



Royal Veterinary College
University of London

The Royal Veterinary College Appraisal Toolkit



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THE APPRAISAL TOOLKIT:

This toolkit will help all Line Managers understand how the appraisal process works and in particular:

- how effective appraisals benefit both individuals and the College
- how to plan, prepare and conduct effective appraisal interviews
- how to use the rating process fairly
- how to encourage better staff performance by:
 - agreeing SMART objectives
 - giving and receiving constructive feedback
 - agreeing effective Personal Development Plans

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1. What is Appraisal?

1. WHAT IS APPRAISAL?

Appraisal is:

- a 2-way process aimed at enhancing individual and organisational performance
- a forum for discussing performance, attitude, problems, achievements and aspirations
- a link between individual and organisational goals
- time with a senior colleague – improving mutual understanding and agreeing future actions

Appraisal is the optimum time to stimulate renewed commitment from individuals by reminding them that their role, no matter how small, makes a valuable contribution to the College

It is also their big chance to say what is on their mind, whether or not you want to hear it!

Key Points

Rule no. 1 – it's **their** time, not yours – your aim is to identify how they can develop their skills for their own benefit, and for that of the College

Rule no. 2 – be **honest** (but sensitive)

People need two key things from their manager:

- a clear understanding of what is expected from them
- help and support to meet these expectations



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2. Look to the Future, Learn from the Past

2. LOOK TO THE FUTURE, LEARN FROM THE PAST

It's very tempting to 'go over old ground', particularly if you feel strongly about something. But it really is a waste of time to spend longer on matters that have already happened unless the appraisee is actually learning from the experience. Just 'going on' about it might make you feel better for a short while but is probably a waste of valuable time

As a rule of thumb, look back for no more than 20% of the time and aim to look forward for 80%

Remember, **'in appraisal the focus is on 'praise!'**

You will work together to determine how they can:

- overcome any difficulties they may be having with their current role
- work out where they should be going over the next year
- decide what skills they need to develop

Key Points

"Learn – from the past
Live – in the present
Work – for the future"

You can't change the past, but you can influence the future

Work together for a better **future**;
the past is history



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3. Values, Rights and Responsibilities

3. VALUES, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Values:

- openness and honesty
- respect for the views of others
- compassion and support
- awareness of the needs of others – and a desire to help them satisfy those needs
- collaboration and encouragement

'Encouragement' must not be seen as being weak in any way – if you try and see the best in someone they often reward you (e.g. a group of teachers were told certain children were brighter than others – but actually they were not. However, by the end of the year the children whom the teachers believed were brighter than their peers consistently achieved better results even though the teachers insisted they had not treated them any differently)

Our common belief should be that **'everyone is potentially a great performer'**. Recognising this principle helps us to focus on helping people to find positive solutions rather than focusing on blame and criticism

Praise is very important – it gets people to listen, and it helps them to relax. Without encouragement and appreciation even a good performer can become a poor one

However, praise must be sincere and specific

Taking the time to say **"Thanks for the way you handled that problem in the lab last week, it was most helpful"** has far more effect than **"Thanks – doing well!"** or even worse, **"I'll soon tell you if there's something wrong so if you don't hear anything, assume you're doing a good job.."**

Most individuals neither expect nor receive much praise or constructive feedback - what a waste

Key Points

Appraisal is a shared experience and works best if both parties:

- prepare thoroughly
- ensure there is appropriate follow-up afterwards

There is a self fulfilling prophecy often enacted out at work:

the manager thinks:

- Sam is lazy and needs to be carefully supervised
- so I tell Sam exactly what to do and check up often

Sam thinks:

- they're always checking up on me
- I'm not expected to do anything on my own
- so I'll wait and be told what to do

and the manager thinks:

- I was right! Sam is lazy...

