Organisational Development in Higher Education

Emerging Practice in Staff Appraisal and Review

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1.0 Introduction
In 2003 HESDA secured funding from the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) and HEFCE’s Good Management Practice Fund (GMP) to undertake a number of Investors in People (iiP) related projects. Five separate project teams have looked at good practice in key areas that are published together under the generic title of Organisational Development in Higher Education.

The five topics are:
- Effective Leadership and Management in Action
- Staff Appraisal and Review
- Learning Needs Analysis
- Induction
- Evaluation

This part of the project looks at ways in which staff appraisal or staff review can contribute to effective organisational development in UK Higher Education (HE) institutions. It provides a brief background to how appraisal was introduced into the HE system, investigates how institutions are tackling the updating, revision and re-launching of schemes in the light of their revised Human Resource (HR) strategies and draws from this some general advice to institutions on good practice.

The term ‘appraisal’ has been used throughout the HE community to describe the formal performance-related discussions that take place between staff and their managers or other nominated colleagues, usually on an annual or biennial basis. The focus for these discussions is the appraisee and his/her job and the discussion usually results in agreed, written objectives, targets and action plans. Appraisal provides an opportunity for both appraisers and appraisees to take a reflective look at past achievements and to agree plans for the future. Appraisal schemes were introduced widely to universities and colleges some 14 years ago in the belief that they would contribute to increased institutional efficiency and effectiveness. It was felt that regular appraisal discussions would help to optimise work performance, enhance training, development and career opportunities and by involving staff in the aims of the enterprise, lead to greater motivation and commitment.

However, when formal appraisal schemes were introduced, primarily for academic and academic-related staff in the late 1980’s they were often regarded with some suspicion. There was a feeling, particularly among academic staff, that appraisal was imposed by government. It tended to be treated as an add-on activity rather than integrated with other management processes and few saw the direct relevance of this ‘not invented here’ system to either themselves or their institutions. In particular, the collegial culture, with its emphasis on peer review, seemed to some to provide a perfectly adequate framework for reflection on performance – and in this context it was perhaps not surprising that appraisal was perceived as an irrelevance. Although some universities and colleges made efforts to make appraisal work as an integral part of the management process, there was little evidence that the time investment was delivering perceived benefits either to individuals or their institutions.
Now, after several years of operating with varied levels of participation and success, many Human Resource departments feel the need to look at ways of making appraisal more effective and in conjunction with staff and the trades unions are modernising, re-designing and re-launching schemes that integrate individual appraisal discussions with institutional and departmental planning processes, make objective setting more meaningful and forge closer links between personal and organisational development.

Further impetus was given to these developments when in autumn 2000 the Government announced additional resources to help higher education institutions recruit, retain and develop staff, and modernise management processes in the sector (HEFCE, 2000). In March 2001, HEFCE (The Higher Education Funding Council for England) allocated additional resources for teaching and research but made it a condition that institutions submit human resource strategies showing how they would use the additional resources to address certain priorities (HEFCE, 2001).

The time now seems right to try to capture, record and disseminate some of the new ideas and practices that are being introduced into appraisal schemes to make them more effective.

2.0 Methodology & Terminology

2.1 Methodology
In June 2003 a small sub-project group was established by HESDA within the overall Organisational Development in Higher Education Project to look at what changes were being made to appraisal schemes across the UK with a view to distilling and disseminating good practice from appraisal, review and other performance management schemes in use within HE.

The group approached its task by:

- Undertaking a review of previous literature relating to appraisal in UK Higher Education;
- Conducting a survey that invited institutions to provide information on how they were currently revising their schemes and to report on any interesting or innovative changes that they were making;
- Visiting or conducting telephone interviews with staff in selected UK HE institutions to gather more detailed evidence and case studies on innovative practice;
- Drawing on its members’ own experience and knowledge of appraisal in higher education and elsewhere.

Details of the members of the planning group can be found in appendix 7.1.

2.2 Terminology
In this report we refer throughout to the term ‘appraisal’ because it is both in common use and generally understood. However, HR professionals are increasingly using the term ‘performance management’ when they talk of appraisal because it places the process in the broader context of organisational development. Appraisal discussions have been perceived by some as an add-on to the management process, with a focus more on individual than on institutional effectiveness. Performance management is a wider and more systematic approach to the management of people, using performance, goals, measurement, feedback and recognition as a means of motivating staff to realise their maximum potential, closely linked to the institution’s strategic mission and objectives.
Schemes that are now being re-designed take this broader remit into account and where, previously, the appraisal discussion was often seen as an end in itself, performance management places it in the context of good management practice, not only in terms of sustaining the dialogue between the individual and the manager, but between the individual and the institution.

### 3.0 Background to the Introduction of Appraisal

The following is a brief summary of how appraisal systems were first introduced into Higher Education Institutions. The origins of appraisal began before the disappearance of the binary line and there were separate, but parallel developments in the pre-1992 and post-1992 sectors.

#### 3.1 Pre-1992 institutions

The introduction of appraisal in the pre-1992 university sector was initiated by recommendations from the Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities chaired by Sir Alex Jarratt (The Jarratt Report) published in March 1985 (CVCP, 1985). The report made recommendations on the efficiency and effectiveness of various university management structures and systems including policy objectives, decision-making, accountabilities and the use of resources. It also recommended that universities introduce a regular review procedure, suggesting that such a procedure, handled with sensitivity, would be of benefit to staff and to the university as a whole and would help recognise the contribution made by individuals, assist them to develop their full potential and enable the university in making the most effective use of its staff.

In January 1987, during protracted salary negotiations, the Secretary of State allocated additional sums for salary purposes ‘provided that there would be a firm commitment to improve procedures for probation, performance appraisal and promotion’.

In February of that year, as a result of pay negotiations, The Twenty–Third Report of Committee A was published in which both parties agreed to the introduction of an appraisal system ‘directed towards developing staff potential, assisting in the improvement of performance and enhancing career and promotion opportunities, thereby improving the performance of the institution as a whole.’ (CVCP, 1987.)

This was to apply to all academic and academic-related staff at all levels of seniority.

However, both unions and staff expressed considerable anxiety that in the light of overall reductions in funding for universities, appraisal would be not so much about development but about judgment. Further delays in salary negotiations led to further difficulties in introducing arrangements for appraisal that were not resolved until the publication of the Twenty-Fourth Report of Committee A in 1989.

Appraisal in the pre-1992 universities therefore had a shaky start. Pilot schemes were introduced, often disrupted by AUT industrial action, or continued on a voluntary basis. There was a large degree of resentment, a feeling that appraisal was an inappropriate import from the ‘commercial world’ and that without the impetus given to its introduction by the Twenty-Third Report, it might never have happened. The requirement to operate appraisal schemes was there, but the will to do so was weak. This encouraged those who disliked the idea to ‘forget about it and hope that it would go away’ (Hughes, 1998).
In 1990 Ian Bull undertook a survey of six pre-1992 universities and reported that although staff had found the introduction of appraisal had been less threatening than they had feared, there were concerns about the availability of resources for the delivery of agreed action plans, the mechanisms for assigning appraisers to appraisees, the criteria to be used for the setting of performance objectives and the lack of linkage between an individual’s appraisal objectives and faculty/department plans (Bull, 1990).

