



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891

# Policy

## Performance Development Review

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## **1. Purpose of Performance Development Reviews within the University**

- 1.1 This policy and process outlines the University's approach to managing employee performance, supporting continued professional development and ensuring alignment to the University's vision and strategic objectives. Achieving the University's vision requires a clear understanding of how we all contribute to its success through regular and open reviews to ensure clarity and feedback on expectations.
- 1.2 The BNU Performance Development Review (PDR) is a University wide process to support staff in maximising their contribution and furthering their development. The primary components of PDRs are the setting of aligned objectives, planning for relevant professional and career development and performance reviews.
- 1.3 The PDR is a joint process, with the line manager/appraiser supporting and guiding staff to define and achieve their objectives and progress towards appropriate professional development ambitions. A meaningful PDR discussion and ongoing feedback are therefore of significant importance and value to every member of staff and their respective line manager.
- 1.4 The PDR is normally conducted by the immediate line manager. In some circumstances, this responsibility may be delegated to nominated appraisers who should ensure they have the required skills and knowledge of the process and appraisee to be able to facilitate the PDR. The online form in business connect allows employees to select their nominated appraiser.
- 1.5 Concerns about any aspect of performance must be raised with the employee as soon as they occur and addressed in line with the university's capability procedures. It is not appropriate for issues to be raised for the first time through the PDR process.
- 1.6 If an employee has any concern regarding their PDR, they should raise with their line manager or nominated appraiser.

## **2. Aims and objectives**

- 2.1 To build a culture of continuous improvement which delivers the University's strategy and secures its longer-term success.
- 1.7 To enable cultural and behavioural change, embedding the University's Values, Academic and Behaviour Frameworks.
- 2.2 To provide a framework for managers and their direct reports to review all aspects of performance through open, honest and constructive dialogue and feedback. This should be on an ongoing basis so that every employee has the capacity and capability to achieve their potential and gain maximum job satisfaction.
- 2.3 To provide a clear and consistent link between organisational, departmental and individual goals to enable each employee to make the best possible contribution to the organisation's strategic aims.
- 2.4 To clarify role expectations, recognise individual contribution and encourage the dissemination of good practice within BNU.
- 2.5 To enable employees to discuss and review their development needs and longer-term plans. Whilst discussions should focus upon acquisition of the relevant skills, knowledge and competencies for an employee's *current* role, the PDR also represents an opportunity to

explore longer term career aspirations, thus considering plans which inform effective talent management and succession planning within the University.

- 2.6 To inform training needs analysis processes. The University uses the findings from PDRs to plan its continued investment in employee learning and development. The University believes this is critical to the success of our employees and the organisation and therefore monitors the return from such investment.

### **3. Applicability & Scope**

- 3.1 It is a current condition of employment that **all** employees on substantive contracts actively participate in the PDR process. The full benefits of the PDR process in terms of improved communication and enhanced performance, both for the individuals and for the University, will only be achieved by the continuous commitment of all those involved.
- 3.2 New employees still in their probationary period will have reviews at regular intervals of 8, 16, 26 and in some cases, 52 weeks and as such are **not** included in the PDR process. At the earliest opportunity, objectives should be set for the remainder of the performance year using the online form in Business Connect. Performance should then be reviewed at the next formal stage which is the more appropriate, i.e. interim or final review.
- 3.3 Whilst the PDR process may not apply to employees on fixed term contracts, Associate Lecturers and ATypicals, it is important to agree and monitor key performance outputs providing feedback to ensure effective contribution.
- 3.4 Circumstances such as maternity leave or long-term absence may arise that prevent a member of staff from participating in the full PDR cycle. These will be dealt with on an individual basis: however, PDR discussion setting objectives should resume as soon as is reasonably practicable.
- 1.8 3.5 Whilst recognising individual circumstances such as those outlined in 3.3, the University is committed to the full participation of every employee in the PDR process. Completion rates are recorded and reported and constitute a key performance indicator for the university.

### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

#### ***University Executive Team:***

- provide the leadership necessary to drive the BNU PDR as a key business process.
- set the strategic direction and planning priorities which can be meaningfully cascaded throughout the organisation in a timely manner.
- carry out the PDR with their direct reports at the start of the PDR window thereby demonstrating personal commitment to the process and enabling achievement of the agreed KPI set.
- carry out the role of Reviewer where appropriate to ensure the process is implemented effectively and consistently within their area of responsibility.
- provide adequate resources to ensure the PDR scheme is valued and effective in its strategic aims.

#### ***Heads of School and Directors:***

- ensure that the PDR is fully implemented and completed in their area of responsibility, working with the Human Resources Directorate in any sampling or moderation process required.

- ensure that all colleagues are effectively updated on organisational and School/Directorate and plans as appropriate to inform objectives.
- carry out the PDR with their direct reports within agreed timescales thereby demonstrating personal commitment to the process.
- carry out the role of Reviewer where appropriate to ensure the process is implemented effectively and consistently within their area of responsibility.
- evaluate the PDR process to assess its effectiveness and impact on School/Directorate plans, with particular regard to the business planning process and training needs analysis.

### **Reviewer**

- The role of the Reviewer is to ensure there is a consistency of approach which is free from bias and that the distribution of assessments is commensurate with performance. They should monitor the standard and rigour of assessments being applied within the area of responsibility to ensure that they are supported with the appropriate levels of evidence. If the second level reviewer has any questions or concerns about the PDR, they should discuss these with the appraiser for clarification before sign-off.

### **All Managers:**

- plan, prepare and carry out PDRs with direct reports within agreed timescales.
- ensure that there is a final and at least **one** other formal performance review during the year.
- coach and support individuals with ongoing performance feedback, both positive and constructive, to achieve objectives and delivery of the full requirements of their role.
- Ensure that they have the relevant skills and knowledge to carry out effective performance review conversations.
- Ensure that colleagues have a job description which accurately reflects the current role requirements. This should be reflected in the online PDR form and action taken to update where required.

### **Employees:**

- plan and prepare for their PDR to be able to participate fully in the process and contribute to their performance discussions.
- work with their line manager or nominated appraiser to get the most out of their PDR.
- invest in their own professional development to be able to respond to the changing needs of their role, School/Directorate and the University.
- Own and implement their performance documents e.g. follow up on actions, feedback and development plans.
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### **Human Resources Directorate:**

- provide the necessary advice and monitoring of the process and appropriate training for line managers and staff.
- ensure PDRs are being carried out in a timely manner and in keeping with the University's values and principles of equal opportunities and inclusion.
- update UMG with PDR completion data for their areas of responsibility during the PDR window to drive completion rates and oversee assessment distribution in the role of Reviewer. This data will also be shared with HR business partners who will work with HoS/Directors to informally moderate overall assessments.

- use PDR data to inform development activities organised within the University to ensure they meet individuals' and organisational needs.
- report on and review the effectiveness of the process, liaising with key stakeholders within the business on performance distribution and related procedures e.g. moderation, reward & recognition, job descriptions etc.
- use the PDR process to inform business planning, working with Schools and Directorates to meet their staffing and development needs. (Succession Planning and Talent Management and training needs analyses).

## 5. Overview of the BNU PDR year

5.1 The performance year is aligned with the academic timetable i.e. from 01st September through to 31st August, allowing for inclusion of key measures such as NSS. The PDR review period therefore runs from **01<sup>st</sup> September through to 30th November**, by which time **all** PDRs are expected to take place to achieve the KPI.

The interim review should take place in March/April each year and it is a requirement that the online form is updated in business connect to record progress. There is however, no requirement to formally assess performance at this stage.

5.2 The PDR is an on-line form, housed within Business Connect. There are **two** PDR forms as follows:

- One PDR form for all BNU colleagues, aligned to the University's strategy, reflective of the "One University" therein.
- Missenden Abbey PDR, aligned to organisational KPIs.

