



The Royal Veterinary College Appraisal Toolkit

THE APPRAISAL TOOLKIT:

This toolkit will help all Line Managers understand how the appraisal process works and in particular:

- how effective appraisals benefit both individuals and the College
- how to plan, prepare and conduct effective appraisal interviews
- how to use the rating process fairly
- how to encourage better staff performance by:
 - agreeing SMART objectives
 - giving and receiving constructive feedback
 - agreeing effective Personal Development Plans

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1. WHAT IS APPRAISAL?

Appraisal is:

- a 2-way process
- a chance to discuss what you have achieved
- a chance to discuss what you need to do better
- a chance to discuss what you need to do next

Appraisal is the optimum time to stimulate renewed commitment from individuals by reminding them that their role, no matter how small, makes a valuable contribution to the College

It is also their big chance to say what is on their mind, whether or not you want to hear it!

Key Points

Rule no. 1 – it's their time, not yours – your aim is to identify how they can develop their skills for their own benefit, and for that of the College

Rule no. 2 – be honest (but sensitive)

People need two key things from their manager:

- a clear understanding of what is expected from them
- help and support to meet these expectations

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2. LOOK TO THE FUTURE, LEARN FROM THE PAST

It's very tempting to 'go over old ground', particularly if you feel strongly about something. But it really is a waste of time to spend longer on matters that have already happened unless the appraisal is actually

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3. VALUES, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Values:

Key Points



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Roles and responsibilities

Key Points





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Asking the right questions

Start with open questions to get them talking: typically questions that start with 'what', 'when', 'where', 'who', 'why' and 'how' - also 'describe', 'tell me about' etc.

Then ask probing questions to get to the facts: hone in on something they've just said and ask for more information. 'Drill down' with repeat probes until you have enough detail

Make reflective statements: to help people to 'open up' if they are not saying much (e.g. the appraiser makes a non-judgemental repeat such as 'you said...', 'you intended that...' etc.

Closed questions lead to a single, specific fact: could be 'yes' or 'no' - you won't get much information but they can be useful to ascertain facts or bring a particular line of questioning to a close

Be careful with the following types of questions:

- hypothetical – can be useful at times, but you won't get facts or evidence
- leading questions tend to get us the answer we want, or they think we want
- multiple questions confuse both the appraisee and the appraiser – good questions are short and direct

Some people need a lot of encouragement to open up. Make an attempt to draw them out on what they like / dislike about their role currently and what they would like to do differently

Key Points

Keep clarifying and summarising to show that you really do understand

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Active listening:

- ensures the information is heard correctly
- encourages the speaker to feel valued and talk more
- identifies areas for further probing
- listen to what is being said (the facts) and also hear how it is being said (their feelings)
- what is their body language telling you?
- listen with your ears and with your eyes

Don't be thinking of your next question or planning your next task after the appraisal is over – LISTEN! - Intently

Don't let your mind wander because you are bored – keep your concentration and don't let any impatience you may feel show on your face!

Watch out for these common listening pitfalls:

- **Scoring points** - relating everything to your own experience
- **Mind reading** - predicting what they'll say next
- **Cherry picking** - choosing to hear some information, but not the rest
- **Counselling** - can't resist giving advice
- **Labelling** - putting the other person into a 'category'
- **Duelling** - challenging their views with your own judgement (and you think you're right...)
- **Rehearsing** - practising your next lines in your head so you're ready for a quick reply

Key Points

What makes you feel you are being listened to?

Make sure your body language:

- matches what you say
- encourages the appraisee to participate

Do any of these apply to you?

Body language

Whether we want to or not, we communicate with our whole body

A typical mismatch – a person says “I’m not nervous!” but they are swallowing hard because they have a dry mouth, their face is pale and they appear agitated. Do you believe them?

If what you “hear” doesn’t correspond with what you “see” you probably need to probe (gently) to get to the heart of the matter. Don’t make the common mistake (particularly if you know them well) of assuming you know what they mean.

“Assume makes an ass of you and me” (ass – u – me). Get it?!!

Key Points

It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it!

- **Words** – the words we speak form only 7% of our communication
- **Tone of voice** – this is more important and accounts for 38%
- **Body language** – a staggering 55% of our communication

Giving and receiving feedback

At various times in the appraisal process you will need to give your view of their performance – good and bad

The way you handle this will have a direct bearing on their participation in the discussion, and their motivation afterwards

In using these guidelines you will be providing a model for your people to use when they give feedback to others. (including you)

If you wish to be critical, take care to criticise the fault, not the person. Keep it factual and impersonal and it will be easier for them to listen to. Avoid emotive words and make sure you have lots of examples to back you up

- Discuss specific behaviour – you liked it or it needs to be improved
- Give factual examples
- 'Own' the feedback you are giving
- Focus on the positive
- Praise boosts morale but constructive feedback improves performance
- Only give constructive feedback about things that can be changed
- Be prepared to offer suggestions – if asked
- Allow the appraisee the opportunity to respond

Key Points

Try to turn negatives into positives, eg.

don't say:

"you have a lousy manner with the students"

but try:

"your work skills are very good, so how can we bring your relationships with students up to the same level?"

- Don't apologise for giving feedback – after all, it's **only your opinion!**

Encourage feedback to yourself

Be prepared for, indeed encourage, feedback from your people to yourself. You may feel very uncomfortable at the thought but try not to be defensive!

If it feels like criticism then make a note of it and agree to consider it. Perhaps this has come about because of the mutual trust you have built during the appraisal process so 'hold your ground and keep your cool'.

They may have a grievance which goes way beyond you, and perhaps they feel under threat or lacking in confidence. Can you help?