3.2 Post-1992 institutions
The Education Reform Act 1988 led to major changes in the former polytechnics and colleges. Incorporation led to the setting up of over 80 individual employing institutions, no longer under local authority control. This required a shift from a system of centralised bargaining between unions and local authority employers and a need to set up new contractual arrangements.

The existing approach to terms and conditions in HE had been to adapt the FE terms and conditions but these now had to be re-negotiated and a new academic contract drawn up.

The basis for the new contract was set out in the Report of the ACAS Working Party on teaching staff contracts in July 1990 chaired by I.T. Smith, and commitments to appraisal arrangements were clearly established.

- ‘In relation to the performance of your duties you will be required to participate in an appraisal scheme approved by the Board of Governors.’

The report goes on to list three underpinning reasons and benefits for adopting appraisal as part of these new arrangements.

- ‘Staff Appraisal should enhance the quality of educational provision within the context of an institutions mission statement and strategic plan and the development plans of faculties.’
- ‘The appraisal of individual lecturers is intended to support the professional development of academic staff in order to sustain and enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes for students.’
- ‘The process of staff appraisal will help to reconcile the professional aspirations and development needs of individuals with the requirements of the institution’

A recommended appraisal scheme was set out as an appendix to the Report. (ACAS, 1990.)

3.3 Comments on the operation of these early schemes
The following is an attempt to summarise and encapsulate the main features of schemes that were introduced in the late 1980’s. The comments describe what was considered to be good practice at the time and note some of the issues and problems that arose.

- Schemes were originally recommended to operate on an annual cycle but many institutions changed this to a two-year (biennial) cycle on implementation, particularly for academic staff.
- It was made clear in both sets of guidance that institutions should adopt a development approach that ‘does not have an explicit link with remuneration’ and that appraisal schemes should be differentiated from disciplinary and other procedures for dealing with questions of competence.
• Schemes were open (all reports seen and signed by all parties) and conducted in confidence. Written comments were linked to work behaviours rather than personal characteristics. There was no direct ‘summative’ assessment and schemes adopted by HE institutions avoided the use of scoring or benchmarking.

• Perhaps because schemes were intended to be primarily developmental, little guidance was given on the joint setting of targets, objectives and work plans and appraisal discussions were neither linked explicitly to institutional, departmental and section plans nor timed to synchronise with the overall planning process.

• Appraisers were expected to be experienced and responsible members of staff with a sufficient knowledge of the work of the appraisee and the department to facilitate the process of reflection and target setting in an appraisal interview.

• Schemes were intended to cover only academic and academic-related staff but some universities went further and devised schemes for other staff groups. We have seen examples from institutions where separate schemes and paperwork existed for up to six different staff groups:
  - Academic staff
  - Academic-related staff
  - Research staff
  - Technical staff
  - Secretarial and Clerical staff
  - Manual staff

• In a review of appraisal for HESDA (then UCoSDA) in 1998, Paul Hughes gives an indication of the variation between institutions in terms of the coverage of their schemes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff group</th>
<th>Percentage of institutions operating schemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic staff and academic-related staff</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretarial/clerical and technical staff</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual staff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme for academic staff only</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same scheme for all staff groups</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hughes, 1998)

• Schemes were sometimes bureaucratic, paperwork-heavy and difficult to administer. A written summary of the discussion and the outcomes was required which was usually placed on the individual’s confidential personal file.

• All discussions were conducted in confidence. Other than the appraiser and appraisee, only one other person would see appraisal reports, usually the Head of Department.
Many universities found that the schemes they developed worked better when designed flexibly to fit with the culture of the organisation or department. Appraisal schemes imported directly from industry, other public sector bodies or the uniformed services were soon changed because they did not always work well.

Appraisal schemes seemed to work better and be more acceptable when there was support for it from the most senior managers and where all levels of staff were appraised rather than just junior staff. Some schemes even named the person who would act as appraiser to the Head of Institution (usually the Chair of Council or Governing Body).

Successful appraisal was thought to require that both appraisers and appraisees received appropriate training and briefing for their respective roles. A requirement for such skills training was often a pre-requisite to the introduction of appraisal schemes, took considerable resources in terms of staff time and energy, and in some institutions alienated academic staff even further.

The emphasis in many schemes was on personal development. This sometimes led to interesting but anodyne discussions that although considered to be helpful to the individual were somewhat divorced from the aims of the enterprise.

Some schemes faltered because there were not always adequate resources/mechanisms in place to meet agreed outcomes from the appraisal process. Successful appraisal needed an effective system of staff development to underpin the scheme and this period saw the expansion of staff development units and personnel over this period.

For a fuller account of how appraisal schemes were introduced and operated in the 1990’s see Bull, 1990 and Hughes, 1998.

3.4 The need for change

In the mid-1990s both the Dearing and Bett reports recommended that institutions introduce performance management systems as part of the professionalisation of HE staff and a much clearer linking of staff development with institutional needs. (NCIHE, 1997 and Bett, 1999.)

By 1998 it was reported by Hughes that appraisal had been sidelined by the need to pursue what were seen as more pressing demands, participation rates were low (at least one in four people covered by approved appraisal schemes were not participating in the process), schemes had not been adapted to meet the needs of a rapidly changing environment and appraisal was seen by many as nothing more than a bureaucratic process which ‘elicits compliance but not enthusiasm’. (Hughes, 1998.)

However, the world has moved on and universities and colleges are now considering ways of redesigning, re-selling and re-launching schemes that are better able to contribute to the demands of the 21st century, particularly in terms of linking individual performance and development to the needs and strategic direction of their institutions. These changes are described in the following section.
4.0 The Current Position
By the start of the new millennium, there was a strong sense within the HE sector that appraisal schemes needed to be looked at again to ensure they were both appropriate and effective. In this section we look at existing appraisal schemes and the way they are being changed to meet current needs. We have tried to identify the factors influencing these changes and the common themes arising from them.

4.1 Rewarding and Developing Staff
As described in paragraph 1.0, English institutions received a strong impetus to review appraisal in autumn 2000 when the funding council announced additional resources to be targeted at HR initiatives. Under the scheme institutions were required to introduce HR strategies, which must include commitments to improve performance management. According to the review of the Rewarding and Developing Staff initiative carried out by the Office of Public Management in 2002-3, ‘the vast majority of institutions recognise that they need to improve their managers’ ability, confidence and willingness to undertake reviews of performance and, at the same time, enhance the acceptability and perceived value of the process for staff.’ (OPM, 2003.) By late 2003 most institutions had begun to plan for the second stage of the initiative and we wanted to find out the extent and nature of their plans for reviewing appraisal in this context.

