Individual Learners Guide

How Are You Doing?
Skills for Effective Staff Reviews
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1. Introduction

What is a Review Meeting?

Review meetings are known by different names in different universities, yours could be called an appraisal or a personal development review or other similar title.

Whatever the name, it is a one to one meeting, probably held once a year, between the team member and usually the person to whom they report. Sometimes, however, within universities, reviews within academic areas are conducted by peers.

Terms Used in this Guide

Within this learning guide we use the term ‘Review’ to describe the process, and ‘Reviewer’ refers to the person carrying out the review, whether or not this is the manager. Team Member refers to the person being reviewed.

Benefits of a Review Meeting

Essentially a review is an opportunity to have a discussion with a team member about their work, their personal development and their future career. Successful reviews benefit the team member, the team, the department and the University as a whole.

Review meetings provide an opportunity for the team member to have time with their reviewer:

- To discuss their performance and development
- To discuss and agree future targets and objectives
- To discuss personal and career development
- To consider past performance and recognise successes
- To identify where improvements/changes could be made
Content of this Learning Guide

A review is a two way process. This learning guide and the video concentrate on you, the reviewer and will offer guidance on how to conduct an effective review. The majority of reviews go well with team members leaving feeling motivated and inspired.

However, because we are all different, a few team members may demonstrate ‘challenging’ behaviours. This guide is designed to help you with these more ‘difficult’ reviews in addition to offering general guidance.

Symbols used in the Learning Guide

- Indicates relevant video scenes
- Indicates an activity
- Indicates an opportunity for reflection
2. Individual University Procedures

It is not the remit of this Learning Guide to cover the procedures for reviews at all universities. Your university will have its own policy and procedure and you should familiarise yourself with these prior to conducting your review meetings.

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Read your University’s policy regarding reviews and check:

- Who is responsible for carrying out reviews
- The frequency of reviews
- What documentation needs to be completed and what happens to it
- Any special requirements for your university
3. **Key Skills**

To conduct a successful review meeting you will benefit from mastering five key skills. These are:

- Questioning
- Listening
- Giving feedback
- Gaining agreement
- Committing to actions

We will be looking at each of these key skills, you will have an opportunity to reflect on how you might use these skills and to see them demonstrated in relevant video scenes.

Remember that these skills will be useful in many conversations that you will have with your team members - don’t just save them up for reviews!
3a Questioning

During a review the team member should do most of the talking. To make sure that this happens you will need to ask open questions to encourage the team member to talk.

Open questions often begin with how, what, where, when, tell me about. Closed questions can usually be answered with one word. In an effective review meeting you should ask more open questions than closed.

Look at these questions and decide which ones could be answered with one word, and which ones would require a more detailed answer.

- Do you think that last year went well?
- How do you feel the last year has gone?
- What do you see as your strengths?
- Is there anything that you want to do differently next year?
- Tell me about any areas where you would like to do things differently
- Can I help you with that?
- Where do you feel you need my support?
- When do you think you could do that for?
- Is there anything that you are struggling with?
- What would you do differently next time?
Re-write the following closed questions to form open questions

Do you know how to write formal reports?

You’ve had experience of project management haven’t you?

Do you need any help?

Do you get on well with the team?

Using open questions enables the team member to reflect. Instead of you saying what you think they should do differently, you might ask them ‘if you were doing X again, what would you do differently?’

This gives the team member an opportunity to identify improvements that they want to make and because they have generated their own ideas they are more likely to commit to these.
You have a team member who always works quickly and appears to be efficient. However he makes mistakes which you think could be because he does not always check his work. You have spoken to him before and things have improved slightly, but you want to raise it again because the problem hasn’t completely gone away. It is not bad enough for a disciplinary interview.

Make a note of:

- some questions which might encourage the team member to reflect on his work
- some questions to encourage him to adopt alternative behaviour

View Video 2 - Key Skills which contains examples of open questions.
3b Listening

Some of us consider ourselves to be good listeners. Some of us don’t even think about listening, it’s just something that you do, isn’t it? To listen effectively you need to concentrate. We can listen on several levels.

