

# Personal Appraisal and Development – Postdocs – appraiser and appraisee

Personal Appraisal and Development is a core annual responsibility. It provides a structured opportunity to look at the big picture: review contribution including celebrating success, agree priorities and objectives, and identify development and career needs. It should reflect ongoing conversations, not a one-off annual event.

This guide mirrors the structure of the appraisal form for ease of use. It includes guidance for both **appraisees** and **appraisers**. Further guidance and support are available from:

- [notes on the form itself](#)
  - [guidance on how to use the system](#)
  - [e-learning and workshops](#).
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## Introduction

Before the appraisal discussion, both appraisee and appraiser should understand School/Institute plans and any relevant funder requirements.

Discuss what you both want to gain from the appraisal meeting and whether to split the appraisal into several meetings to ensure discussions are focussed and that you have sufficient time.

- Schedule the appraisal meeting(s)
- The appraisee completes their sections of the form on the e-appraisal and shares it with their appraiser
- Hold the appraisal conversation
- Update and agree content on the e-appraisal following the discussion
- Finalise the e-appraisal once both parties have reviewed it
- Review objectives and development regularly in one-to-ones throughout the year. This can be on the e-appraisal system or outside it

The quality of the appraisal process depends more on the **quality of the conversation** than on the form itself. Appraisers and appraisees are expected to:

- Prepare thoughtfully
- Engage openly and professionally
- Use evidence and examples
- Agree clear outcomes and next steps

## Link with other people processes

The focus of the appraisal is development and career. The appraiser should also:

- Use information from recruitment/probation (e.g. identified development objectives)
- Ensure any performance concerns are addressed through regular one-to-one conversations and reflected in appraisal through clear objectives and agreed support. Concerns about poor performance should be managed through the [Capability Policy and Procedure](#).

## Objectives

### Looking back

Below are some questions that may help the appraisee reflect in advance and support the appraiser in prompting reflection during the appraisal discussion:

- What are you most proud of this year?
- What challenges have you successfully overcome, and how?
- What achievable next step could help you build on this success?
- How would others know that things are improving?
- Which of our Values in Action do you feel are your strongest? When have you demonstrated this?

See Appendix 3 for guidance on providing helpful feedback.

### Looking forward

Objectives should:

- Be expressed as outcomes, not task lists
- Cover the main areas of the role (e.g. education, research, citizenship)
- Be aligned to your grant objectives and wider funder aims. You will also want to look at [Strategy 2030](#), [Enabling Plans](#), and School/Institute priorities.
- Respect academic freedom while providing clarity about expectations

Consider:

- What are the priorities now and in the future?
- What does this mean for what the appraisee should start, stop, and continue doing?

Whilst a firm statement of intent, some objectives will change in the face of shifting circumstances and opportunities. Some objectives will depend on the availability of support/resources.

Lack of progress should be discussed openly, not avoided.

### Ensuring objectives are SMART

Appraisee and appraiser should review objectives together to check they are SMART, where success can be recognised through clear outcomes, indicators or examples – even where these are not fully quantifiable:

### Evidence

**Setting SMART goals** – setting challenging, specific goals leads to higher performance than urging people to do their best (except when the task is complex, or the individual is new to the task); this is “regarded as one of the most ‘evidence-based’ interventions in organisation and people management” ([Barents, E., Janssen, B. and Velghe, C. \(2016\)](#))

- **Specific:** Outcomes should be clear and concrete.
- **Measurable:** Define what success looks like, using quantifiable or clearly described criteria.
- **Achievable:** Set objectives that can realistically be met with the available resources.
- **Relevant:** Align objectives with the individual's role, School/Institute goals, and Strategy 2030.
- **Time-related:** Assign appropriate deadlines and discuss interim milestones if timelines exceed a year.

See Appendix 1 for example objectives

## Citizenship

Citizenship describes how the appraisee contributes to the Queen Mary community and research culture, including:

- Supporting students and colleagues promoting an inclusive research environment
- Contributing to committees, staff associations, networks or strategic initiatives
- Enhancing Queen Mary's reputation and external engagement (e.g. using the [design templates and key messages](#), improving your public profile)

It also includes how the appraisee models our [Values in Action](#) when delivering objectives – for example, asking whether a research proposal could adopt a more inclusive or innovative interdisciplinary approach (Ambitious)

## Measuring success

It's important to consider how to measure success upfront, as it may require gaining a baseline measure and/or a clearer idea of the problem you are trying to solve. These can be quite simple; for example, if you were mentoring someone you might set objectives at the beginning, then ask the mentee to describe/rate where they are at the start and end of the mentoring process.

## Considering workload

Considering both the *Objective* and *Citizenship* section, is the workload manageable? Have an open and constructive conversation about workload and discuss any changes where appropriate to ensure aims and objectives are achievable. Ongoing conversations about workload are encouraged in one-to-ones.