4.2 Draft Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Pay Structures
In summer 2003 the Joint National Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) published a draft framework agreement on pay structures, which included among the agreed principles a statement of the importance of ‘regular development reviews for all staff – with a view to facilitating both the improvement of performance to meet institutional objectives and career development for individuals.’ (JNCHES, 2003.) It also introduced the concept that individuals’ progression within grades would become dependent ‘in part on an assessment of their contribution’ as well as on length of service. Although the two statements are not explicitly connected, they suggest a move in the direction of linking pay to formally assessed performance. The Universities’ and Colleges’ Employers’ Association (UCEA) carried out an informal survey in June 2003, which showed that only five institutions had full performance management systems for all their staff including a link between performance ratings and pay, but that a small majority had some arrangements of the kind for some staff groups.

4.3 Survey of HE Institutions
We knew anecdotally that many institutions were going through the process of reviewing and revising their appraisal schemes. In order to try to establish the extent of this activity and, more importantly, the rationale behind it, a short survey was carried out. This was sent to all institutions on the HESDA mailing list asking for brief details of their current scheme, the reasons for any recent or proposed changes, any achievements and any challenges faced.

We received 32 responses from a wide range of universities and HE colleges during the summer of 2003. The majority of respondents were undertaking a review or had very recently implemented new or revised schemes, which certainly confirmed the view that there was significant activity in this area. However, the timing meant that any successes or achievements had had limited time to emerge and that any challenges or obstacles were still being worked through.

Nevertheless, the survey did help highlight a number of themes that were worth exploring further; these are outlined below and covered in some of the case study material.
4.3.1 Rationale for change

By far the most often quoted reason for reviewing appraisal was an acknowledged weakness in many existing scheme(s); respondents referred to ‘patchy implementation’, ‘neglect in some areas’ and ‘low participation rates’. For others the existing scheme was ‘not meeting its objectives’, was ‘onerous and ineffective’, ‘difficult to administer’ or ‘out-of-date’.

It is highly likely that the staff responding to the survey, being directly involved in human resources and staff development, were already aware of some of the problems associated with the implementation of existing schemes. Indeed, they may have been responsible for prompting and undertaking any review activity.

In some cases institutions undertook staff surveys (or, more informally, focus groups) to highlight the need for changes to existing schemes. Elsewhere the increasing practice of running regular staff satisfaction surveys provided a mechanism for identifying issues relating to appraisal.

In a few institutions, new senior management provided the impetus to review existing practice.

In addition to internal factors, many respondents referred to specific external drivers for change. These include:

- **HEFCE HR Strategy**
  The very clear statement from HEFCE that university HR strategies should address annual performance review of all staff, and the offer of some additional funds to support this, seems to have actually prompted the action encouraged by the recommendations made by the Dearing and Bett Reports. Many of the respondents referred to the HEFCE HR Strategy and/or developments in their internal HR strategies as a key factor influencing decisions about the objectives of appraisal. The focus of such schemes is shifting to reflect what one respondent called the ‘changing HE context’ and appraisal is more explicitly described as a tool to manage and improve performance (see 5.4).

- **Investors in People**
  Over a third of institutions represented in the survey already have whole or partial iiP recognition and for some the preparation for assessment or the feedback following assessment was identified as a key prompt for changes in the way appraisal was carried out. Even where iiP was not directly identified, the principles of the Standard are implicit in many responses regarding the reasons for change, e.g. ‘to link development to the University strategic plan and targets’ and ‘strengthen alignment with strategic objectives’.

- **Legislation**
  There was a suggestion that a robust appraisal scheme would help meet some of the requirements of new legislation such as the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, by ensuring that all staff have equality of opportunity to discuss development needs and that this discussion and its outcomes are recorded and monitored.

4.3.2 Changes made

A change referred to frequently was that of reducing both the number of schemes and the supporting paperwork. Most institutions that responded have moved to a single scheme, often replacing five or six different schemes for different staff groups. This has largely been managed by introducing a flexible framework with principles that can be
applied to the wider range of roles undertaken by university staff. It is an attempt to reduce the apparent, and often the real, bureaucracy of such schemes by putting emphasis on the process not on the paperwork. In addition, some institutions are considering extending their schemes to include not only all staff groups but also a range of part-time staff such as tutors (London Institute).

We also found examples of team appraisal, where a specific group of staff opted to be appraised together, in addition to individual appraisals, following the merging of a number of departments and the introduction of matrix (cross-departmental) working (Nottingham Trent).

A number of respondents talked about ‘re-invigorating’ the scheme and others referred to the scheme ‘evolving’. The message seems to be that the basic principles of appraisal are still widely accepted as relevant and valuable, combining elements of review, forward planning and identifying development needs. However, as indicated previously, the focus is changing along with a ‘tightening up’ of the process in order to place more emphasis on appraisal as a performance management tool.

In a limited number of universities this focus on performance is taken even further by creating a direct link between the outcomes of appraisal and pay. At this time there are very few details of what arrangements are already operational or are planned but three respondents referred to performance related pay being in place for senior management and there are strong indications that others will follow suit for some or all staff. We explore this further in paragraph 5.3.4)

Whilst more emphasis might be placed on appraisal there is also an acknowledgement that it cannot stand alone. Other approaches are being used, as one respondent put it, ‘to support and add value to the appraisal process’. These include the use of 360-degree appraisal for some staff (usually senior managers), of mentoring and of a competency framework.

4.3.3 Challenges
There may have been significant changes in the HE sector since appraisal was first introduced in the late 80s but there is a distinct sense of déjà vu when reading about some of the challenges identified in the survey.

Respondents referred to the difficulties of enlisting the commitment of managers to implement the scheme positively, or at all; one called it ‘persuading managers to manage’ and another referred to managers' ‘resistance to or fear of performance management’.

This resistance tends to be greater amongst academic staff with one institution stating that this group, with AUT support, had opted out of a performance management approach and another admitting that terminology such as ‘performance’ and ‘targets’ had been deliberately avoided. The challenges are exacerbated when the issues affecting academic staff and the managerial role are combined, e.g. the nature of rotating headship of academic departments, an unwillingness to adopt managerial structures and a culture of peer review do not fit easily with a scheme that is manager-led and focuses on performance management.

Other issues are taxing the minds of staff expected to implement new or revised appraisal schemes and there seem to be no easy answers. Respondents were seeking to tackle some of these issues through changes to existing schemes or by putting in
place other activities to complement appraisal but it was too early at the time of our survey to identify any significant successes or breakthroughs.