Level 1

This is when we aren’t concentrating on the speaker, we may be looking at them, we may even be displaying appropriate body language like nodding and smiling in appropriate places. However we may also be aware of a conversation happening at the other side of the room and may be ‘tuning in’ to that at the same time. In effect we are only partially listening to the speaker and are unlikely to pick up any ‘unsaid’ messages.

Level 2

When listening at this level we are concentrating on the speaker and ‘tuning out’ other conversations or distractions that may be going on around us. We are really listening to the words that they are saying, checking our understanding, maybe by summarising and repeating back to them for their confirmation.

Level 3

This is when we are concentrating not only on the words that are said but also looking at body language to check whether or not it supports what is being said. We will be listening to the tone of speech and may follow up with some more probing questions. Listening at this level involves identifying the feelings behind the words.

What level of listening do you usually employ?
In Summary

- Aim to listen at level 3
- Allow the team member ‘thinking time’, don’t be afraid of silence
- Don’t immediately jump in with a solution. Let the team member finish and have their say, even though it may be uncomfortable
- Watch their body language, is it supporting the words they are using? Do they really mean what they are saying?
- Probe for more information

View Video 3, Scene 3.1 - Reviewing administrative staff

In this scene Pardip comments that his communications with other departments are OK. Joseph (the manager) notes his worried expression and repeats back “OK? You don’t sound too sure.”
3c Giving Feedback

The golden rules of feedback are:

- It should be specific
- You should have witnessed the event (I saw, I heard etc)
- You should own it (I statement)
- It should be about something that can be changed
- It should be given as soon after the event as possible

During a review meeting nothing should come as a surprise - so this won’t be the first time that you will have given feedback on something that the team member has done well, or not so well - you will have given feedback at the time, or as soon after as possible.

Ensure that you have specific examples

It’s nice to hear ...... ‘you’ve worked well this year’

Better to hear ...... ‘I was particularly pleased with the way in which you organised the conference in January - we had some really good feedback on that’

You could say... ‘You don’t seem to make a lot of effort’

Better to say.... ‘We spoke about your customer care recently and agreed that you didn’t often ‘go the extra mile’’

Give feedback on what you have seen/heard, for example:

‘I have noticed that ...........’

Rather than ‘I have been told that ...........’.

Are there any occasions where you might find it difficult to give feedback? Think about what might make it difficult and how you could approach this.
View Video 3, Scene 3.2 - Reviewing manual services staff

In this scene June give Dave feedback on his performance.

Think about a member of your team whom you will be reviewing. Consider their work during the last year and identify three specific things on which you could give them specific, honest feedback. Make a note of what you might say.
3d  Gaining Agreement

There may be occasions when you and the team member have completely different opinions about an issue.

One way to resolve this is to try to get the team member to see the situation from another perspective. Ask them to recall a particular instance and remember the reaction of one of their colleagues, ask them why they think their colleague reacted in this way, how would they have felt if someone had spoken to them this way? Would it have been possible to say the same thing in a different tone, use different language? You might even ask them to rephrase what they said.

By getting the team member to see the situation from another person’s point of view you are more likely to gain agreement about their inappropriate behaviour and then you can move on to discuss how they might change their behaviour.

An example could be about the way they speak to other members of the team – maybe some team members find them a bit aggressive. The team member is not aware of this and doesn’t see it as a problem – how are you going to get agreement and then move on to taking action?

*Make some notes of the questions you might ask to encourage their self reflection*
Where the disagreement is on work performance then you will again need evidence to show to the team member. This could be physical evidence, for example complaints, or error rate. However, remember that the Review is not performance management and anything that you bring up should not be a surprise to the team member.

**View Video 3, Scene 3.4 - Reviewing academic staff**

*In this scene Jane gets Matt’s agreement and commitment to actions to make changes to his teaching style. Jane has gained Matt’s agreement by asking probing questions to encourage him to see the situation from the students’ point of view.*
3e Commitment to Actions

It is likely that your discussions on many topics will result in actions on the part of the team member. It is all too easy to agree that they will look into xxx and get back to you. In reality this probably won’t happen.

