Policy Statement

The Appraisal and Personal Development Scheme (hereafter referred to as Appraisal) applies to all staff at the University of Essex and is designed to be sufficiently flexible so that it is equally relevant and meaningful to the different staff groups and to those at varying stages of their careers. Appraisal is designed to support the delivery of the University’s Strategic Plan and is a critical mechanism for meeting the University’s commitment to good management and staff development. The University ascribes great importance to appraisal as a means of developing the contribution of all staff and engaging staff in the achievement of the University’s strategic aims.

Appraisal represents an opportunity to:
- Provide/receive feedback on performance
- Reflect on how the abilities and interests of the appraisee are being employed
- Identify areas of development which will enable the appraisee to enhance their contribution to the University and increase their own job satisfaction
- Reflect on how the contribution of the appraisee has been enhanced by any training and development undertaken during the year under review
- Discuss how the activities of the individual have contributed to the goals of the Department/Section/area of work and to agree measurable objectives and targets for the coming year.
- Promote equity and fairness

The commitment to appraisal is embedded in the University’s Strategic Plan and its HR Strategy. It includes:
- Adoption of an appraisal process that meets the needs of individuals, managers and the University.
- Commitment to the personal and professional development of all staff.
- Active support to staff in the achievement of personal and institutional objectives.

The University sees appraisal as a fundamental part of the normal management process whereby managers (or other nominated colleagues) and staff should be meeting regularly to discuss issues of importance to the individual, the team, the Department/Section, the Faculty and the University. Appraisal should be an open and honest two-way opportunity for reflection and feedback. It should also form part of the planning process – an important professional dialogue that allows plans for the future to be discussed and agreed.

The appraisal process is seen as a means of developing an ethos and expectation of continuous lifelong learning amongst all staff. Appraisers and appraisees will jointly identify the training, development and work experience needed in order to enable staff to work as effectively as possible and to work towards agreed objectives. In order to ensure continued credibility, it will be important that there is a commitment to follow through on professional development opportunities that are discussed and agreed. It is crucial therefore that managers (normally Heads of Department/Section and Faculty PVCs/Registrar) ensure that relevant and appropriate training and development plans are formulated and implemented within available resources.

Although appraisal does not form a direct part of any annual review in respect of promotion, re-grading or the award of additional and/or discretionary increments it serves as a meaningful link into these existing processes and procedures. For example, if an academic member of staff is considering whether or not to go forward for promotion the appraisal should be informed by the relevant criteria from the Annual Review

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1 For the purposes of this Scheme, ‘Department’ means any Department, School or Centre of the University.
Procedures for Academic and Research Staff and used to gather evidence that will then help to inform the promotion application. Similarly, if a member of support staff considers that they should be put forward for a discretionary increment the extent to which they have achieved their annual objectives may be a relevant factor when discussing their performance.

PVCs and Heads of Department/Section have responsibility to ensure that appraisal is offered regularly within an annual cycle and that agreed outcomes are followed through.

The University will provide guidance and training to members of staff, whether appraiser or appraisee.

The appraisal scheme is applicable to all staff, whether employed on part-time, fixed term or full time contracts.

On appointment, all staff with a responsibility for appraisal will be required to attend appraisal training in order to have a clear understanding of the appraisal process within the University.

Members of staff will be briefed on appraisal as part of their induction, both at University and local departmental level.

Either a copy of individual personal development plans or a Departmental/Section training/development needs summary should be submitted to Human Resources. These will then be used to inform the provision of the annual staff development programme.

In support of the policy, Human Resources will provide advice on appraisal and staff development issues to any staff member, or group of staff.

**Principles and Procedures**

**Overview**

The underlying principle of the Appraisal and Personal Development Scheme is that staff have a right to receive high quality, responsible and balanced feedback on their work and developmental activities, and to agree relevant and appropriate training needs or development plans and work targets for the coming year.

The scheme provides opportunity for self-appraisal, feedback and upward appraisal (within the spirit of two-way communication) and a constructive dialogue and review between appraiser and appraisee leading to developmental outcomes where appropriate. The scheme will support managers and staff in meeting the joint aims of enhanced effectiveness and job satisfaction and is designed to be developmental rather than judgemental.

