assessing performance against agreed targets and objectives.
2. **Feedback** – providing information to the individual on their performance and progress.
3. **Positive reinforcement** – emphasising what has been done well and making only constructive criticism about what might be improved.
4. **Exchange of views** – a frank/honest exchange of views about what has happened, how appraisees can improve their performance, the support they need from their managers to achieve this and their aspirations for their future career.

5. **Agreement** – jointly coming to an understanding by all parties about what needs to be done to improve performance generally and overcome any issues raised in the course of the discussion.

A successfully carried out appraisal will have information on the following as a minimum:

- **Objectives and Accomplishments** – what has been achieved and how it was achieved.
- **Training** – what training the individual has received in the review period and what training or development they would like to receive in the future.
- **Actions** – a note of any actions that need to be carried out by the individual or the appraiser.

Preparing for the meeting

Time needs to be given to both individual and manager to prepare for the meeting beforehand if a successful outcome is to be achieved. The person conducting the meeting or the appraiser should:

- Consider how well the individual has performed since the last meeting, the individual's most significant accomplishments and contributions.
- Consider how successfully the individual has performed any new tasks or additional duties outside the scope of his/her regular responsibilities.
- Consider to what extent any agreed development plans from the last meeting have been implemented.
- Consider how the achievements have supported the overall objectives of the department and the United Synagogue as a whole.
- Think about the feedback to be given at the meeting and the evidence that will be used to support it.
- Review the factors that have affected performance both those within and outside the individual's control.
- Consider the points for discussion on the possible actions that can be taken by both parties to develop or improve performance.
- Consider training and development needs and possible directions the individual's career might take.
- Consider possible objectives for the next review period.

The individual or appraisee should consider the following points:

- What they have achieved during the review period, with examples.
- Tasks achieved outside the scope of his/her regular responsibilities.
- Any examples of objectives not achieved with reasons/ future plan of action.
- What they most enjoy about the job and how they might want to develop the role.
- Any aspect of the work in which further development is required and how this might be achieved.
- Their learning and development needs with requests for specific training.
- What level of support and guidance they require from their manager.
- Their aspirations for the future both in the current role and in possible future roles.
- Objectives for the next review period.

Self-assessment

Appraisees are asked to assess and analyse their own performance as a basis for discussion and

action through a self-assessment process. This aims to improve the quality of the appraisal discussion because individuals feel actively involved in the process and it encourages them to work through the points above beforehand. This can be particularly useful with more junior staff or those not used to appraisals.

What a good appraisal looks like

A good and constructive appraisal meeting is one in which:

- appraisees do most of the talking
- appraisers listen actively to what they say
- achievement is recognised and reinforced
- there is scope for reflection and analysis
- performance is analysed not personality
- the whole period is reviewed and not just recent or isolated events
- ends positively with agreed action plans.

A negative or unconstructive appraisal meeting is one which:

- focuses on a catalogue of failures and omissions
- is controlled by the appraiser
- ends with disagreement between appraiser and appraisee.

Appraisal skills

All managers expected to carry out performance appraisal should have some training. This should not just be on the skills of performance appraisal – the ‘how’ to do it, but also on the reasons for performance appraisal the ‘why’ we do it. Managers will be trained to understand how it fits into the wider strategic process of performance management and how the information and data generated contributes to understanding of the capacity of the human capital of the organisation to contribute to business strategy and add value.

A basic requirement is that appraisers have the skills to carry out an effective appraisal as described above. This means they ask the right questions, listen actively and provide feedback.

Asking the right questions

Questions should be open and probing:

Open questions are general rather than specific; they enable people to decide how they should be answered and encourage them to talk freely. Examples include:

- How do you feel things have been going?
- How do you see the job developing?
- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me, why do you think that happened?

Probing questions dig deeper for more specific information on what happened. They should provide support for the individual’s answer and encourage them to provide more information about their feelings and attitudes and they can also be used to reflect back to the individual and check information. Examples would be:

- That’s very interesting. Tell me more about?
- To what extent do you think that ...?

- Have I got the right impression? Do you mean that?

Listening

Good listeners:

- Concentrate on the speakers and are aware of behaviour, body language and nuances that supplement what is being said.
- Respond quickly when necessary but don't interrupt.
- Ask relevant questions to clarify meaning.
- Comment on points to demonstrate understanding but keep them short and do not inhibit the flow of the speaker.

Giving feedback

Feedback should be based on facts not subjective opinion and should always be backed up with examples. The aim of feedback should be to promote the understanding of the individual so that they are aware of the impact of their actions and behaviour. Wherever possible feedback should be used positively to reinforce the good and identify opportunities for further positive action. Giving feedback is a skill and training is essential.

Feedback will work best when the following conditions are met:

- Feedback is related to actual events, observed behaviours or actions.
- Feedback describes events without judging them.
- Feedback is accompanied by questions soliciting the individual's opinion why certain things happened.
- People are encouraged to come to their own conclusions about what happened and why.
- There is an emphasis on ensuring positive behaviour in future rather than censuring past behaviour.

The ongoing process of Performance Management

Appraisal forms are an important part of performance management. However, appraisal is only one aspect of that process. Done well it can significantly enhance relationships between individuals and line managers, and provide an effective vehicle for objective setting and review. Its impact as a single tool is limited unless it is delivered within a broader process which also recognises the on-going importance of the line manager relationship outside the annual cycle of objective setting and review. Regular conversations are essential in which the manager frequently congratulates good performance as and when it happens, agrees ongoing goals and talks about development needs as and when they arise.