The challenges most frequently indicated were:
• Dealing with resistance from unions, although some respondents did comment that close consultation with unions had brought about benefits in terms of support and co-operation;
• Convincing staff of the potential benefits and, linked with this, addressing the conflict between what staff want from a scheme and what the university needs;
• Putting effective briefing/training in place, i.e. meeting the needs of staff at different levels, having the time and resources to deliver training, ensuring those that need to attend do
• Implementing a scheme that combines flexibility (for maximum involvement) with fairness and consistency

5.0 Current Appraisal Practice – Issues, Evidence and Change
In this section we look more closely at the findings of our survey and attempt to highlight some of the current practices and revisions to practice among appraisal schemes within the HE sector.

5.1 Institutional values and cultures

5.1.1 Groups of staff
A perception of how the different staff groups are viewed by the institution may be reflected in the type of scheme adopted for the different staff groups. A number of our survey respondents have separate schemes for different staff categories. This may reflect an incremental approach – for example, as support staff became involved in appraisals, instead of expanding the existing scheme, the institution developed a new scheme. In some institutions it may reflect a conscious attempt to match the needs and culture of the different staff groups by adopting different processes. We found that in most institutions there is an increasing sense that it is possible to adopt a single scheme for all staff groups, allowing for variations in e.g. paperwork or frequency of meetings to suit local needs. An exception to this may be appraisal for manual staff (see paragraph 5.6.2).

5.1.2 Fit with culture
Institutions have different views about what type of appraisal process suits them according to their culture and the values they hold. What works in one place may not be easily transported to another. The titles of schemes vary from ‘staff development scheme’ (Birkbeck) to ‘performance and development review’ (Newcastle). This variety of titles may also reflect the focus of schemes from staff development to performance management.

5.1.3 Flexible schemes
Many institutions set common guidelines and let departments or sections operate schemes that best fit in with their ethos and working practices. In a couple of cases, where there is no central university policy, a school or department may ask to have a scheme designed specifically for their staff. In other instances we found that although there was an institutional policy and guidelines, flexibility was allowed so that groups of staff could tailor the process to meet their needs.

5.1.4 Scheme objectives
Where institutions have more than one scheme for the different staff groupings, objectives for each scheme may vary slightly. Imperial College London runs a number of Personal Review and Development Plan (PRDP) schemes to fit with different staff group needs. The wording of the aims of the PRDP processes for Clerical, Manual and Technical staff is the same as that for Administrative, Library, Computing and other related staff. However the wording for PRDP for academic staff varies albeit only slightly. At Birmingham, all three staff development review (SDR) schemes have exactly the same wording for objectives although the paperwork used in each varies.

5.2 Training and support for managers
Some of our survey respondents feel strongly that a crucial success factor for appraisal is good quality and extensive training for managers that emphasises not so much the requirement to complete appraisal forms as the benefits of a high quality appraisal discussion, linked to other aspects of performance management and staff development. Training can also be used to influence the development of appraisal schemes in an informal way, avoiding or at least postponing the need to re-launch. This has happened at Bradford and Oxford, and both institutions have used the discussions that take place in appraisal training to feed into more formal redesigns of their schemes.

5.2.1 The quality of the interaction
We identified a tension between the ‘mechanistic’ aspects of appraisal – the forms, the rules about confidentiality, the systems to make sure appraisal discussions take place, the monitoring to ensure equality of opportunity – and the content and quality of the appraisal discussion itself. Our respondents make frequent references to the need to avoid getting bogged down in paperwork and comment that the discussion is what counts. The problem here is that in any big organisation the mechanisms are probably essential to getting the scheme off the ground. The trick, perhaps, is to keep the focus of the training on the skills required for a good appraisal discussion (see 5.2.2 below), and to keep the mechanics as simple as possible.

In one institution (King Alfred’s), appraisal for senior staff is backed with a combination of personal reflection and group development, using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to provide a framework for analysis of individual and group behaviour. Anonymised feedback to the senior management team focuses on their style in one-to-one and larger meetings, and it is hoped that this kind of feedback will help to improve appraisal interactions.

5.2.2 Skills development (for implementation)
Many institutions report increased training in support of implementing new or revised schemes. Increasingly, however, the web is used as a back-up to face-to-face training, enabling the latter to be streamlined, taking up fewer resources and avoiding the risk of simply repeating the original training provided in support of the older schemes. With forms and guidance on the HR website, individual departments or groups can tailor the schemes to their own purposes in institutions where this is allowed. Crucially, appraisal training is now tending to be seen as part of the standard induction package for new members of staff. Training is also increasingly backed up with other support mechanisms for appraisers and appraisees, such as mentoring (for example, at Bournemouth) and coaching for managers (for example, at Kingston).

In some institutions’ training programmes there is a new emphasis on the core skills of appraisal such as giving and receiving feedback and setting objectives. We think the ‘core skills’ approach may be particularly helpful in gaining the support of academics, for
whom the skills can be seen as a useful addition to their toolkit for teaching. Presented in this way, appraisal skills are more likely to be perceived as generally valuable.

Some of our respondents emphasised the need to help appraisers and appraisees – especially perhaps academics – to see the value of an incremental, detailed and specific approach to objective setting and feedback. In a culture oriented towards summative assessment, there may be a tendency to take an over-simplistic approach – characterised by one respondent as ‘You’re OK/You’re not OK.’

5.3 Contributions to organisational development

Appraisal meetings provide formal opportunities for staff to discuss their work, career and personal development needs and any other topics that either the appraiser or the appraisee wishes to raise within the work context. It has also been generally thought that these free-ranging discussions should avoid certain topics that are best left for formal treatment elsewhere. Pay, promotion, poor performance and grievance are commonly the subject of separate personnel policies and procedures and, although they may be referred to in the discussion, are not and should not be resolved here.

Under existing arrangements an appraisee does not expect to leave the appraisal with the promise of more pay, the expectation of imminent promotion. Neither is the meeting used either by the appraiser to issue a disciplinary warning, or by the appraisee to raise a formal grievance.

Most schemes state explicitly that appraisal is not about assessment and appraisal schemes in HE have not tended to use, as is common in the commercial and some other public sector bodies, box-marking to rate performance (usually on a five point scale A-E or 1-5) or make any explicit links to the formal procedures mentioned above.

Consequently, although seen as beneficial at a personal level appraisal has tended to become a separate and rather isolated activity that concentrates on the development and contribution of the individual and has either ignored or minimised the needs and expectations of the institution.

However, many now feel that, provided the current benefit of confidential, open and honest conversation is not compromised, schemes might be enhanced by forging stronger, but appropriate links between personal performance and organisational development. Some of our survey respondents explicitly stated their intention of integrating appraisal with other human resource processes.