## Support and Engagement

This section supports an open, two-way conversation about what helps the appraisee feel engaged, supported and able to do their best. Appraisees are encouraged to reflect honestly on what is working well and what could be improved. Appraisers should listen with curiosity and focus on shared problem-solving and practical actions within their influence.

### Appraisees should:

- Highlight what has supported your motivation, wellbeing and performance
- Be specific about barriers and what might help
- Think about what is within your control, and what may need wider support

### Appraisers should:

- Allow space before moving to solutions
- Acknowledge what you hear, even where immediate change isn't possible
- Being clear about what you can influence directly, and what may need escalation or longer-term action

Where issues are raised that cannot be resolved quickly, agree what will happen next and how progress will be reviewed.

### Optional reflective questions

- What's been most energising for you this year?
- What's been hardest to sustain?
- What support has made the biggest difference?
- What's one small change that would help you work more effectively?
- Is there anything you've been hesitant to raise but would like me to know?

### Where helpful, capture:

- One or two actions to sustain what is working well
- Any agreed support, adjustments or follow-up conversations
- Who will take these forward and when will they be revisited

Where issues cannot be resolved immediately, appraiser and appraisee should agree clear next steps and how progress will be reviewed.

## Career and Development

In addition to working on a specific research project for which you will have productivity and development goals attached, this section of the appraisal encourages researchers to examine their career and development goal setting more broadly. Consider how you will use this next year to prepare and develop yourself for that next career step.

We are signatories to the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#). The Concordat specifically sets out responsibilities for institutions, and managers of researchers, which are summarised below:

- Hold regular (at least yearly) career development meetings.
- Help researchers consider and prepare for a wide range of career options, inside and outside higher education - using mentors, career advisors, training sessions, and resources like [Careers and Enterprise](#), [researcher development](#), and the [Vitae website](#)
- Protect at least 10 days per year for career and professional development (CPD) activity (adjusted for part-time staff).
- Provide additional time and opportunities for researchers to build their research profile and leadership abilities; ensure these efforts are recognised and credited appropriately.
- Engage in leadership and management training to improve personal effectiveness and foster a positive approach to professional development.

### Looking back

**Appraisee:** It's worth spending time on this section, even if this is your first appraisal at Queen Mary. You should use this as an opportunity to take stock on your career ambitions, and reflect on what personal or profile development you have had and any CPD activity undertaken. This gives you pause to celebrate accomplishments as well as provide insights for your forward-looking plans.

### Looking forward

#### *Career and personal ambition*

Remember that the postdoctoral phase in academic research is transitional and often made up of multiple fixed-term contracts across different research groups. Appraisees should consider how each role helps to build their profile, experience and skills portfolio, and take purposeful steps with each contract.

If the appraisee is on a fixed-term contract, career planning should begin early. Where appropriate, the Principal Investigator (PI) and appraisee should discuss future funding options at least one year before the current funding ends.

Appraiser and appraisee should discuss what the most useful next career step might be. Appraisers may want to encourage appraisees to think broadly, rather than focusing only on securing another postdoctoral role. Appraisees may also find it helpful to consult [Career Support for Researchers](#) and to consider options both within and beyond academia. Those considering an academic career path should use the [Academic Careers Framework](#) to assess expectations for academic staff posts and help inform their development plans.

### *Development Objectives and Activities*

Development objectives may arise from:

- reflection on the previous year's work
- developments in the appraisees' research field, including independent research,
- support needed for planned objectives
- appraisees' reflections on career ambitions above.

Reflection on core skills and behaviours - [Values in Action](#) and [Leading Together](#) can help you reflect and consider your development areas.

### **Activities:**

Think beyond training courses: gain experience through new responsibilities, new independent projects, job shadowing, and learning from different situations.

- acquiring new research methods and practices, forming new networks, and developing your research profile at Queen Mary and beyond
- engaging in continuing professional development in your subject discipline and its pedagogy including incorporating research, scholarship, and the evaluation of your professional practices.
- building on qualifications, such as [teaching certificates](#), to further enhance your skills.
- Postdoc Mentoring Programme or other provision available from the Centre for Early Career Researchers

### Internal development opportunities

- Centre for Early Career Researchers
  - [Researcher Development Programme](#)
  - [Careers Counselling for Researchers](#)
- [Organisational and Professional Development](#)
- [Queen Mary Academy](#) including:
  - Education and Learning
  - Teaching recognition
- [Health and Safety](#)

## Appendix 1 - Examples for objectives setting and review

To help review (looking back) and formulate (looking forward) objectives, there are some questions/examples to consider below. Although you are not expected to cover all areas, we recommend you considering opportunities beyond your research objectives to support your career and professional development and enrich your research community.