Roles and responsibilities

Prior to commencing the appraisal process you might wish to give some thought to the rights and responsibilities of the two parties, and possibly discuss this with your team

	Rights	Responsibilities
Appraiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to appraise the employee • to have their opinions respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be open and fair • to respect the rights of the employee
Appraisee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to privacy and confidentiality • to not understand • to make mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to respect the opinions of the manager • to learn from their mistakes

Key Points

4. Aspects of a Good Appraisal

4. ASPECTS OF A GOOD APPRAISAL

A good appraisal process:

- is based on key tasks and clear skill descriptions
- assists appraisees to appraise their own performance by knowing their own objectives and measurements
- encourages both parties to bring data to the discussion
- gives focus to development, with relevant objectives agreed
- is handled skilfully and promoted well
- allows for open discussion
- focuses on improvement and personal development
- clarifies key tasks and objectives for the year ahead

Key Points

A good appraisal process is seen as fair and valuable

Both parties understand what is being appraised and how judgements are reached

Staff understand own goals and measurements

5. Planning

5. PLANNING

Poor appraisals are usually down to poor planning. A well prepared appraiser should never be in for an unforeseen shock and their planning means that they can face the odd 'little surprise' calmly and professionally

Appraisers who feel they don't have to do much preparation because
“we work together everyday” &/or
“we know everything about each other”
often find that they **don't** actually know as much as they thought they did.

Close working relationships, whilst having undoubted strengths, can often harbour resentments because it can be harder for some appraisees to bring up issues that are concerning them in the course of everyday work. Hence, when given the chance to do so at an appraisal sometimes things can get a bit fraught, much to the surprise of the appraiser

But on the bright side, issues brought to the fore can be dealt with, and momentary discomfort can lead to huge improvements all round. It is surprising what improvements can be brought about simply by opening an objective dialogue

Key Points

- badly performed appraisals can reduce performance
- well conducted appraisals can improve performance

what will yours do?

Review their **Job Description** – how does their actual work measure up against the original description of what they should be doing? Has there been a change of priorities, or have some aspects fallen into disuse, perhaps because of personal preferences?

It's good practice to review job descriptions annually anyway

6. Key Skills Required

6. KEY SKILLS REQUIRED

All managers can learn and develop these skills – they are basic communication tools that can help everyone in the course of their daily work, and beyond

Effective appraisers prepare thoroughly and are therefore more successful. Appraisal interviewing is not just 'having a conversation', it's about knowing your stuff and involves skills, techniques and processes

The basic skills required are:

- asking appropriate questions
- listening actively to what is being said
- controlling the flow of the conversation
- making sound judgements
- agreeing useful objectives for the future

Key Points

Take notes (which can be a sign of active listening) but make sure you aren't writing so many notes you are no longer listening, and keep looking up to re-establish eye contact as often as possible

Asking the right questions

Start with open questions to get them talking:

typically, questions that start with 'what', 'when', 'where', 'who', 'why' and 'how' -
also 'describe', 'tell me about' etc.

Then ask probing questions to get to the facts:

home in on something they've just said and ask for more information.
'Drill down' with repeat probes until you have enough detail

Make reflective statements:

to help people to 'open up' if they are not saying much (e.g. the appraiser makes a non-judgemental repeat such as 'you said...', 'you inferred that..' etc.

Closed questions lead to a single, specific fact; could be 'yes' or 'no'
– you won't get much information but they can be useful to ascertain facts or bring a particular line of questioning to a close

Be careful with the following types of questions:

- **hypothetical** – can be useful at times, but you won't get facts or evidence
- **leading** questions tend to get us the answer we want, or they think we want
- **multiple** questions confuse both the appraisee and the appraiser
– good questions are short and direct

Some people need a lot of encouragement to open up. Make an attempt to draw them out on what they like / dislike about their role currently and what they would like to do differently

Key Points

Keep clarifying and summarising to show that you really do understand

Some examples of very general questions to give you an idea of how you can get people talking; (note the 'probes')

- How has this year been for you?
 - What have you **enjoyed** this year?
 - **Why** have you felt like that?
 - What **disappointments** have you had?
 - How did you **overcome** them?
- Where are you aiming to be in X years time?
 - What are you **doing** to get there?
 - Do you need any **help**?
- What improvements can you make next year?
 - Which areas could you do **even better** in?
 - How are you going to **maintain** your performance?

