Appraisal and objective setting

Top tips for employers in the NHS

Appraisal systems are only as good as the people who operate them. Your organisations will only get out, what they put in.

This document sets out some key messages when appraisal and objective setting.

Overall key messages

- Be patient focused.
- Ensure individual objectives link to your organisation’s objectives
- Make time for appraisals and regular performance reviews.
- Foster a culture of performance management in your team.
- Be transparent.
- Be factual.
- Be consistent.
- Back feedback with evidence.
- Avoid surprises.
- Be measured and clear when having any of these conversations.
- Do not shy away from addressing developmental points as well as positive ones.
- Do not get blinded by systems, they should be tools which assist. Appraisers and appraisees should not feel that they are simply in a process or going through the motions.

Prepared by DAC Beachcroft on behalf of the NHS Employers organisation
Managers preparing for an appraisal

1. Refresh your memory on 1-2-1s and objectives set in the previous appraisal/through the course of the year.

2. Assess the evidence and make a note of your provisional view of the individual’s performance, with examples to support it.

3. Be clear about what you will address, in what order and the importance you attach to each issue.

4. Consider whether the feedback is fair in the sense that the person has had control over the delivery of the relevant objective. A common response to not meeting an objective is “it was not my fault” or “I did not get the support I needed”. Consider in advance whether those points may arise/should be reflected in your feedback.

5. Ask whether any of what you plan to say will come as a surprise. If so, is that because it has only just arisen or has it been missed?

In the appraisal...

- Allow enough time for the meeting and avoid distractions.
- Remember the key messages.
- Review performance against the objectives set in the previous appraisal. Before giving your feedback, allow the individual to reflect on their own performance. Ask open questions to encourage this.
- Avoid surprises, a person should generally not be hearing something for the first time in an appraisal.
- Avoid being adversarial in an appraisal whilst being firm and clear.
- Make sure the discussion is balanced: give praise where it is due, as well as addressing any points for improvement.
- Base your feedback on objective measures and examples wherever possible.
- Discuss the reasons for any shortfall in performance. Suggest and agree what support might be needed: this might include mentoring, shadowing, coaching, training, short secondments and/or more robust and regular review or reporting.
- If there is a disagreement about a piece of feedback, do not simply backtrack on it. There are various options open such as:
  - stating you appreciate the individual has a different view but your and other people’s view remains and you want to positively address the point
  - give other examples to explain the basis for the feedback
  - if the individual’s response throws up relevant fresh information that you are unaware of, say you will take the issue away and consider it further
  - set, or re-set, objectives, which should be SMART wherever possible
  - make sure that individuals understand what they must do to achieve each new or revised objective, and how success will be measured.
In between appraisals

- Appraisals are absolutely not the only time to discuss an individual's performance and set him/her objectives. It is an ongoing process.
- Use regular 1-2-1s to give feedback and set/re-set objectives. Make it clear how individual objectives are connected to the effective performance of your team, department or service.
- Be clear, consistent, factual and thorough.
- Do not shirk from giving developmental feedback. Back it with clear examples, this is especially important with feedback about behaviour and attitude.
- Where there are real issues, document them in notes of 1-2-1 meetings or emails so that there is no dispute about what is required.
- Be clear about the consequences of not achieving objectives.
- Do not assume that individuals will pick up the signals about how they are doing. If you have something to say, say it.

Remember....in reality HR professionals often end up being the custodians of appraisal systems, making sure they happen and setting the organisational tone for how they should be carried out.

Objective setting

It may be stating the obvious but make sure objectives are:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable**
- **Realistic**
- **To be achieved within a timescale**

Recognise that the nature of many roles mean they do not really change year on year so you may think “I will just use last year’s objectives”.

However, remember things like supporting a new colleague to settle into his/her role are important and should be reflected in objectives.

Ensure your organisation’s objectives are reflected in objective setting throughout.

Remember patient care should be at the heart of everything you do.

For example, are all the interpersonal skills, so important to patient experience, being reflected in a meaningful way in individuals objectives across the organisation?