It is far better to agree exactly what you want to happen in the form of a SMART objective.

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**greed/Achievable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**imebound

This is an example of a SMART objective:

*To investigate the feasibility of XXX, produce a short report and present it to the management team meeting in December.*

This objective is:

- **Specific** - The team member knows exactly what they must do
- **Measurable** - The measure of success is producing the short report
- **Agreed/Achievable** - This will have been agreed with the team member. It is achievable in the timescale agreed (it is now October).
- **Realistic** - It is within the scope of the team member’s job role
- **Timebound** - There is a date agreed for completing the objective

**View Video 3, Scene 3.5 - Reviewing research staff**

_In this scene Sally gains Suresh’s agreement to actions and checks that he knows what he needs to do._
Write a SMART objective for yourself
4. Preparation

You will need to prepare for each of the review meetings that you conduct. Although not always the case, you are likely to know those people whom you will be reviewing so you will have a good idea of their issues, their attitudes and possibly their feelings towards reviews. This knowledge will be useful in your preparation.

Before each team member’s review you should consider:

- Their performance since the last review
  - What has gone well - with examples
  - What could have been done differently or better (with examples)
  - Any discussions you have had about their performance and any resulting changes
- Any anticipated changes to workload, particularly those which might require the team member to learn new skills/knowledge
- Anything you would like the team member to do differently
- What the team member wants to talk about. Some universities will have a preparation form to be completed by the team member prior to their review and shared with their reviewer. This is very helpful in your preparation
- If you know your team member is interested in undertaking any training and/or development you might want to investigate how appropriate this is, any implications for the team, the cost and how this would be met
- What you want to achieve from the review
- The team member’s likely response to the above and any strategies you might need to adopt
- Some open questions to start off each item
Think about one of your team members and make a note of three work related activities that have gone well over the last year and one thing that you would like them to do in a different way.

You should also make all the appropriate *domestic arrangements*, such as:

- Where you will be carrying out the review. If you have a private office then you are likely to use that. However, many people may have to book a meeting room. Whatever room you use make sure you won’t be interrupted and that it is private and you won’t be overheard.
- It might be a good idea to arrange to have tea/coffee available - this helps to create a more relaxed, informal environment.
Allow enough time for the meeting. It is better to over-estimate, just in case the meeting goes on longer than you anticipate. For example, if you expect most reviews to last for around an hour, book at least 1½ hours in your diary.

Unless you have absolutely no alternative do not carry out reviews in a formal office layout with a desk between you and the team member. Try to get a more informal layout. Have a look at the film clips for some ideas.

Where will you hold your review meetings?

Thorough preparation for each review will make you feel more confident and lead to a more effective meeting.
5. The Review Meeting

You have prepared well and know what you want to achieve at your team member’s review meeting. The time has come for the meeting.

Welcome the team member and try to make them feel at ease. With many team members this won’t be a problem but some may feel nervous, particularly if they haven’t had a review before, or if they don’t normally have a great deal of contact with you.

You should remind the team member of the purpose and benefits of reviews and stress the confidentiality of the process. Try to communicate your enthusiasm for the process.

At the beginning of the meeting you should agree an agenda with your team member. If the team member has completed a preparation form then you may have prepared the agenda in advance using the information from their form. If not, ask the team member what they would like to talk about during the review and note down the items so that you can refer to it during the meeting.

View Video 3, Scene 3.3 - Reviewing technical staff

In this scene Lucy agrees the agenda with Paul at the beginning of their Review Meeting.

Before working through the agenda items it is a good idea to give an overview of the team member’s performance since their last review. Praise the team member for work that has gone particularly well. You may wish to highlight issues which you would like to discuss in more depth and that are on the agenda.

The easiest way to structure the meeting is to work through each item on the agenda. Introduce each item, have your discussion, probe for information, agree necessary actions and gain commitment and, where appropriate, agree objectives.
When you have completed your discussions on the agenda items **summarise any agreed actions and objectives** and confirm that the team member agrees with these. Let the team member know what happens next with any documentation, will they receive a copy, and if so, when.