These integrative moves are summarised briefly below:

5.3.1 Strengthening links between individual work objectives and institutional planning

‘We intend to revise our scheme and make it more aligned to strategic objectives’

‘We make clear links between the organisation’s aims and the objectives of departments, teams and staff’

‘We have pulled arrangements for appraisal into the planning cycle’

‘For academic staff, we have made a direct link between strategy and appraisal’
In 1990 Ian Bull’s survey of six institutions concluded that in agreeing personal work objectives there was little reference or linkage to institutional strategic and operational plans. (Bull, 1990.) In order for an appraisal system to work as a mechanism for helping to develop the organisation these links must be made. Several institutions are now addressing this issue; in summary we have found that some are:

- Linking appraisal discussions more closely to the planning process
- Ensuring that there is a sequence in which an institutional plan is produced first from which is derived local faculty, departmental and section plans all of which are timetabled to be available to both appraisers and appraisees before the appraisal round begins
- Encouraging staff to set task-oriented targets that set their own contribution in the context of organisational, faculty or departmental requirements
- Asking staff to state their long-term career goals, thereby enabling not only career support for individuals but also succession planning for the institution

It has been reported to us that work objectives and targets have tended to be couched in vague and non-specific terms and that under new arrangements there are moves to encourage:

- The use of SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based) that are agreed and define more precisely what is required.
- Objective setting as a joint activity between appraiser and appraisee. An open, frank, two-way discussion in which views are exchanged and feedback given.
- Objectives that are agreed and not imposed, and where the relative contributions of individuals and other team members are clearly identified.
- Using different types of objectives appropriate to the job and the individual that may be:
  - personal - specifying personal development actions that will benefit both the individual and the institution;
  - maintenance - aiming to sustain an already high level of contribution or performance;
  - innovative - mapping out new projects or directions.

All these refer back to the stated mission, objectives and operational targets of the institution.

The number of formal objectives set in this way varies, but most feel that between 3-6 objectives are appropriate and ensure that the process does not become overly bureaucratic or oppressive.

5.3.2 Professional development planning and institutional need

‘We have refocused our scheme around professional development planning’

‘A key feature is the production of individual development plans’

‘Development portfolios are encouraged’

‘Our managers are supporting professional development through coaching and
Moves to align individual objectives with the needs of the organisation are being supported by enhanced personal development planning.

Appraisal has always been used as a way of discussing personal training and development needs. However, we see appraisal being used not only as a way to determine what the staff member will contribute in terms of performance actions, but how they will do it and the development of appropriate competencies and skills. In one external organisation employees are asked to select three development needs for improvement over the coming year set in the context of their work targets. (IDS, 2003.)

The changes to the appraisal process that we have had reported to us are:

- The use of the appraisal discussion to develop both an agreed work plan and a personal development plan
- To support personal development by assigning a mentor to the appraisee
- Providing guidelines and training for mentors in support of their roles
- Staff encouraged to take more ownership of their own development
- Coaching for managers and more regular reviews of work progress
- Encouraging the use of Continuous Professional Development records and plans
- Outcomes from appraisal coordinated into departmental staff development plans
- Offering specific training on objective setting
- The use of competency frameworks to help identify both performance targets and personal development needs.

We have evidence that institutions are working to define the skills and competencies associated with particular jobs and to use these as part of the appraisal process. Competencies are linked sets of behaviours and characteristics that enable a person to perform and have long been used for planning management and skills development programmes. These may be based on generic management/leadership models or broad requirements for the job and cover such things as the ability to act strategically, manage and develop staff, undertake finance and resource management - or skills such as personal effectiveness, problem solving and team working.

Although the use of such frameworks in appraisal is not as yet widespread, several institutions reported that they are using them in a variety of ways. These range from broad job activity headings e.g. appraisal discussions based on teaching, scholarship and research, administration and income-generating activities, to more complex breakdowns of job skills and requirements. We have also seen (but not in higher education) examples of value-based appraisal frameworks where staff consider their performance under headings such as communication, self-motivation, team spirit, service delivery and inter-personal relationships.

In March 2003 the Office of Public Management commented that in HEI’s, ‘common tools and techniques were either not being used fully, or being inappropriately applied. For instance, one institution had introduced a competency framework, but then made the use of it voluntary. Competency frameworks work most effectively when they are central
to development and performance management activity. Partial use undermines their effectiveness.’ (OPM, 2003.)

In June 1999 the Independent Review Committee under the chairmanship of Sir Michael Bett recommended that job evaluation be introduced to underpin reform in pay structures within Higher Education. One of these job evaluation frameworks HERA (Higher Education Role Analysis) system claims that it its 14 job elements can be used to support a range of human resource management objectives including performance appraisal and staff development. We understand that HR professionals are considering using HERA for this purpose and that courses are currently being offered in this area.

5.3.3 Amending the objectives of appraisal schemes

It has become clear in the course of our investigations that for appraisal to be effective it has to have the commitment and ownership of both managers and staff. We have noticed a move away from the rather harsh and judgmental language used in some of the earlier schemes to a much more user-friendly and involving style. Although the term ‘performance management’ is now widely used to set the wider organisational context, terms such as ‘appraisal’ and ‘performance appraisal’ are being replaced by terms such as ‘staff review’ or ‘job and development review’ or even ‘staff development and appraisal’. This signals that the process is intended to be friendly, positive and relevant rather than threatening, judgmental and/or pointless.

A change of language can also be detected in the ways that the objectives for the schemes are being couched. A few examples of this change in language may serve to illustrate this point:

The rather stark objective, ‘To improve staff performance’ replaced by ‘To provide the opportunity for staff to discuss their performance and progress in their jobs against previously agreed objectives with a view to renewing their commitment and increasing their effectiveness’. Or – ‘To discuss and agree work objectives for the coming year within the context of the overall plans and objectives.’

‘To identify and develop potential for promotion’ and ‘To help individual members of staff to develop their careers within the institution’, replaced by ‘To identify and develop capabilities to enhance future prospects’ and ‘To identify training and development needs’

In addition, some schemes refer to positive benefits in their objectives such as: ‘To improve job satisfaction and morale’ or, ‘To maintain good communication.’

An institution may not necessarily use the same objectives for all its schemes. Where there is more than one scheme, objectives for the schemes may vary. However, sometimes although the paperwork involved might vary the objectives for the schemes are the same - showing some consistency.

5.3.4 Linking performance and reward

‘We are developing a more performance based scheme’

‘We are introducing performance-related pay for senior managers’

‘There is a need to establish a link between reward strategy and appraisal’
In 2002 a HEFCE document on good practice in setting HR strategies (HEFCE, 2002) reported that a small number of HEI’s are using or are proposing to use some form of performance related pay to recognise excellent performance, but that this is currently only available for senior staff and not across the board. As described in paragraph 4.2, UCEA carried out an informal survey in 2003 with similar results. Although these surveys indicate that the position is not changing substantially or very fast, it has been reported to us that:

- Some staff would welcome some fair and appropriate mechanism for linking performance to reward
- Many staff now working in higher education have experience of pay-related appraisal schemes from their work in industry or other public sector bodies and would not resist the introduction of such schemes into HE provided they were managed effectively.
- Having a formal system of committing to objectives and targets, against performance criteria is pointless if there are no tangible outcomes.
- There needs to be some effective mechanism to cope with new reward structures brought about by the introduction of a common pay spine.
- Appraisal may be the best mechanism for ensuring the currency of job roles and of providing for people’s progress towards ‘contribution points’ on new salary scales.

