

Appraisal for Researchers – Guidance for the Appraiser

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1. What is an Appraisal and why is it important?

In accordance with the National Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers, all research staff in Higher Education should undergo a **Professional Development Review**, which is called an **appraisal** at UEA. Our interpretation of how we are implementing the principles of the Concordat is contained in the UEA Concordat Action Plan 2012-2014, 2.1.5 All Research Staff are offered an annual appraisal.

The appraisal process allows both you and your researcher to review progress over the last year, and to plan ahead for the next one.

The appraisal has two main components:

- a) a review of their research project. Are the strategic aims of the project being met on schedule? Have the aims of the project changed?
- b) a consideration of the wider personal development and career goals of the researcher, and how their employer can support them in achieving them.

For every researcher, an appraisal is also an important opportunity to highlight achievements so that they can be recognised, acknowledged and valued; and raise issues / constraints that affect their performance for discussion so that these can begin to be resolved. They can also share with you any recent changes in personal circumstances which may impact on the way work is done in the future.

2. How does it happen?

The appraisal process should happen annually, and is initiated by the Head of School/Department. You, as PI, are responsible for ensuring appraisals take place for all your research staff regardless of the contract length or whether his/her contract is for a fixed term, short term temporary period, or open ended. The Concordat on the career management of contract research staff strongly supports this view. A large proportion of the University's fixed term staff are often in the early stages of their careers, when feedback on contribution, discussion on career aspirations and future objective setting are particularly valuable. It is recommended

that an initial appraisal meeting takes place within the first two months of appointment. Subsequent appraisals will then be incorporated into the annual appraisal timetable of the School/Division/Department.

Heads of School/Department will consider requests for an alternative appraiser if researchers do not wish to be appraised by their PI. In these cases, the alternative appraiser is responsible for making the arrangements and ensuring the process is completed in accordance with these guidelines.

You should begin the appraisal round, normally at the beginning of the Spring Semester, but this should be flexible for those staff on shorter contracts. Contact your researcher(s) to let them know that an appraisal meeting will be held, and give (or direct) them to the appraisal documentation. You can find a copy of the appraisal scheme and all the relevant forms, along with further guidance notes, on the HR web pages <http://www.uea.ac.uk/hr/employee-information/appraisal>

To get the best out of the appraisal, make sure that it is not narrowly confined to the specifics of the current project. The focus should be on the researcher's training and development in the current project and beyond – so that they can gain skills and experience which will make them a more effective, more highly skilled and more employable worker.

3. Self-assessment

The starting point of the appraisal is a written 'self-assessment' by the researcher of what they have achieved since the last appraisal meeting (or since starting in the role). This is normally measured against 'aims' or 'objectives' that have been agreed in advance or at the last appraisal meeting. Typical objectives might be: to complete a key piece of work in the research project; to [get a paper published](#)¹; to plan a short-term project and supervise a project student; [to present their work](#)² at a conference; to submit a bid for research funding. There are many other possibilities.

The self-assessment will also allow the researcher to consider what they would like to achieve in the longer term, including some project-specific objectives or aspirations for professional development (e.g. to get some experience of teaching or supervision).

4. The formal meeting

This self-assessment, which will be forwarded to you beforehand, will set an agenda for a formal meeting where you will discuss their self-assessment and agree goals for the coming year, including consideration of the researcher's wider personal development and career goals and how these can be supported.

¹ <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/engagement-influence-and-impact/communication-and-dissemination/publishing-your-research/publishing-your-research>

² <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/engagement-influence-and-impact/communication-and-dissemination/communication-methods-and-media-for-researchers>

This is a two-way process. A good appraiser will not present their personal list of priorities but will discuss the researcher's needs alongside those of the project. Any objectives that are set should be ones that you have both agreed.

The output from the formal meeting will include a written summary of what you discussed and a written agreement of objectives for the coming year. Once agreed, the formal record is normally lodged with the Head of School/Department and will form the basis of the following year's appraisal.

5. Ongoing review

Keep a copy of the final written document. Look at this from time to time over the course of the next year, to remind yourself of what was agreed.

It is also worth noting that objectives can be changed. You might discover that one of the priority research goals is not achievable, or that it will not be fruitful to pursue it. Other opportunities (career development as well as project-specific) might come along that you would like to make your researcher aware of. You are free to look again at the agreed objectives and work with the researcher on changing them. They should be realistic and allow for the flexibilities of research, rather than being set in stone.

6. Do's and Don'ts of Appraisal

Do

- ensure you know who you are responsible for appraising. Check with your Head of School/Department and/or Research Director if in any doubt;
- complete the CSED Appraiser training;
- prepare for the meeting by reading through the researcher's self-appraisal form, and begin to think about your feedback by considering achievements over the last year, as well as what you think the focus should be for the next 12 months, or remaining duration of the contract;
- make sure you prepare for the meeting. If you do not receive the self-assessment, be proactive and chase it as it will help to set the agenda and will enable you to give more meaningful and useful feedback;
- arrange the meeting in good time and in a place where you can have a meaningful confidential discussion without being disturbed or overheard;
- allow the researcher to talk about their achievements, constraints, issues and any changes to their personal circumstances that may have occurred since the last appraisal (or appointment to role);
- use the appraisal as an opportunity to suggest what needs to improve or to be done differently;
- make sure that you give the researcher the opportunity to discuss their career development;
- ensure you have kept a record of the actions you need to take.

Don't

- deny the researcher the opportunities presented by the appraisal process to discuss their career development.

7. Appraisal training

The Centre for Staff and Educational Development (CSED) is responsible for coordinating appraisal training programmes and for giving guidance and advice on the scheme to appraisers and appraisees. **Training is mandatory for all appraisers**
<https://www.uea.ac.uk/csed/Programme+14-15/pp1#appraisers>

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