Through the self-service function, all employees have access to their performance documents for which they retain responsibility. Updates can be saved throughout the year and submitted to line managers/reviewers through the workflow in business connect when required. It should be noted that the emphasis of any PDR is the ongoing dialogue between employee and their appraiser. The purpose of on-line form is to offer a conversation framework and to formally record the outcomes of these conversations.

## 6. The BNU PDR cycle

6.1 The BNU PDR cycle will start with UET in readiness for the September window, setting organisational priorities which can be cascaded into departmental, team and individual targets. This is to ensure that employees are clear about the importance of their work within the context of the University's objectives and that any planned development is relevant to individual and University needs.

6.2 Line managers and appraisers should engage colleagues in discussions throughout the year on objectives, performance and development. Continuous dialogue throughout the year between the manager and the reviewee is critical to inform PDR meetings and provide effective performance feedback.

Regular, informal conversations are particularly important for staff members who are new in post, junior in their career path, working in an area of significant organisational change or where

either party feel this is necessary. The recorded interim and finals reviews should be a culmination of these regular conversations, drawing them together into a more formal setting.

6.3 The objective of the final meeting will be to review the previous year's achievements, agree clear future objectives, along with any learning and development relevant to the University and to the individual in reaching their full potential.

This should be regarded both as a reflective and planning process and focus on what has been accomplished and/or reflect where there has been genuine constraint in attainment. The outcomes of the discussion must include a clear assessment of overall performance, including but not limited to objectives set, expectations as outlined in the job description and adherence to organisational values.

6.4 Revised overall assessment from September 2021 are as follows

- High Performer: an individual normally exceeds in most objectives and expectations.
- Performing well: an individual normally meets all objectives and expectations
- Developing Performer: an individual meets some objectives and expectations
- Under Performer: an individual falls below on most objectives and does not meet role expectations

*For additional clarity, for any colleague active in any formal or informal performance or capability plan, it is expected that their assessment will fall into Developing or Under performer.*

## **7. PDR training**

7.1 All line managers and nominated appraisers should attend the Embedding Successful PDRs training normally run in September to coincide with the PDR window. This one-day workshop is mandatory for all appraisers carrying out PDRs at BNU and acts as a full introduction or as a refresher.

7.2 Planning & preparing for you PDR and SMART targets workshops are also be made available to employees each year. In addition, employees can equally access relevant learning and development at any time via the BNU E-Learning platform.

7.3 An Honest Conversations course also provides excellent tools and strategies for managers and colleagues to support them in participating in and open and honest conversations about performance and in other settings.

7.4 A Developing a coaching culture workshop will also be available for line managers to support a strengths-based conversation and enhance listening skills.

7.5 The BNU MicroLearn E-Learning platform offers a wide range of modules available to both managers and colleagues what may be helpful in preparing for and participating in the PDR. Please click on the link for further details.

7.6 Requests to attend training, including those for eLearning should be sent to the Learning and Development Team on [buckslearn@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:buckslearn@bucks.ac.uk). Colleagues can also sign up via the Events page on [BEN](#).

## 8. Additional resources

A range of resources is provided on [BEN](#) within staff learning and development, as follows:

- Resources to help you access and complete your online PDR forms in business connect, including managing the workflow in business connect.
- Access to a PDF of MicroLearn eLearning modules available to both managers and colleagues
- A list of evaluative questions for self-assessment.
- Tools and self-assessment resources to help colleagues engage with the BNU Behavioural Framework, accessed [here](#) on BEN.
- A self-help guide to career conversations
- Training dates and business connect drop-in sessions for systems support.
- FAQ document

## 9. Monitoring and Review

The University recognises the need to ensure that the PDR policy and procedure is operated and applied in a fair and consistent manner. In order to do this, a number of checks and balances are built into the process. These include:

- The cascade of objectives from the Vice Chancellor and via the strategic planning process down through the University.
- Training available for all participants involved in the PDR process covering skills, behaviours and application.
- The role of the reviewer to ensure consistency and fairness of application.
- Completion rates and assessment distribution are monitored and recorded by the Human Resources Directorate
- Any reviewee who feels that their PDR was unsatisfactory or unfair may ask that a senior manager to review their PDR.