Key Points

Don't feel you're being noseey by asking questions; most people are very happy to respond to a genuine interest in them

Active listening:

- ensures the information is heard **correctly**
- encourages the speaker to feel valued and **talk more**
- identifies areas for further **probing**
- listen to **what** is being said (**the facts**) and also hear **how** it is being said (**their feelings**)
- what is their **body language** telling you?
- listen with your ears and with your eyes

Don't be thinking of your next question or planning your next task after the appraisal is over – LISTEN! - **intently**

Don't let your mind wander because you are bored – keep your concentration and don't let any impatience you may feel show on your face!

Watch out for these common listening pitfalls:

- **Scoring points** - relating everything to your own experience
- **Mind reading** - predicting what they'll say next
- **Cherry picking** - choosing to hear some information, but not the rest
- **Counselling** - can't resist giving advice
- **Labelling** - putting the other person into a 'category'
- **Duelling** - challenging their views with your own judgement (and you think you're right..)
- **Rehearsing** - practising your next lines in your head so you're ready for a quick reply

Key Points

What makes **you** feel you are being listened to?

Make sure your body language:

- matches what you say
- encourages the appraisee to participate

Do any of these apply to you?

Body language

Whether we want to or not, we communicate with our whole body

A typical mismatch – a person says “**I’m not nervous!**” but they are swallowing hard because they have a dry mouth, their face is pale and they appear agitated. Do you believe them?

If what you **‘hear’** doesn’t correspond with what you **‘see’** you probably need to **probe** (gently) to get to the heart of the matter. Don’t make the common mistake (particularly if you know them well) of assuming you know what they mean

‘Assume makes an ass of you and me’ (ass – u – me). Get it?!!

Key Points

It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it!

- **Words** – the words we speak form only 7% of our communication
- **Tone of voice** – this is more important and accounts for 38%
- **Body language** – a staggering 55% of our communication

Giving and receiving feedback

At various times in the appraisal process you will need to give your view of their performance – good and bad

The way you handle this will have a direct bearing on their participation in the discussion, and their motivation afterwards

In using these guidelines you will be providing a model for your people to use when they give feedback to others, (including you)

If you wish to be critical, take care to criticise the **fault**, not the person. Keep it factual and impersonal and it will be easier for them to listen to. Avoid emotive words and make sure you have lots of examples to back you up

- Discuss **specific behaviour** – you liked it or it needs to be improved
- Give **factual examples**
- ‘**Own**’ the feedback you are giving
- Focus on the **positive**
- Praise boosts morale but **constructive feedback improves performance**
- Only give constructive feedback about things that can be changed
- Be prepared to **offer suggestions – if asked**
- Allow the appraisee the opportunity to respond

Key Points

Try to turn **negatives into positives**, eg.

don't say:

“you have a lousy manner with the students”

but **try**:

“your work skills are very good, so how can we bring your relationships with students up to the same level?”

- Don't apologise for giving feedback – after all, **it's only your opinion!**

Encourage feedback to yourself

Be prepared for, indeed encourage, feedback from your people to yourself. You may feel very uncomfortable at the thought but try not to be defensive!

If it feels like criticism then make a note of it and agree to consider it. Perhaps this has come about because of the mutual trust you have built during the appraisal process so 'hold your ground and keep your cool'

They may have a grievance which goes way beyond you, and perhaps they feel under threat or lacking in confidence. Can you help?

If they need to let off steam, let them. Then steer them back to the appraisal proper, and gently remind them that you're here to talk about **them** and **their** role

Key Points

7. An Appraisal Framework

7. AN APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK

- **Beforehand**
 - brief appraisee
 - prepare / gather information
 - check administrative arrangements
- **During**
 - put them at ease
 - use a structured approach
 - summarise / close
- **Afterwards**
 - complete form
 - follow up any issues
 - review progress

Check the RVC guidance notes:

- give individuals at least 2 weeks notice
- give copy of College and dept. / section objectives for past and coming year
- ensure individual has copy of last year's appraisal and relevant sections of this year's so they can prepare their comments and return to you at least 1 week before appraisal
- allow 1-2 hours per person
- prepare your feedback, comments and ratings
- think about the objectives you would like them to achieve
- consider their personal development needs
- check you've done everything you said you'd do last time!

