**Developing and Agreeing Priorities**

**Additional Learning Resource - Guide for Reviewers and Reviewees**

**1. Introduction**

Clear priorities and good alignment with strategies within a Faculty/School or professional function alongside University plans and goals, can help to create a supportive environment where there is a focus on achievements, successes and academic/professional development. Agreeing priorities and reviewing contribution should be an ongoing process with time for feedback, reflection and planning for future success. This can be an important part of Personal Development Review (PDR) for all staff.

**2. Why do we need priorities?**
- To be clear about what needs to be achieved, the actions and outcomes needed, success measures and time frames;
- To understand how each individual contributes to the team/department and University goals;
- To motivate and provide focus on what matters most. What will make the biggest difference?
- To help employees grow and develop within their current role while preparing them for future progression where appropriate.

**3. What should priorities be about?**

Work priorities and objectives play a part in supporting employee development.

- It should be possible to identify clear priorities for each employee.
- These are normally agreed annually, with opportunities for employees and their people managers to 'check in' regularly during the academic year to review progress.

**4. What approaches could help?**

*(a) Well-formed Outcomes*

A simple approach is to try to ensure that the conversation focuses on outcome(s):

- What is it that the employee is trying to achieve?
- Set a timeframe
- Is achieving this outcome within our control?
- Get specific – How will we know that the outcome has been achieved?
- Identify resources needed to achieve the outcome.

*(b) SMART Framework*

The 'SMART' objective method can help to ensure goals are well designed, to build confidence and review progress/achievements. This method can be used by individuals as well as teams and managers.  The SMART goals framework can be used in PDR conversations, regular 'check-in' meetings and for agreeing expectations and standards. This framework may also be used in feedback, personal and team development planning, coaching and mentoring conversations.

*SPECIFIC*

- What do you need to achieve? Are there clear parameters and outcomes?
- Is there enough detail that ensures clarity and understanding of what is to be achieved?
- Has the expected result been clearly stated?

*MEASURABLE*

- Could this outcome be measured?
- How would you or others know that the objective has been achieved?
- What indicators are there to measure attainment of this outcome?
- Can improvements or progress towards this outcome be measured?
- Think about measures of quantity, quality or standards

*ACHIEVABLE*

- The goal should be challenging, but achievable and also inspire or motivate
- Are there any constraints which need to be considered that significantly impact on the achievement of the objective? If so, how can these be overcome or addressed?
- What input will be required from line managers or others?
- Do individuals have all the relevant skills and knowledge to achieve the objective?

*RELEVANT*

- Does this objective fit with local strategic priorities?
- Does the objective fit within the context of your role and grade?

*TIME-BOUND*

- Are there clear time frames for the objective?
- If the objective goes beyond the review period, are there interim stages or milestone dates?
- What could impact/compromise any deadlines? How can you mitigate risks or concerns?
- Are deadlines realistic with a good likelihood of success?

*When trying to write priorities, the 'SMART' or 'Well-formed objectives' approach can help overcome a number of potential issues which could otherwise arise*:

- Priorities might be too vague or not specific enough;
- Priorities may be task-oriented or a comprise a lengthy list of activities in an attempt to ensure that all aspects of a job or role description have been identified and stated;
- There might be no reference to timeframes or 'when' priorities are to be completed;
- The right balance between agreeing readily achievable priorities or those which are more challenging and stretching may not be achieved.

## 5. Aspects to be considered when developing good priorities

*Key strategic themes*

- Identify the key strategic areas of focus for the Faculty/School/Research area or Professional Service.
- Consider the important areas, opportunities, changes and challenges.
- Identify relevant documents and additional information.

*Key priorities for the individual (considering role and grade)*

- Reflect on how the individual or team could make the most significant contributions in the coming period.

*Key areas of interest – is there an opportunity for work priorities to support career development aims?*

- Consider career development aims and opportunities (e.g. promotion and other development)
- How can specific skills be developed through experience and support; or other skills beyond the existing role?
- What represents best practice in the particular work area or specialism (within Queen's, the HE sector or other comparable employers)?

*Draft and agree priorities, use the SMART approach or Well-formed Outcomes approaches (if they are helpful)*

- Ensure priorities are structured in a clear, concise and succinct way. SMART priorities are useful in gaining agreement and setting expectations for what can be achieved.
- Propose priorities and gain agreement at the appropriate time with line managers to clarify and review

*Review*

- Discuss and use agreed priorities actively to review progress during regular meetings.
- Update and amend priorities where required.


*Consider Queen's Core Values*

There should be an opportunity to align priorities with Queen's core values?

- *Integrity* – being professional, responsible and accountable
- *Connected* – actively collaborating to achieve goals and have a positive impact on staff, students and society
- *Ambition* – forward-thinking, creative, innovative, embracing change with a desire to be the best
- *Respect* – being open to challenge, encouraging diversity, supporting Queen's people and creating a positive environment
- *Excellence* – striving to deliver the best results, with pride and passion in our work


**6. Additional Information**

(a) Individual priorities can be agreed for all staff roles, though they lend themselves more readily to roles where staff have a broader scope of responsibilities and non-routine work.

For employees with more routine work, priorities may need to refer to ongoing outcomes which describe the core work of staff.  In these cases, consider:

- How can this colleague show they are doing well?
- What are the possible measures of success on a regular basis?
- When is routine work reviewed or monitored (e.g. weekly, monthly or quarterly)?
- Is 'high quality' mentioned?
- Have changes and improvement areas been included where possible?

(b) Priorities should be worded using unambiguous language, with a focus on results and achievements rather than a series of actions or tasks.  Detailed lists of tasks or project plans may need to be in place, however these will form part of the further work planning processes rather than at the time of agreeing priorities and having a personal development review conversation.


For additional guidance, and related policies and procedures, refer to the People and Culture website or seek assistance from your HR Business Partner.

*For guidance on PDR, FAQs and additional resources, including Skills Workshops for PDR Reviewers and Reviewees visit: go.qub.ac.uk/PDRinfo*