

Research Staff Appraisal: Supporting information and best practice guidance

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1. Introduction to the appraisal process

Appraisal involves the on-going process of review, support, development and professional dialogue between Appraiser and Appraisee, that culminates in an annual appraisal meeting. The appraisal process aims to allow space and time to reflect on progress during the past year and plan both performance **and** career development goals and objectives for the subsequent year(s).

Progress review and future objectives and actions are articulated through the appraisal form and supporting documentation which remain confidential to the Appraisee, Appraiser and Head of School.

For a full scope and guidance relating to the University of Sussex appraisal scheme please refer to: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/appraisal/>

2. Scope – who does research staff appraisal apply to?

The appraisal scheme is relevant to all University of Sussex research staff employed on either an indefinite or fixed-term contract. Those researchers on fixed term-contracts of less than 12 months' duration may, with the agreement of their Head of School, choose not to participate in the scheme.

The University's definition of Research Staff is drawn from the [Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#) which defines research staff as:

'Individuals whose primary responsibility is to conduct research and who are employed for this purpose'.

We recognise that 'research staff' refers to a wide range of staff including those with

- different disciplinary backgrounds
- varying levels of training
- a wide variety of different experiences and responsibility types
- different types of contract (fixed or open ended, full or part time)
- diverse career expectations

Staff who do not fall under this definition should look to the HR appraisal webpages for appraisal guidance for other staff groups: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/appraisal/>

3. Appraiser allocation

Heads of School have ultimate responsibility for allocating staff within their Schools to Appraisers. It is expected that staff will be consulted on the choice of appraiser for them and, in exceptional cases should be able to request an alternative. For more guidance regarding Appraiser allocation please see the full Appraisal Scheme Guidance: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/appraisal/>

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4. Best Practice Guidance for Research Staff Appraisal

The following tables set out some tips and best practice guidance for Appraisees and Appraisers to get the most out of the appraisal process. Prior to appraising research staff, Appraisers should attend an appraisal training session offered by the Staff Development Unit .

Best practice guidance for Research Staff Appraisees		
<i>Before the Meeting</i>	<i>During the Meeting</i>	<i>After the Meeting</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to reflect on previous year, complete the Research Staff Appraisal Form and gather any relevant supporting information/evidence. • Ensure that the meeting agenda covers all the key points that you need to discuss to get the most out of your meeting. Liaise as appropriate with your appraiser regarding any amendments to the agenda. (suggested agenda in Section 6 of this document). • Consider work related and career development objectives for the following year. • Familiarisation with relevant training and development opportunities on offer at Sussex (see section 5 of this document) and through relevant external bodies - are there any specific development opportunities that would benefit your career and/or research? If you cannot locate an opportunity that reflects your particular development requirements a useful discussion to have with your appraiser might be to consider how/where support may be obtained. • Send all appraisal documentation to appraiser at least 1 week in advance of your meeting. • Consider attending 'Making the Most of your Appraisal' training offered by the Staff Development Unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight your key achievements from the previous year using your completed appraisal form and supporting documentation as a prompt for discussions. • Discuss any challenges, obstacles or barriers to progress and jointly identify appropriate actions to overcome these. • Feedback any support requirements/needs. • Discuss and seek to agree performance objectives for the following year . • Discuss career development aspirations and goals and agree Career and Personal Development actions (<i>Section E of the appraisal form</i>). • Ensure adequate time for topics of discussion according to your needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon receipt of completed appraisal form from Appraiser add any additional comments/clarifications and return to your Appraiser. • Arrange training and development as agreed or look into options to support agreed career development actions. • Reflect on performance objectives and identify your next steps and any additional support requirements or input required. • Ask for further follow up meetings with appraiser or other suitable person (e.g. mentor) as appropriate to your needs. • Retain copy of your completed appraisal form for your records. • Notify and/or discuss with your appraiser if circumstances necessitate a change/refinement of objectives through the year or if additional support is required.