However, there are equally strong arguments offered on the other side:

- Staff feel that schemes would not be objective enough and that some managers would not be willing or be sufficiently proficient to make such schemes work
- Linking performance to pay through appraisal would lead to artificial discussions where appraisees would not admit to any shortcomings or development needs.
- Such schemes do not fit well with the culture and are not appropriate for not-for profit organisations: words such as ‘performance’ or ‘targets’ are excluded from their rubrics.
- Introducing ratings, particularly to a ‘high-performing institution’ would have a negative impact on employee motivation
- It would be divisive to reward single individuals for whole team performance
- Performance is difficult to measure in the absence of agreed objective performance indicators.

There seems little disagreement that as the appraiser is often the person who would support, or not, any recommendation for pay or promotion it is impossible to entirely disengage issues of pay and promotion from discussions that take place within the appraisal meeting. Many people feel that in the absence of an entirely reliable and fair assessment system, and with managers often unwilling to make definitive judgements in this context, appraisal reviews should inform rather than determine staff pay awards.

We have been unable to gather much information from organisations that are going down the performance-related pay route other than to list some general principles.
Some institutions do allow copies of appraisal reports to be used as additional evidence for pay, promotion or re-grading panels provided the appraisee agrees. Performance–related pay is still generally limited to senior managers. The introduction of some form of box-marking where staff are assessed as against three (or more) levels of performance: ‘effective’ - meets expectations, ‘exceptional’ - exceeds expectations or ‘not effective’ - does not meet expectations.

Performance is measured against a limited number of key objectives related to the key result areas of an individual’s job. The need for some form of moderation or mechanism to ensure that ‘rating’ is evenly applied against robust measurement criteria. Specific training given to appraisers on the use of ratings. The use of a balanced scorecard approach to help structure individual targets (OPM, 2003).

In some institutions the links between pay and performance are less direct. Appraisal may not be directly linked to pay but schemes provide information for the annual review. Scheduling the pay round before the appraisal discussions, as happens at Strathclyde. Staff use the pay review to focus on making the best possible case for a pay rise in terms of institutional and departmental objectives, and once this is over they can concentrate on being open about identifying development needs in the knowledge that this will not damage their case. This avoids the danger of being defensive about development needs because they think it will affect the pay review.

5.3.5 Performance Management – a case study
A case study contributed by Jill Meighnan, Training and Development Manager at Napier University indicates how performance management does not stand in isolation, but needs to be part of a broad approach, part of which can include appraisal. (See Appendix 7.3.)

5.4 Appraisal schemes in practice
As we have indicated, the norm is still very much based around an annual meeting between the appraiser and appraisee but with greater emphasis on this being part of an ongoing process to manage performance. This emphasis had led to a situation whereby the appraiser is more likely to be the direct line manager rather than a peer or colleague with little direct knowledge of their work. This has particular implications for academic staff (as referred to in 4.4 above).

This raises the wider issue of how appraisers and appraisees are assigned. We found that approaches varied considerably; for example:

- Reducing the maximum number of appraisees assigned to an appraiser (Hertfordshire)
- The appraisee having flexibility of choice of appraiser, sometimes from a pool of trained people
- A move towards the requirement that the appraiser be the line manager (Bradford)

The appraisal meeting seems still to have the usual elements of review, forward planning and identification of development needs but there seems to be a shift towards
greater input from the appraiser/manager in setting and agreeing objectives and reviewing the staff member against those targets. Almost all schemes now seem to include explicit references to meeting university and departmental objectives, greater alignment with university and departmental priorities. The cultural shift implies a stronger focus on the needs of the individual as a member of the organisation rather than of the individual per se. This can have a tendency to impact on the confidentiality of the process. Whilst the detail of the discussion between appraiser and appraisee remains confidential, the outcomes of the process might need to be more open, e.g. a wider knowledge of individual objectives and targets and how they relate to departmental priorities and staff development plans.

However, one feature of schemes that has been retained is the notion of ‘self-appraisal’, which is seen to be important in making the process more acceptable to staff. Appraisees are given the opportunity to prepare for their meetings using some form of document encouraging them to think about their own contribution, career path and development needs thereby giving them increased ownership of the process and enabling them to reflect on their professional practice.

In order to underline the ongoing nature of performance management and moving away from seeing appraisal as a once a year activity, the recommendation or requirement for an interim review meeting, often less formal, is included in many schemes.

As discussed in 4.3.2 above, there is an acknowledgement that it is the process that is important and that the principles of appraisal can be readily applied to any member of staff. This has led, in many cases, to a significant reduction in the paperwork, specifically the forms to be completed. Brunel has introduced a no-form scheme whereby a staff member simply writes up what is agreed at the meeting, signs this statement and gets their appraiser to endorse it. The documentation is presented primarily as a prompt for the discussion and this approach seeks to counteract the views that appraisal is just ‘a form-filling/paper exercise’. Much documentation is now available for downloading from staff intranets, which helps to reduce the bureaucracy that was present in some earlier schemes.

5.4.1 Monitoring and follow-up
One of the main criticisms of appraisal in the past has been the lack of monitoring and follow-up both at individual and at institutional level. This is being addressed, in part, by ensuring that development needs are compiled into departmental and/or institutional staff development plans submitted to the staff development unit. (Salford, Bolton and Sheffield.) There are also examples of copies of completed paperwork being submitted to personnel for planning, monitoring and evaluation purposes. In addition there are examples of moderating procedures which help to ensure consistency and equity, e.g. Deans reviewing a sample of the forms (Queens, Belfast).

Most institutions are retaining the three-person confidentiality, appraiser, appraisee and head of department/section, which enables both room for appeal and retains a mechanism for monitoring of both process and practice. Schemes continue to build in long-stop appeal mechanisms, which may become important as schemes take on a wider performance-management role.

5.5 Selling and promoting schemes

5.5.1 Senior staff commitment
Success, particularly for the introduction of new schemes, seems to be connected with support from the head of the institution and the senior management team. At the London Institute, the Rector turns up at appraisal training courses now and again to give his support. Personal communications from the Vice Chancellor at Newcastle have helped to gain staff commitment. A number of institutions are using 360-degree feedback with senior managers (see paragraph 5.6.1 for more on this), taking the view that this visible involvement of senior staff will improve their schemes’ credibility. Investors in People standards require institutions to demonstrate this kind of senior-level support and encouragement. Bradford in working towards gaining IiP found that there was greater participation in its appraisal scheme due to the support from the Vice-Chancellor. A number of our respondents say that they made a point of involving senior managers in publicising the process, as a means of demonstrating its close links with normal management processes and avoiding the danger of staff seeing appraisal as an HR initiative with no connection to the institution’s objectives and progress. Chichester in introducing a new scheme found that getting managers to commit time to the process was a challenge.