Don’t forget to **thank the team member** for coming to the review and thank them once again for their work over the past year.

You will need to take **notes** during the review meeting so that you can write up any documentation afterwards. Make the team member aware of the reason for your note taking. It is advisable to make notes at the end of each agenda item to summarise agreements and actions. If the team member talks about **personal issues** make a point of putting your pen down and not writing. Remember that when you are writing you are not making eye contact and it is unlikely that you will be listening actively.

It is recommended that you arrange **follow up meetings** to discuss progress towards objectives. We all know that things change and sometimes a team member won’t be able to achieve their objectives because of this. Follow up meetings need not be lengthy and their frequency will depend on the objectives agreed.
Summary of Video Scenes

Video 1 - Introduction

What Can Go Wrong

The first four scenes give examples of what can go wrong at reviews and may raise some fears that potential reviewers have. You may wish to have a look at these four scenes and consider what went wrong and how the situation could be handled differently.

1. June and Dave (Manual staff)
   Dave has worked as a part-time cleaner at the University for a few years. June is very happy with his work and is not sure what they are going to talk about at Dave’s review.

2. Lucy and Paul (Technician)
   Paul thinks that reviews are a waste of time and that he works harder than his colleagues and deserves a pay rise.

3. Jane and Matt (Lecturer)
   Matt is an experienced lecturer with high expectations from his students.

4. Sally and Suresh (Researcher)
   Suresh has worked as a Researcher for a couple of years and is coming to the end of his contract. Sally has been encouraging him to be proactive in finding another post.

When conducting a Review it is important to be honest. However, think carefully about what you are going to say and how you will say it. Scene 5 illustrates what not to do!

5. Joseph and Pardip (Administration)
   Pardip is good at his job and wants to apply for a more senior position. Joseph does not think that he is ready for this promotion.
Video 2 - Key Skills

The following two scenes identify the skills which will help to make your reviews more effective. These skills are:

- Questioning
- Listening
- Giving feedback
- Gaining agreement
- Committing to actions

These key skills are illustrated within the following film scenes.

2.1 Lucy and Linda
(Technician)

Lucy is very happy with Linda’s work, but is concerned that she may be left behind due to her reluctance to learn new skills.

2.2 Joseph and Jenny
(Administration)

Jenny is unhappy with her huge workload which is largely due to her colleague being off sick.

Video 3 - Effective Reviews

This video shows parts of review meetings where the key skills are used and are intended to illustrate more effective review meetings. These scenes can be viewed independently or in conjunction with the scenes in Video 1.

3.1 Joseph and Pardip
(Administration)

Pardip is good at his job and wants to apply for a more senior position. You do not think that he is ready for this promotion.

This scene shows Joseph giving honest feedback to Pardip and illustrates how they work together to identify what Pardip needs to do to develop his skills.
3.2 June and Dave  
(Manual Staff)  
Dave has worked as a part time cleaner at the University for a few years. June is very happy with his work and is not sure what they are going to talk about.

This scene illustrates that even if there are no pressing issues to discuss, it is important to use the opportunity to give feedback and to check out any assumptions you may have about the team member’s ambitions.

3.3 Lucy and Paul  
(Technician)  
Paul thinks that reviews are a waste of time and that he works harder than his colleagues and deserves a pay rise.

It may be true that Paul does work harder than his colleagues but the review is not about having a pay rise. The scene shows how Lucy tries to convince Paul that reviews aren’t a waste of time and how she deals with the issue regarding the distribution of work.

3.4 Jane and Matt  
(Lecturer)  
Matt is an experienced lecturer with high expectations of his students. However some students are struggling and there are rumours that they are considering making a formal complaint about Matt’s teaching style.

This scene shows how Jane tries to get Matt to see the situation from the students’ point of view and then reflect on his style.

3.5 Sally and Suresh  
(Researcher)  
Suresh has worked as a Researcher for a couple of years and is coming to the end of his contract. Sally has been encouraging him to be proactive in finding another post.

In this scene Sally shows understanding about Suresh’s reluctance to network and offers him some advice on how to be more proactive.