

Appraisal for Researchers

How to get the best out of your professional development review¹

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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 has two main components:

- a) a review of your research project. Are the strategic aims of the project being met on schedule? Have the aims of the project changed? How can you best adapt to these changing circumstances? It also involves a reflection on what you bring to the project, the skills you have developed and the skills you might need in the coming year;
- b) a consideration of your wider personal development and career goals, and how your employer can support you 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 performance for discussion so that they can begin to be resolved. You can also share with the appraiser 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 via your PI. Your PI is normally responsible for appraising all their research staff, regardless of length or nature of their contract of employment, but you can request an alternative appraiser if you want to. Your appraiser should contact you to let you know that an appraisal meeting will be held, and you will be

¹ Material drawn from <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/doing-research/research-staff/practicalities-of-being-research-staff/professional-development-review>

given (or be directed 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 your appraisal, make sure that it is not narrowly confined to the specifics of your current project. The focus should be on your training and development in the current project and beyond – so that you can gain skills and experience which will make you a more effective, more highly skilled and more employable worker.

3. Self-assessment

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

The self-assessment will also allow you to consider what you would like to achieve in the longer term. You will be asked to propose some objectives that you aim to meet before the next appraisal meeting. These might be specific to the project (e.g. to get the next paper accepted for publication) or they might relate to your continuing professional development (e.g. to get some experience of teaching or supervision). **Think strategically. Consider targets that will benefit your career, not just a year from now, but five or even ten years from now. Can you build any of these long-term targets into your plan for the next year?**

You will find some guidance on self-assessment and career development here: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/career-management-for-researchers>

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework/researchers-how-you-can-use-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>

4. The formal meeting

Once your self-assessment is complete, you should forward it to your appraiser. Between you, you will set an agenda for a formal meeting where you will discuss your self-assessment, including your wider personal development and career aspirations, and agree goals for the coming year.

This is a two-way process. A good appraiser will not present you with their personal list of priorities but will discuss your needs alongside the needs of the project. They should involve you in the discussion. 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 goals for the coming year. This should be an agreed statement that both you and your appraiser are happy to sign. 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 you agreed. This is a useful way of keeping the 'bigger picture' in sight. And if your appraiser has promised to let you go to an international conference or to receive valuable training, it is a good way of making sure that he or she delivers on the promise.

It is also worth noting that goals can be changed. You might discover that one of your priority research goals is not achievable, or that it will not be fruitful to pursue it. Other opportunities, career development or project-specific, might come along that you were unaware of at appraisal time. You are free to ask your appraiser to look again at the agreed goals and work with you 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 your appraiser is. This will normally be your PI so check with them first;
- prepare – appraisal quality is enhanced by being prepared. Your self-assessment will help to set the agenda and will enable your appraiser to give more meaningful and useful feedback;
- schedule some time to reflect on your contribution since your last appraisal or the start of your job;
- if you don't know what your departmental/lab/project objectives are, find out;
- provide your self-assessment form to your appraiser in good time and usually at least one week in advance of your appraisal meeting;
- talk about your achievements, constraints, issues and any changes to your personal circumstances that may have occurred since your 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 take the opportunity to discuss your career development, if you wish to;
- read through the feedback provided by your appraiser, and ensure you have kept a record of the actions you need to take;
- update your appraiser if anything changes which might have an impact on your agreed appraisal objectives.

Don't

- miss out on the opportunities presented by the appraisal process. **If your PI has not contacted you about an appraisal then be proactive and remind them. If your PI doesn't respond, please speak to your Head of School/Department.**

7.Flow Chart