The discussion should take note of performance, working relationships, training and development undertaken and identify priorities for the year ahead including training and development needs.

**Management of appraisal process**

Appraisers will usually be allocated by the Head of Department or Head of Section and will normally be the line-manager of the post-holder. It is acknowledged that on occasion an appraisee may seek to be appraised by someone other than their allocated appraiser. This must be discussed and agreed with the Head of Department/Section or, if the appraiser is the Head of Department or Section, with the Faculty PVC or Registrar respectively.

In view of the number of staff that a Head of Department may nominally have to appraise, Heads will normally ask senior members of staff to act for them in appraisal meetings. For academic staff, the appraiser will normally be expected to be at Professor level if possible. Alternatively, a department may operate a ‘bank’ of appraisers with the appraisee able to select their own appraiser. Regardless of whether the appraiser is the Head or a delegated senior member of staff, the agreed record of the appraisal meeting and personal development plan, will be returned to the Head of Department/Section who has responsibility for reviewing the department’s overall staff development requirements and matching these against

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2 Separate review arrangements exist for Graduate Teaching Assistants
available resources. If the accountability of a member of staff changes the appraisal records will be passed to
the new manager.

Each member of staff should have a formal appraisal meeting on at least an annual basis. An additional
informal review meeting may be held six months after the appraisal meeting, if necessary, to review
progress against objectives, take account of changed circumstances, and revise objectives if necessary. It
is recognised that different appraisal cycles operate in different areas and that different times may be more
suitable for some areas than others. For academic staff however it is recommended that appraisal
meetings should take place during the summer term, or early in July, so that they can take account of
teaching outcomes for the past year, work allocation for the forthcoming academic year, and of planned
activities such as research and conference visits during the summer vacation.

In cases where a member of staff undertakes an additional role (e.g. Proctor) this should also be covered
within the appraisal process and may require additional agreed consultation within a confidential
framework.

**The appraisal meeting**

Before the appraisal meeting, the appraiser and appraisee should each separately review the appraisee’s
previous objectives, and the set of general and specific issues listed in Appendix 1, and note down those
topics that they wish to discuss. Some thought should also be given to possible future objectives.

Where the appraisal is of a member of academic staff on an A + R contract, the information about the
appraisee’s research activity over the past year (publications, research contracts awarded, honours,
conference invitations etc.) that is required by the University’s Research and Enterprise Office (REO)
should ideally be collected in advance of the appraisal meeting as it will normally form one topic of
discussion and is likely to be relevant to any research objectives set.

At the appraisal meeting, appraiser and appraisee should first discuss the general and specific issues that
may have influenced the appraisee’s activity and performance over the last year. Appraiser and appraisee
will then review the appraisee’s previous set of objectives and targets and record their agreed view of the
extent to which these objectives have been met, using evidence as objectively as possible.

Appraiser and appraisee should then agree appropriate SMART\(^3\) objectives and targets for the forthcoming
year arising from their discussion and the review of previously set objectives. It is normally expected that no
more than six objectives are set in each annual cycle, and these should align with Departmental/Section
objectives that are, in turn, informed by the University objectives. Relevant key performance indicators
should also be used to inform objectives as appropriate.

Additionally, and in line with the different themes that the University’s Annual Review process uses to
assess cases for permanency, promotion and increments, it is expected that most objectives of academic
staff will align with one or more of the following themes:

1. Teaching
2. Research
3. Administration, management or leadership
4. Knowledge transfer
5. Professional Service
6. External service of benefit to the University

If appropriate, the appraiser and appraisee should also discuss the personal development of the appraisee,
review any recent training and consider whether further training in any particular developmental area(s) is
required.

Within two weeks of the meeting, the Appraisal and Personal Development Record (Appendix 2) should be
completed. The appraisee is required to update their personal development plan (Appendix 3) and all
paperwork is then submitted to the Head of Department/Section who is responsible for copying the
personal development plan to Human Resources or for ensuring that a summary of Department/Section
development needs is submitted.