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Best practice guidance for Research Staff Appraisers		
<i>Before the Meeting</i>	<i>During the Meeting</i>	<i>After the Meeting</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make contact with Appraisee and arrange mutually agreeable meeting time – as a guide allow up to 2 hours. • Book suitable room, ensuring it is somewhere private and away from interruptions. • Familiarisation with Appraisee’s contributions over the previous year, evidence may include; research outputs, contribution to School, teaching, mentoring, broader contributions, professional development (refer to appraisal form and supporting documents). • Review any previous appraisal documentation from earlier meetings. • Familiarisation with current career stage and longer term career development aspirations (refer to appraisal form and supporting documents). • Agree agenda for the meeting with the Appraisee in advance of the meeting (suggested agenda in Section 6 of this document). • Familiarisation with relevant Training and Development opportunities on offer (See Section 5 of this document for useful links) • Familiarisation with relevant HR policy and wider support for research staff (See section 5 of this document for useful links) • Consider goals and objectives in context of research group and department/school • Undertake the appraisal training offered by the Staff Development Unit (N.B. in some instances School/Department-wide appraisal training is offered) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create supportive and open environment to have a productive, confidential two-way discussion. • Agreement of agenda (suggested agenda in Section 6 of this document). • Use the completed appraisal form as a prompt for discussions. • Recognise the highlights and achievements of the Appraisee over the past year. • Discuss any challenges, obstacles or barriers to progress and jointly identify appropriate actions to overcome these. • Discuss and seek to agree performance objectives for the following year . • Discuss career development aspirations and goals and agree Career and Personal Development actions (<i>Section E of the appraisal form</i>) • Agree the frequency and schedule for follow up discussions regarding career development and performance objectives – recommended frequency for these discussions is 2-3 times per year outside the main annual appraisal meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify the Head of School that the appraisal meeting has taken place • Seek to agree content of the appraisal form, complete the summary comments section of the form (Section G) and send completed form to Appraisee. • Retain copy of appraisal form in confidential place. • Liaise with Head of School regarding training and development requirements where appropriate (e.g. where significant time/budgetary commitments would be required). • Maintain an on-going professional dialogue with the Appraisee. Two or three follow up discussions through the year are recommended to specifically discuss progress against career development and performance objectives. Review and refine objectives as appropriate through the year if circumstances change.

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5. Links to Useful information and Support for Research Staff

5.1 Relevant Policy/Guidance Documents

- a) Academic Appraisal Guidance: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/appraisal/appraisalguidelinesforacademicstaffappraiseesandappraisers>
- b) Employment Terms and Conditions: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/humanresources/personnel/termsandconditions/Staff>
- c) Fixed-Term Contracts: Management Guidance: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/humanresources/personnel/policies>
- d) Promotions/reward procedures: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/humanresources/personnel/promotionrewardprocedures>
- e) Research and Knowledge Exchange Policies: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/spg/research-policy>
- f) Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat-to-support-the-career-development-of-researchers>

5.2 Support for research staff development

- a) Research Staff Webpages (including Research Staff Office) – Hub of information for research staff and those supporting researchers: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/researchstaff>
- b) Research Staff Development Series – Tailored development workshops and events for research staff: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/researchstaff/traininganddevelopment>
- c) 1:1 Coaching sessions for Research Staff – Confidential and impartial coaching by qualified development coach on any aspect of professional/personal development: Contact N.A.James@sussex.ac.uk (01273 877979) for more information or to book an appointment.
- d) Staff Development Unit – training and development courses open to all University staff members: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staffdevelopment/>
- e) Researcher Development Programme – Development workshops and online courses targeted at doctoral researchers and open to all early career researchers: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/doctorschool/internal/researcherdev/>
- f) Academic Development and Quality Enhancement – Support and training for Teaching and Learning including ‘Starting to Teach’ and PGCertHE courses: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/>
- g) Careers and Employability Centre – Offers 1:1 careers advice and online careers resources for research staff: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/careers/aboutus/researchstaff>
- h) Library Research Support – 1:1 resource awareness sessions, open access information, online resources and workshops for researchers - <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/research>
- i) Research Professional – Online database for funding opportunities, tailored searches and email alerts: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/funding/researchprofessional>
- j) Vitae – National organisation supporting the career development of researchers (Some content will require you to register with your UoS email account): <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/>
- k) Vitae Researcher Development Framework – Framework for skills and competencies for a successful research career: <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework>

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6. Suggested Agenda for Research Staff Appraisal

Below is a suggested agenda for a research staff appraisal meeting, which broadly follows the structure of the research staff appraisal form. The information on the appraisal form should be used as a prompt to inform and guide the discussion.

Adequate time should be allowed to enable discussion of all aspects of the appraisal form.

Along with progress review and performance objectives, the career development discussion should form an important element of the appraisal meeting. Clear career and personal development objectives and actions should be identified during the meeting and noted in Section E of the appraisal form.

The appraisal meeting forms part of the on-going professional dialogue between Appraiser and Appraisee. Two or three follow up discussions through the year are recommended to specifically discuss progress against career development and performance objectives.

Suggested Agenda

- 1. Welcome and Agreement of the Agenda**
- 2. Highlights and Achievements for previous year** (*Section A of appraisal form*)
- 3. Challenges from previous year** (*Section A of appraisal form*)
- 4. Career and Personal development over previous year** (*Section B of appraisal form*)
- 5. Plans and objectives for the forthcoming year** (*Section C of appraisal form*)
- 6. Career and Personal development aspirations and Goals** (*Section D of appraisal form*)
- 7. Career Development plan** (*complete section E of appraisal form during the meeting*)
- 8. Agreement of actions and next steps**
- 9. Any other points for discussion**
- 10. Date of next meeting and/or follow up discussion**