### Education

Where possible, supporting teaching and learning for example by mentor PhD students or support their training.

Have you considered whether you map across to the criteria for another category of Advanced HE [HEA Fellow](#), e.g. Associate?

### Research and Career Profile

How can you contribute to our distinctive, world-leading, curiosity-driven and applied research?

- Publications and other research outputs e.g. conference poster/presentation, publications.
- Research impact, including engaging with the public/beneficiaries, informing policy.
- Small grant applications and awards at a level appropriate to the discipline and your career level (starting off perhaps with small-scale travel grants).
- Supporting the supervision of PhD students.
- Work contributing to research impact.
- Consider contribution to REF/TEF/KEF as relevant to the job profile.

### Research culture

- Maintaining the highest standards of research integrity and professional conduct.
- Consider opportunities to contribute to institutional or local policy development aimed at creating a more positive research environment and culture within their institution.
- Actively contribute to the development and maintenance of a supportive, fair and inclusive research culture and be a supportive colleague, particularly to newer researchers and students.
- Support for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.
- Facilitation of research interactions and collaborations.
- Leadership roles in research culture, e.g., leading a local journal club or research staff association.
- Building and growing networks or centres and encouraging collaboration between them.
- Developing cross-disciplinary research activities.

### Citizenship and Inclusion

Contributing to the wider Queen Mary community, including demonstrating our [Values in Action](#).

Activities that you have/will be involved that enable us to achieve the 2030 Strategy, supporting others to achieve their goals, and developing the University community by advising or mentoring within your School/Institute or Faculty.

- Supporting the increase of awareness and reputation of Queen Mary.
- Serving on School/Institute, Faculty or University committees e.g. Athena Swan, ECR Forum.
- Contributing to institutional policy development.
- Involvement in, or leadership of, culture change within a discipline or team.
- Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion for staff and/or students.
- Contributing to School, Faculty or University strategic activity.
- Member of staff network committee e.g. Parents and Carers Network, LGBTQA+ Staff Network etc.
- Contributing to an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion - specific event of conference.
- Supporting the wellbeing of others.

Citizenship and Inclusion also includes demonstrating how you have delivered your objectives by exemplifying our [Values in Action](#), e.g.

- How have you actively considered and met the range of needs in our community?
- How have you kept informed of the University's achievements, and celebrated them?
- How have you been ambitious?
- How have you built strong partnerships with other disciplines/Professional Services to resolve challenges?
- How have you upheld integrity?

### **Enterprise and External Engagement**

Enhancing the lives of the people of East London and beyond through our recruitment, teaching, research, and public engagement activities.

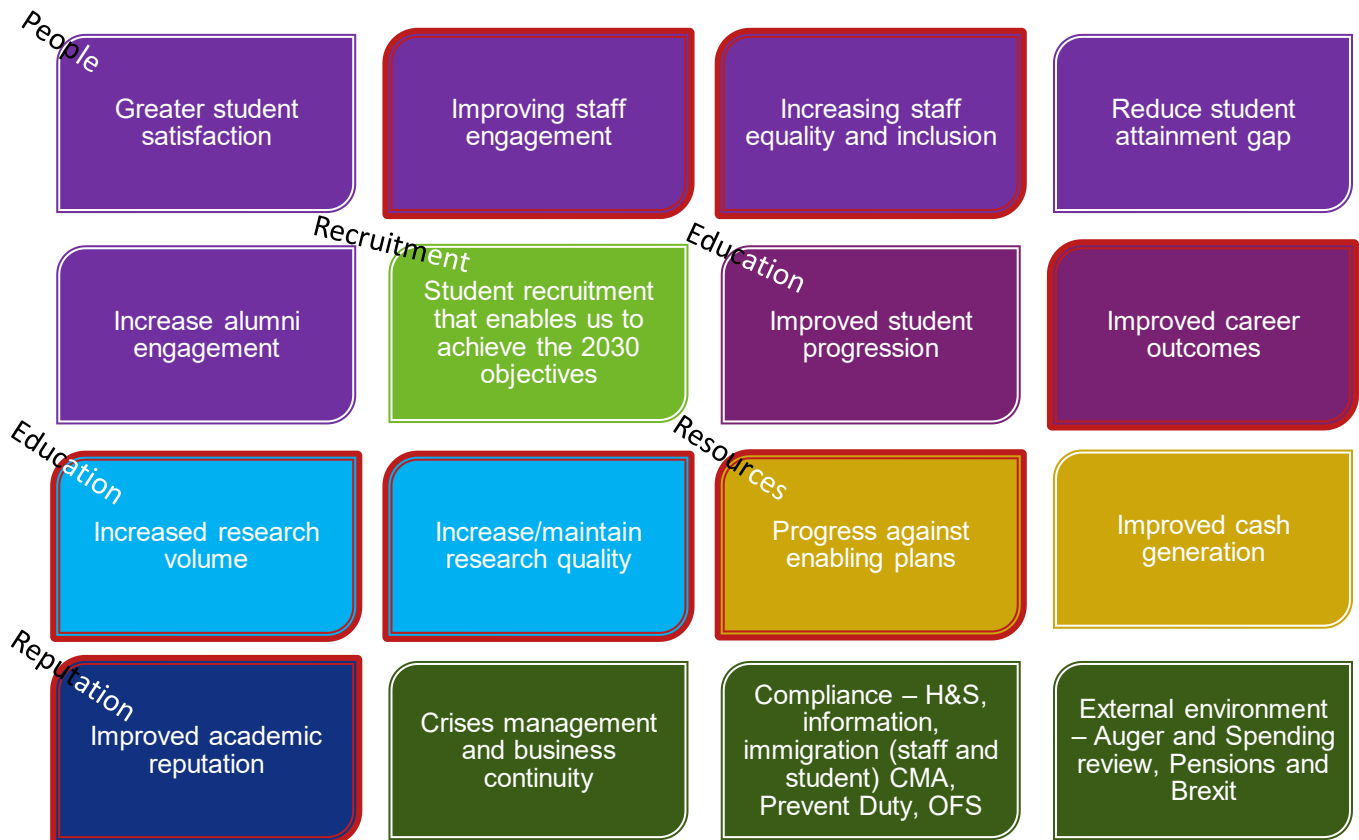
- Contributions to public engagement initiatives and activities which generate mutual benefit, influencing internal and external priorities and practice.
- Creating partnerships with other organisations, leadership in societal engagement, and demonstrating research impact.
- Enterprise activity facilitating engagement with business and with the third sector, through the practical application of research discoveries and other income-generating activities (including short courses, professional development and executive education)
- Generating intellectual property and protecting it, development of spin-out companies etc.