If they need to let off steam, let them. Then steer them back to the appraisal proper, and gently remind them that you're here to talk about them and their role.

Key Points

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The individual's performance in their core job is the most important and underpins the rating awarded, whereas performance against personal objectives, whilst also important, should be seen as 'in addition' to their core role (i.e. what is covered by their job description). It would not be acceptable to award a rating mainly on performance against objectives.

The rating takes into account:

- how well the individual has performed in relation to their role (as per their job description)
- how well they have performed in other areas e.g. achievement of personal objectives
- any particular difficulties experienced, and the reasons behind them
- the experiences of other employees in similar jobs

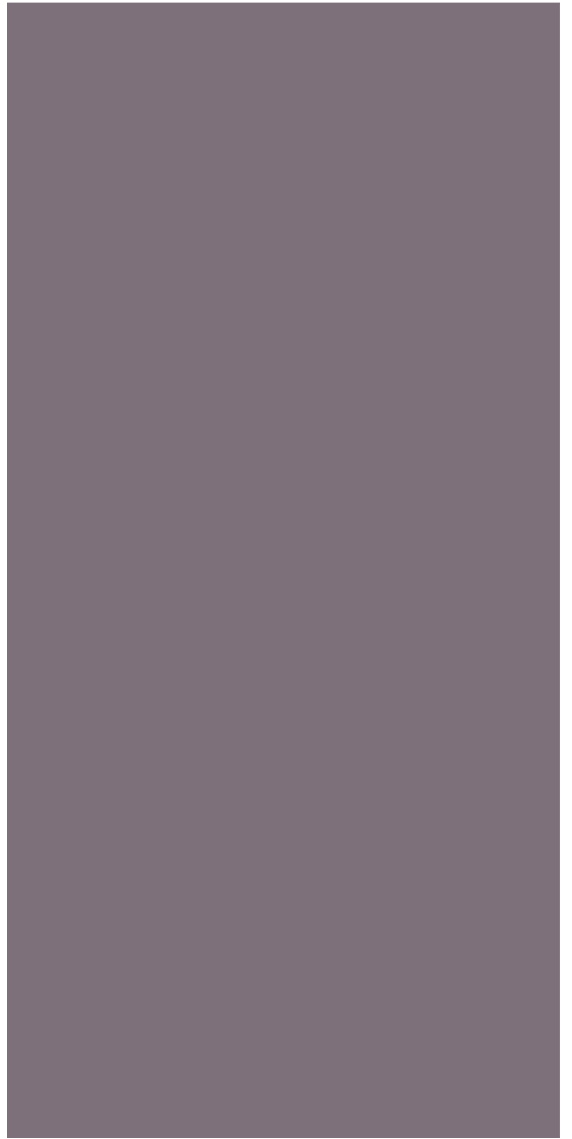
Unfortunately there is no magic formula for awarding the 'right' rating, but providing you understand their job and have set sensible and well constructed objectives you simply apply a 'common sense judgement' regarding the most appropriate rating.

It is important to have sufficient evidence to support your rating - the more evidence you have the more confident you will be.

It is not advisable to 'over rate' individuals rather than face up to concerns regarding performance or to keep them happy. Appraisal is a

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A checklist

SPECIFIC

- is the objective detailed, focused and well defined?
- have you really thought through what you want achieved (and why)?

Key Points

Involvement

Involve individuals in the setting of their own objectives wherever possible

For example, you might have an 'overall' objective you wish to be achieved, but you could allow them to determine how they achieve it. This 'freedom' will add to their motivation and provided you have clear measurement criteria, why not let them do it their way?

This can be hard for a number of reasons, e.g. if you have done their job in the past and therefore think you know how it should be done, or you don't entirely trust them to do it exactly how you want it done

So, be very clear on how you will measure it and set frequent review dates. If they are making good progress, tell them (and relax...). If you have cause for concern then give them some help!

Key Points

Make sure individuals understand exactly *why* the objective is important

Individual objectives should underpin College objectives and if the individual can't make the link between them they are unlikely to deliver to the required standard

If you don't understand the link – find out!

10. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A Personal Development Plan (PDP) helps individuals:

- achieve objectives
- develop skills and behaviours
- reach potential

Everyone has the potential to develop in their current role and some people will grow into bigger or different roles

An effective PDP can include:

- identifying behaviours that need to change
- helping people develop to become more effective in the job
- helping individuals deal more effectively with difficult situations / issues
- building on potential to make an internal move
- helping to develop potential for a bigger role in the future

Development requires careful thought and imagination... Start small and be pragmatic – then you (and they) have more chance of success

Remember to meet any obligations you may agree to – you can't review how the appraisal is doing if you haven't achieved what you promised to do

11. DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Appraisal time can be difficult: sometimes the appraiser approaches an individual's review with trepidation as they already expect a problem and sometimes quite the opposite - they are completely bowled over by a problem that seems to come out of the blue.

As already mentioned, preparation is the key, but here are a couple of common issues:

1. People you have worked with or known well for a long time:

- the closer you are, the more important it is to 'stand back' occasionally
- be extra sensitive to the language you use
- keep it formal – this helps to focus on the appraisal itself
- if all is positive, use them as a sounding board to brainstorm new initiatives or problems

2. Poor performance:

- identify what it is you are not happy with
- determine the gap between expected and actual performance
- seek to identify the reason behind the poor performance
- do not label the person, simply the problem

Poor performance should not really be an issue at appraisal time, it should have already been dealt with, but sometimes – 'it just happens'. If you encounter a problem, deal with it and never hesitate to ask HR for advice (sooner rather than later)

Key Points

- Sufficient planning and preparation can minimise potential problems
- However, appraisers can choose and use their own behaviour to modify that of the appraisee
- Discuss performance, not personality