

PDR during the COVID-19 pandemic: a briefing paper for line managers

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Background

The NDPCHS is committed to supporting the personal development of its staff. The current COVID-19 pandemic is no exception to this. Despite the ongoing need to work remotely, the department has asked all line managers to ensure they maintain regular 1-1 meetings with all their staff. These meetings may also present an opportunity to conduct a Personal Development Review (PDR).

The department is committed to offering all staff a PDR. This offering should not be neglected during this period of remote working. Personal Development Reviews can be conducted using existing processes, with the meeting taking place via Teams.

The PDR Working Group is aware that some line managers are already having conversations with their staff about PDRs. In some cases, staff appear to welcome the opportunity to discuss their personal development needs for the future. The Working Group are also aware that some staff may not be in the right frame of mind to discuss their development needs while continuing a perceived sense of uncertainty. Line managers are therefore encouraged to recognise the need for sensitivity when approaching the topic of PDR with their staff. Reviews may be delayed until later in the year.

Staff who have been furloughed will not have their PDR during this time. On return to work a discussion about their personal development to alleviate concerns they have about their progression could be beneficial.

Conducting a PDR

The usual process and forms for PDR should be followed:

<https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/files/intranet/personal-development-review-procedure-process.docx>

Please remember to return the completed PDR forms to the HR team at hr@phc.ox.ac.uk

Objectives and Learning Expectations

- Care may be needed to ensure that objectives are manageable under the current circumstances
- Consider setting short term goals for 3 or 6 months in addition or instead of the yearly objectives. Agree now to check and update these after that time.
- Explore how training opportunities can be maximised (eg via LinkedIn Learning, Futurelearn, view POD's [eLearning](#))
- Many events and conferences have moved online. This may make attending some more accessible than before. Consider any other innovative online learning opportunities.

Tips for holding remote a PDR

- **Acknowledge the context** - Although we are all quickly adapting to virtual meetings, the regularity of them is something most of us will be less familiar with. There may be value in taking a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting to ease into the virtual conversation, acknowledging the remote setting.
- **The power of "How are you?"** - This may be something that comes naturally anyway but becomes even more critical during the current period of social distancing. It is a useful way to sense check how the reviewee is feeling, whether they are managing working remotely and whether they are in the right frame of mind to have their PDR. If appropriate, be open to using the time to discuss other elements of wellbeing. Some staff members may be struggling in the current circumstances and therefore find it challenging to take on board feedback and discuss their development. If necessary, ask if they are happy to hold the PDR or would prefer to postpone.
- **Video** - Consider using your video to help the review feel more natural and be aware of the subtle visual cues you give and receive. However video calls can also be more tiring than face to face meetings, so turning the camera on should be optional.
- **Be intentional** – A PDR is an essential meeting for both of you. In some cases, it may be the only formal dedicated time set aside to discuss personal development. Recognise the importance of that time and, despite the need to use video calling, switch off any other distractions such as email, other video calling, web browsers and unused software.
- **Agree on the purpose** - The PDR meeting should not be used as the first place to address a performance issue. Performance concerns should be addressed as and when they arise. In PDR you can cover progress made and any work still to be done, but it is not the place to raise an issue of poor performance for the first time or to go over the same ground that has been discussed in a performance meeting.
- **Contract together** - At the start of the meeting, agree the purpose, process and the timelines that you have set aside to ensure the process is completed. The reviewer looks at the proposed plan and sends any amendments to the reviewee before the meeting. As a result of this process, there should be no surprises at the meeting.
- **Be prepared for discussions on uncertainty** – It is entirely plausible that the reviewee may have concerns about the stability of their work, contract or future. If possible, bring these out in the open at the beginning to enable a more open discussion wherever possible and appropriate.
- **Listen carefully** - Working remotely may leave many feeling disconnected from the department and potentially more disengaged by a review process. Try to overcome this by making them an active rather than a passive participant. Involve them from the start, so the review is a two-way conversation. Give space for them to ask questions and share their opinions and reflections
- **A time for empathy and compassion** - Staff may be facing a variety of problems or concerns at this time, some of these may be outside of work. Approach the review with empathy to set up a safe space for transparent dialogue. Wherever appropriate, recognise and offer helpful advice, thoughtful recommendations and constructive reflections.

If you have any questions about the process, please contact a member of the HR team at hr@phc.ox.ac.uk

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On behalf of the PDR Working Group