If you find you need more time for the appraisal than you had originally planned, just agree a time to reconvene - don't try to conclude if it is not appropriate to do so just because of timing

8. Ratings

8. RATINGS

As the appraising manager you are required to give an overall assessment, using a scale, which summarises the individual's overall performance against work expectations

The rating scale method is commonly used and has the benefit of being easily understood by appraiser and appraisee - but it requires factual examples from the appraiser to support the rating

The objective of 'rating' is to provide employees with clear feedback about their overall performance, but set in the context of a full and frank exchange of views about individual aspects of their job, hence **after** the appraisal discussion

A** - outstanding	proficient in all job requirements and regularly exceeds expectations in all areas
A* - exceeds expectations	proficient in all job requirements and exceeds expectations in some areas
A - fully meets expectations	proficient in all job requirements
B - meets most expectations	generally proficient with some improvements needed in some areas
C - needs improvement	performance in most areas does not meet expected standards
D - needs major improvement	performance in most areas is unacceptable

A is the standard required

It is likely that most employees will be rated A or B

Key Points

You need **evidence** to objectively justify the rating you give, making reference to two separate factors:

- performance in the job
- performance against personal objectives

taking into account what has happened during the past year

The individual's performance in their core job is the most important and underpins the rating awarded, whereas performance against personal objectives, whilst also important, should be seen as 'in addition' to their core role (i.e. what is covered by their job description). It would not be acceptable to award a rating mainly on performance against objectives

The rating takes into account:

- how well the individual has performed in relation to their role (as per their job description)
- how well they have performed in other areas e.g. achievement of personal objectives
- any particular difficulties experienced, and the reasons behind them
- the experiences of other employees in similar jobs

Unfortunately there is no magic formula for awarding the 'right' rating, but providing you understand their job and have set sensible and well constructed objectives you simply apply a 'common sense judgement' regarding the most appropriate rating

It is important to have sufficient evidence to support your rating - the more evidence you have the more confident you will be

It is not advisable to 'over rate' individuals rather than face up to concerns regarding performance or to keep them happy. Appraisal is a great opportunity to have an honest discussion, face up to any problems and move forward, together, working for the future

Key Points

Individuals should not aim to achieve personal objectives 'at the expense of the day job' - the job comes first, the objectives second

9. Smart Objectives

9. SMART OBJECTIVES

The value of objectives:

- agreement of **key elements** of job to be achieved, and by when
- clarity of each individual's part in achieving College objectives
- focusing each individual on what matters most
- enable key performance measurement

The individual can list and group their key tasks together before agreeing with their manager what needs to be achieved over the coming year – then have a go at drafting their own objectives based on this

Encourage staff to act assertively – this may take time but is worth the effort. They should be able to take a pro-active role in objective setting (it takes some of the pressure off you!)

SMART objectives:

- empower people to achieve greater things and allow you to 'help' rather than 'police'
- promote positive attitudes to work by building on competence, self-control and purpose
- should always be stretching – making individuals try 'just that little bit harder'

The effect of achieving a stretching objective should be very motivational. Stretching objectives boost morale, and in the long term make management easier by increasing competence

Key Points

- **S** – Specific
- **M** – Measurable
- **A** – Achievable
- **R** – Realistic
- **T** – Time Limited

“If a goal ain't SMART it ain't worth setting”

Objectives should be:

- reviewed regularly throughout the year to ensure they remain relevant
- updated if necessary

Specific:

- define exactly what is it you are aiming for – what must be achieved?
- make the objective concrete and use action words e.g. 'develop, build, plan, execute' etc.

Measurable:

- you must be able to assess the outcome - numeric or descriptive, quantity, quality, cost

Achievable:

- attainable, measurable and feasible and within individual's control and influence

Realistic:

- make the objective realistic with the resources available, but also stretching and challenging

Time Limited:

- identify deadline, target dates and include interim steps to monitor progress

Key Points

Ask the following questions:

- What must the individual do?
- How are they going to do this?
- Why is it important that they do it?
- When must it be completed?
- Who is going to do what, and who else needs to be involved?

A checklist

SPECIFIC

- is the objective detailed, focused and well defined?
- have you really thought through what you want achieved (and why)?
- have you used precise action verbs e.g. produce, develop, build, plan etc.?