5.5.2 Trade union support and involvement
The survey reveals an emphasis on staff and trade union involvement in the design of new schemes and the revival of ailing ones, both formally via joint negotiating frameworks and informally via focus groups. Some of our respondents spoke of the benefits of gaining staff ‘buy-in’ by involving them at early stages and, where possible, by gaining the official endorsement of the unions. At the same time, some institutions (e.g. Leeds Metropolitan) are introducing performance management schemes following a relatively limited amount of consultation, taking the view that such new schemes will inevitably meet some resistance at first. ‘Don’t over-consult’ seems to be the message from these institutions.

5.6 Development for specific groups

5.6.1 Senior managers and 360-degree feedback
360-degree feedback is being used increasingly as a way of providing a multi-sided view to senior managers on their skills and performance. Information is collected from various stakeholders in that person’s work, line-manager, colleagues, other team members, staff and customers (students, internal/external service users, etc.) It can often be used for development purposes, particularly on management development programmes, to help analyse needs and to design personal development plans but some HE institutions have used it as part of appraisal.

A more limited form of this is 180-degree feedback, or upward appraisal where the discussion makes use of evidence from staff and customers e.g. the use of student evaluation in discussions about teaching.

This is a developing area and we are only able to highlight some general trends and practices from information gained from our survey:

- The use of 360-degree feedback is becoming more widespread in higher education.
- It is generally used for senior managers for development (based on a competency framework), but sometimes for appraisal, succession planning and pay purposes.
- Some organisations that have used 360-degree feedback for senior managers are now cascading it down to lower levels.
• The process of coordinating feedback from a variety of sources and the production of anonymised reports is being managed centrally and can be resource intensive.
• The individual may select the respondents (usually up to 7) and also complete a response themselves (self-appraisal)
• The analysis of data and feedback to the jobholder has to be handled sensitively and skilfully. For development purposes this may involve impartial (but often expensive) external consultants.
• Some institutions are moving to disc-based or web-based tools that enable reports to be generated more efficiently.
• In some institutions the hope is that as people get used to 360-degree feedback, they will begin to manage it themselves rather than relying on consultants or computer-based tools.
• Where 360-degree feedback is being used for appraisal purposes it is seen as an adjunct to rather than a replacement for existing appraisal mechanisms.

We suspect that there may be a risk that where 360-degree feedback is used for pay determination, pressure may be placed on stakeholders to make positive statements.

5.6.2 Manual staff
Manual staff have until relatively recently been the least likely of all the staff groups to have access to appraisal discussions with their managers. Many universities have had schemes that do not apply to manual staff; some have included manual staff in principle but have found participation rates to be low. Since the late 1990s, however, several institutions have begun to consider how to make appraisal more relevant to staff whose working conditions may not be conducive to reflecting on performance, completing forms and finding a place for a confidential discussion with their manager. Some of these institutions have carried out pilot projects and/or consultation with manual staff via focus groups; a few have introduced a ‘job chat’ scheme, which provides a loose framework to encourage all manual staff to have regular discussions to establish: ‘how well are you doing in your job? How satisfied are you with your job? Do you think you have the skills needed to do a good job?’ (University of Reading, 2003.) Leicester’s ‘job chat’ scheme is closely linked with initiatives to develop core skills. Reading’s scheme has a short form (University of Reading, 2003) and a leaflet specifically addressing the kinds of concerns manual staff may have. Imperial College London has a scheme for manual staff with no form at all.

5.6.3 Research staff
In January 2003 the report of a HEFCE Good Management Practice project was published (University of Sheffield, 2003); its focus was the personal and career development of research staff and the crucial role of appraisal features strongly in its research and its recommendations. Research managers are encouraged to ‘ensure that training and development of researchers is planned and discussed regularly at staff review/appraisal and other appropriate meetings (p.46) and Heads of Department are encouraged to ‘ensure that research staff receive regular and meaningful staff review/appraisal meetings by ensuring that the quality of research management is one of the performance criteria used in the staff review of research managers’ (p.47).

The findings of the report included a number of barriers, real and perceived, that might prevent research staff participating in institutional appraisal schemes. These included the following (with responses in brackets): lack of commitment from managers/Heads of Department (this group of staff make a valuable contribution toward the university’s performance and therefore should not be excluded from a process to support their own
and the institutions development); the timing is not appropriate for researchers on contracts (appraisal should be flexible and ongoing to coincide with key stages of the research project); lack of clear roles and responsibility (research managers should be made aware of their staff management responsibilities and research staff should acknowledge their own role in their development). As for any group of staff, the whole process must be seen to be relevant, supportive and taken seriously; some flexibility might be required in the paperwork and the timing but there is no evidence that points to the need for a separate scheme for research staff.

6.0 A Checklist of Good Practice

Much has been written about good practice in appraisal. Here are some of the messages that, based on our experiences and those of our respondents, we feel are worth repeating.

- Ensure that the design of the scheme reflects institutional/departmental culture and values;
- Agree a scheme that is positive and encourages staff rather than threatens and judges;
- Be clear about the aims and objectives of the scheme and how they fit into the institution's aims and business plan;
- Be specific about the name of the scheme and widely publicize it;
- State how the process fits in with other human resource/personnel policies;
- Link target setting/work planning to both personal and organisational development;
- Ensure equality of opportunity. Give all levels and categories of staff the opportunity to participate in the process;
- Communicate effectively about how the scheme will operate;
- Get agreement from line managers and trade unions;
- Provide support and impetus from senior managers;
- Be clear about who is doing the reviewing - have effective reporting structures in place;
- Make sure all staff are trained to operate the scheme effectively - pay attention to interpersonal skills;
- Provide guidance notes;
- Make paperwork simple and cut down on administrative time;
- Be clear about the confidentiality aspects of the information shared in the meeting;
- Encourage two way feedback;
• Ensure that what's agreed actually happens and resources for training and development are made available;

• Ensure time is allowed for meaningful appraisal discussions to take place;

• Have an agreed appeals procedure to follow when there is a disagreement of views;

• Promote the benefits of the scheme and what actually gets done - most schemes fail because of lack of interest, poor skill in carrying out the discussion, and no action or feedback on outcomes of the meeting;