### **Professional Practice**

- Continuous development and maintaining a reputation in the field of practice.
- Maintaining in-depth technical knowledge, and up-to-date understanding, of developments affecting the practice of the profession.
- Offering consultancy or policy advice to public or regulatory bodies and holding advisory board membership of professional organisations.

## Appendix 2 - Strategic priorities

To ensure we are all focused on what is important to Queen Mary, your objectives should support one or more of the following strategic priorities.



## Appendix 3

### For appraisers

#### Providing helpful feedback

Before giving feedback, pause to check your intent: am I offering this to help the appraisee learn, improve or build on a strength? Feedback is most useful when it is rooted in specific examples, focused on behaviours or outcomes, and given in a way that supports reflection rather than defensiveness.

Where possible, start by inviting the appraisee's own reflection. For example: *How do you think that went? What worked well? What might you do differently next time?* This can help create a more balanced and open conversation, and the appraisee may already have insight into the issue or opportunity you want to discuss.

If you need to give more direct feedback, the CEDAR model can help structure the conversation in a clear, constructive and developmental way. It supports a discussion based on context, examples, shared understanding and practical next steps.

- **Context** – briefly describe the situation you want to discuss so the conversation starts from a shared understanding.
- **Examples** – give specific examples of what you observed, heard or reviewed. Keep this factual and focused on behaviours or outcomes rather than assumptions about intent.
- **Diagnosis** – explore together what may have contributed to the situation. This is the point to ask questions, listen carefully and check whether there are barriers, misunderstandings or support needs affecting performance.
- **Actions** – agree what should continue, change or stop. Be clear about expectations, support and any practical next steps.
- **Review** – agree how and when progress will be reviewed, particularly if the feedback relates to an ongoing issue or development goal.

For example, an appraiser might say: *In the last two project meetings (Context), I noticed that key updates were sometimes shared after the discussion had moved on (Examples). I wanted to understand what might be contributing to that and whether anything is making it harder to prepare or speak up in the meeting (Diagnosis). For future meetings, let's agree that you bring your updates at the start and that I will make sure there is space on the agenda for them (Actions). Let's review how this is working over the next month (Review).*

#### **When receiving feedback:**

If the feedback is positive, it can be natural to not spend time reflecting on it. However, it's important to acknowledge it (thank the person) and consider how you can build on this and use your strengths.

If the feedback is negative, it can be natural to feel defensive and justify your actions, for example by blaming the situation or other people. If you do this, people are unlikely to want to give you feedback again, and you will miss out on important perspectives. Try to give yourself time:

- Ask questions and probe for more information if necessary, to ensure you have sufficient detail and understanding of the feedback.
- Take a 'time out' if needed: "That's interesting. I've not seen it like that before, can I go away and reflect?"
- You can ask others to get their perspective.
- Agree next steps during the conversation or at an agreed later time.