MEASURABLE

- have you identified the measurement source(s)?
- how will you and the appraisee track progress towards attainment?

ACHIEVABLE

- is there any reason why the appraisee cannot commit to achieving the objective within the time frame?

REALISTIC

- are sufficient resources e.g. skills, money, equipment etc. available to appraisee?
- is the objective stretching but not so far that appraisee loses motivation?

TIME LIMITED

- when should the objective be commenced / accomplished?
- how and when will you track progress?

Key Points

Use this checklist when setting objectives for your staff, but also use it when considering objectives for yourself!

Involvement

Involve individuals in the setting of their own objectives wherever possible

For example, you might have an 'overall' objective you wish to be achieved, but you could allow them to determine **how** they achieve it. This 'freedom' will add to their motivation and provided you have clear measurement criteria, why not let them do it their way?

This can be hard for a number of reasons, e.g. if you have done their job in the past and therefore think you know how it should be done, or you don't entirely trust them to do it exactly how you want it done

So, be very clear on how you will measure it and set frequent review dates. If they are making good progress, tell them (and relax..). If you have cause for concern then give them some help!

Key Points

Make sure individuals understand exactly **why** the objective is important

Individual objectives should underpin College objectives and if the individual can't make the link between them they are unlikely to deliver to the required standard

If you don't understand the link – find out!

10. Personal Development Plans

10. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A Personal Development Plan (**PDP**) helps individuals:

- achieve objectives
- develop skills and behaviours
- reach potential

Everyone has the potential to develop in their current role and some people will grow into bigger or different roles

An effective PDP can include:

- identifying behaviours that need to change
- helping people develop to become more effective in the job
- helping individuals deal more effectively with difficult situations / issues
- building on potential to make an internal move
- helping to develop potential for a bigger role in the future

Development requires careful thought and imagination. Start small and be pragmatic – then you (and they) have more chance of success

Remember to meet any obligations you may agree to – you can't review how the appraisee is doing if **you** haven't achieved what you promised to do

Key Points

- An effective plan is one that works
- It will work better if both parties agree it and work towards it together
- **It should be practical and achievable, with some short term results**

Building a PDP:

1. identify sources of information
2. prioritise 2 or 3 development needs
3. identify the root causes (not just the symptoms)
4. brainstorm possible actions
5. transfer into a PDP

Sources of information include:

- what the individual knows about themselves
- what their manager knows about them
- informal or formal feedback from peers, colleagues, key contacts etc.
- skills / knowledge gaps
- perceived ability to grow and develop in current role
- preparation for future roles

Get results!

Prioritise for improvement those areas that:

- will have '**greatest impact**' results (for **your** benefit)
- will deliver **fast** results (for their benefit)

Focus on 2 or 3 areas only – you can always agree more later

Key Points

Encourage self-awareness

Maximise the achievement of results – make the most of them!

Don't make the mistake of creating a long PDP – you risk diluting your aims and confusing and demotivating the individual



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11. Difficult Situations

11. DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Appraisal time can be difficult; sometimes the appraiser approaches an individual's review with trepidation as they already expect a problem and sometimes quite the opposite - they are completely bowled over by a problem that seems to come out of the blue

As already mentioned, preparation is the key, but here are a couple of common issues:

1. People you have worked with or known well for a long time:

- the closer you are, the more important it is to 'stand back' occasionally
- be extra sensitive to the language you use
- keep it formal – this helps to focus on the appraisal itself
- if all is positive, use them as a sounding board to brainstorm new initiatives or problems

2. Poor performance:

- identify what it is you are not happy with
- determine the gap between expected and actual performance
- seek to identify the reason behind the poor performance
- do not label the person, simply the problem

Poor performance should not really be an issue at appraisal time, it should have already been dealt with, but sometimes – 'it just happens'. If you encounter a problem, deal with it and never hesitate to ask HR for advice (sooner rather than later)

Key Points

- Sufficient planning and preparation can minimise potential problems
- However, appraisers can choose and use their own behaviour to modify that of the appraisee

- Discuss **performance**, not personality