• Review and evaluate the progress of the scheme.
### 7.0 Appendices

#### 7.1 Contributors

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>Jan Beesley has worked in the HE sector for around 17 years starting life as a Faculty Administrator at Leicester Polytechnic (now De Montfort University). At the University of Sheffield she spent a number of years in the International Office undertaking some student recruitment activity but focusing on her role as European Liaison Officer promoting the University’s involvement in EU funding programmes. This led to a three-year secondment to the Leonardo da Vinci National Co-ordination Unit and thus an involvement in vocational training activity. On her return to the University she joined the Staff Development Unit in the Department of Human Resources to work on a number of policy areas such as appraisal/staff review and departmental staff development plans as well as having responsibility for work related to Investors in People. Firth Court, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN  Tel: 0114 222 2471  Email: <a href="mailto:j.beesley@sheffield.ac.uk">j.beesley@sheffield.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Rebecca has worked in higher education since 1992, initially in the equal opportunities field and from 1996 in staff development. She runs leadership and management development programmes for senior academics at Oxford, and has also designed appraisal schemes for departments within the University, advised on two re-launches of appraisal for academics and run training courses to equip appraisers and appraisees for their roles. She maintains a professional interest in equality of opportunity, especially the</td>
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area of fair selection of staff and students. Her early career was in local government, beginning at the Greater London Council in 1985 as a management trainee and moving on to equality roles at the Inner London Education Authority and two district authorities in Lancashire and Hertfordshire.

Rebecca has recently completed an MBA at the Open University.

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Susan is an enthusiastic and committed learning and development facilitator. For over 20 years she has worked in management and personal development for a number of Public Sector organisations – Civil Service, Health Service, a charity and Local Government. She is currently Staff Development Adviser at the University of Birmingham, with responsibility for the development of Support and academic related staff.

She has organised and facilitated many training and development events on a wide range of management and personal development topics for all levels of staff. Susan is a licensed trainer for the Springboard Women’s Development programme and has recently achieved a Certificate in Life Coaching. Susan has supported many managers and staff in managing and coming to terms with change in a variety of organisations. In particular, she has been involved with the introduction of appraisal/performance management schemes, including organising and facilitating training sessions developing key skills for appraisers and appraisees.

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7.2 Acknowledgements

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Diane Hill, Personnel Consultant.
Julia Houghton of Julian Houghton Associates
Kate Lobley, Open University
Jill Meighan, Training and Development Manager, Napier University
Kirsten Mussell and Kim England, University of Bristol
Sue Petrie, University of Coventry (now at the University of Derby)
Jocelyn Prudence and Peter Thorpe, UCEA
Peter Sayers, University of Bradford
Lorna Sinclair, Staff Development Adviser, University of Edinburgh
Fiona Triller, Leeds Metropolitan University
Keith Willis, The Nottingham Trent University

Our grateful thanks also to all those who responded to our email survey.
7.3 Case Study: Approach to performance management at Napier University

Jill Meighan, Training and Development Manager, Napier University

Background
Napier University was successfully assessed for Investors in People in 2001. We continue to use the criteria in the IiP framework to ensure a systematic approach to planning, communication, training & development, induction, management effectiveness, performance review and evaluation.

For example, a strategic plan and annual plan are generated each year, with individual schools and services also preparing their own plans linked to these two. Colleagues have an opportunity to contribute to the planning process.

Most staff should have an annual Staff Development Career Review (SDCR), which looks at work objectives and learning and development needs. These should link to the plans, but don’t always, and not all staff agree with the SDCR process. Not all managers are skilled in their role as developers of people, and it is not always clear how learning needs link to what the university needs.

So although we have an approach to performance management, it can be inconsistent and sometimes ineffective. We evaluated our SDCR and found that it was not meeting its objectives. However, the majority of people involved in the evaluation want to get useful feedback on their performance, and to be able to develop their skills and knowledge.

Our approach to improvement
Our understanding of performance management is that it is an approach designed to create a shared vision of the purpose and aims of the university. I like the definition of performance management as ‘a process of establishing a shared understanding of what is to be achieved and of managing people in a way that increases the probability of it being achieved.’

Our aim is to achieve a majority of staff who understand where the university is going and their contribution to its success, who are skilled in what they need to do now, and that there are plans in place for future development.

So, the factors we include in reviewing and improving our performance management are:

1. Developing our mission and objectives
2. Developing a range of ways of communicating these to colleagues
3. Developing ways of ensuring two-way communication of objectives and goals
4. Clarifying individual responsibility and accountability
5. Considering how to define and measure individual or team performance
6. Developing staff to improve performance
7. Considering reward strategies
8. Developing methods to aid future career progression.

Work in progress
1. **Developing our mission and objectives**  
The University is currently undertaking a strategic review, with an expectation that staff will have the opportunity to contribute to this work and influence the outcome.

2. **Communicating our objectives to colleagues and**
3. **Developing ways of ensuring communication of goals and objectives.**

We conducted a communication audit, which has identified (among other things) that colleagues are not always clear or agree with where the university wants to go and what its focus should be. An action plan to improve involvement and communication has been produced and is being implemented. We will be evaluating closely how the results of the strategic review are communicated and whether people feel that they have been given the opportunity to contribute.

4. **Clarifying individual responsibility and accountability**
   We have developed, in consultation with colleagues, management competences for those with a management role at all levels in the university. We will use these to carry out individual needs analysis with our managers. We may in the future develop other competence frameworks for other roles.

5. **Considering how to define and measure individual/ team performance**
   We have a working group developing a scheme that will serve the university. We have discussed what gets in the way of good performance, what we want from a scheme and how we can communicate this to colleagues. We expect to have made sufficient progress to report to colleagues by spring 2004.

6. **Developing staff to improve performance**
   In general staff feel that there is a great deal of opportunity for development at Napier, However, it is not always targeted at the needs of the business, and managers don’t always have the skills to support staff in identifying their learning needs, selecting an appropriate learning intervention, helping to embed new learning in the workplace, and feeding back on performance. Our approach has been to design a half-day session called ‘Developing staff to enhance performance’ which we are rolling out to most managers. We are also planning to give managers the opportunity to develop their coaching skills, as one of the ‘tools’ to help enhance performance. One of our MSC students is evaluating this programme fully to gauge the benefits and whether new behaviours are being embedded in the workplace.

7. **Considering reward strategies**
   None of the above stands in isolation and all of our approach is linked to our HR strategy. Pay and reward is an area that will be explored possibly next year.

8. **Developing methods to aid future career progression**
   We hope that by helping to enhance managers’ skills as people developers this will enable them to consider and advise on career progression more effectively.

**Other**
We have started work on a management development policy, which will further clarify our expectations of those with a management role.

**Conclusion**
We have approached performance management using a method which ‘begun with the end in mind’, and worked back from that. Our aim is for our people to know what
is expected of them and to have the opportunity to continue to learn and develop and get useful feedback so that they can perform effectively. By working on improving a number of linked factors we hope to achieve this.
7.4 References

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