\(^3\) S.M.A.R.T. objectives = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited objectives
Appraiser and appraisee may wish to review progress against objectives and targets and training needs between appraisal meetings and revise/amend these where appropriate, or in order to reflect changed circumstances. Where possible, an additional informal meeting six months after the formal appraisal meeting is suggested for this.

**Appraisal training**

Prior to the commencement of an appraisal round, Heads of Department/Section will ensure that all staff (i.e. appraisers and appraisees) are briefed on the aims and objectives of the Department/Section and also on resources currently available for staff development.

Appraisers and appraisees will carry out appraisals within the spirit of this policy. Appraisees will be responsible for maintaining their own personal development plan, with support and advice where necessary from their manager and/or Human Resources.

Appraisers, appraisees and the University share a responsibility for ensuring that appropriate training and development needs are identified and met and that outcomes are evaluated.

If difficulties arise in connection with appraisal at any stage in the process, or in interpreting the policy, the Head of Department /Section or PVC will give advice. Human Resources will also provide advice and guidance as appropriate.

**Research Staff**

Research staff should have regular formal appraisals irrespective of contract type. The appraisal should cover two distinct sets of goals and the objectives that are set need to reflect the wider career and personal development of the researcher as well as the more immediate requirements of the specific research project. This is in accordance with ‘The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers’.

**Probationary Staff**

It is particularly important that all probationary members of staff have regular review meetings to ensure that satisfactory progress is being made. Probationary academic staff are required to submit an annual report to the Academic Staffing Committee that details activities, responsibilities, achievements and planned future work. An appropriately timed appraisal meeting can provide support and assistance in the completion of the report which may also act as a record of the appraisal.

**Equality and Diversity**

The University recognises the value of diversity and is committed to equality of opportunity. It is important therefore that during the appraisal process staff are treated with dignity and respect and solely on the basis of their merits, abilities and potential, regardless of, race, ethnic or national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, socio-economic background, family circumstances, religious or political beliefs and affiliations or other irrelevant distinction.

Particular regard should also be paid to the ‘Two Ticks’ symbol. The symbol is a recognition given to employers who have agreed to take action to meet five commitments regarding the employment, retention, training and career development of disabled employees. One of the five commitments is ‘to ensure that there is a mechanism in place to discuss, at any time, but at least once a year, with disabled employees what can be done to ensure that they develop and use their abilities’. This discussion should form part of the appraisal process. The appraisal also provides a formalised mechanism to review any adjustments that have been made to ensure that they continue to be appropriate and to identify any additional need.
Appendix 1

Examples of topics for discussion at appraisals

The following lists are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive but are provided as possible prompts to help both parties prepare for the appraisal meeting.

For the appraisee –
- The overall purpose of the job
- Need for review of job description
- How agreed objectives have been achieved
- Key activities over the last year
- Any particular achievements
- Any new responsibilities undertaken
- The balance of different activities over the year
- Things which have gone particularly well / been problematic
- The most rewarding parts of the job
- Things which have caused frustration
- Feedback on performance from other staff
- Physical conditions
- Relationships with colleagues/students/customers/clients
- How work is organised
- Other conditions, for example equipment or hours
- Workload
- Any new skills which have been developed
- Any skills which are underused or could be developed
- Training or personal or professional development needs
- Any anticipated changes in the next year
- Career aspirations
- Objectives or priorities for the future
- Feedback on management / Department or Section / University issues
- Any Health and Safety concerns
- Any other issues relevant to you and your role

For the Appraiser -
- Overall contribution of the member of staff
- Matching of individual, team, Department/Section and University aims
- Review of previous objectives
- Constructive feedback on the past year’s performance
- Effectiveness of any training or development activities
- Current training and development needs
- The role of the Appraiser in supporting individual effectiveness
- Career and professional development
- How the member of staff has upheld the University’s values
- Equality and diversity-related achievements e.g. being a diversity champion or straight ally, actively promoting diversity in recruitment activities
- Any Health and Safety responsibilities and training needs related to job role
- Any other issues relevant to the post-holder and their role