



STEP Academy Trust

Appraisal Guide

Good Practice Guide for Conducting Appraisals

Date of Guidance: January 2019

Review: October 2020

Introduction

STEP Academy Trust Board of Trustees has agreed this Guidance and as such, it applies to all Academies within the Trust.

A good appraisal should recognise that most of us are good at our jobs. We meet most of our objectives, most of the time, and should feel recognised and rewarded for our achievements.

It should encourage us to hold valuable development conversations that emphasise the need to:

- offer specific praise;
- give honest feedback;
- focus on the future.

Honest and open performance conversations are an ongoing part of our personal, professional and organisational development. Whether or not you manage people, you should take time to understand your roles and responsibilities so you're ready to take the right approach in an appraisal.

The principles described in this guide underlie all appraisal systems and should be considered in conjunction with the specific appraisal arrangements in individual Academies. They apply equally to teachers and support staff.

Appraisal – Five key principles

1. Conversations matter most

To get the best out of an appraisal meeting, both parties need to be prepared to have an honest and open discussion. Remember an appraisal meeting is:

- a two-way discussion;
- an ongoing process, not an annual event;
- a chance to appreciate the other person's perspective.

Both parties have responsibilities for ensuring that appraisals are successful. Providing honest and open feedback, both ways, is critical to improving performance.

2. Focus on development

Investing in the development of all of your team members should be a priority for the Trust/ Academy and should be planned, implemented and evaluated to ensure it is effective.

Development planning is a key part of appraisal as it provides the opportunity to discuss the support an individual needs to meet their objectives.

3. How we work is as important as what we do

Objectives need to be set with the Trust/Academy's values in mind. Part of the discussion when your objectives are set and agreed requires you to think about how roles help to bring the values to life, as well as how you deliver the tasks themselves.

4. Assumption of competence

The vast majority of staff are competent and they should feel trusted and valued because of that. The fundamental principle of a good appraisal is that most staff are good at what they do and that it is demotivating when appraisal feels like performance management when it does not have to.

5. Performance management and capability

For the small minority of those in the Trust/Academy who are performing unsatisfactorily, or who are new to their role, the process will be more focused, with a more detailed recording of the review evidence and a greater focus on a robust development plan. Long-term issues of capability and competence will still trigger formal HR procedures for performance management, which can occur at any time in the appraisal cycle.

Appraisal – Five key principles

A good appraisal is all about putting people at the core of what we do. It creates the time and space for us to have a two-way conversation together as team members and managers that actively helps us to understand what is expected of us and how we are doing so we have one agreed way forward together.

A successful appraisal has its basis in honest and open conversations between manager and team member that helps both to better understand what they need from one another to work confidently and effectively together.

A successful appraisal is a continuing conversation over the course of the year in regular meetings where we recognise our successes and achievements and work out together what we need to do to meet current and future challenges and deal with hurdles that are difficult to overcome.

A successful appraisal is about taking responsibility for our own successes and our own development and being prepared to share our thoughts and reflections on both towards agreeing what our focus for the future needs to be.

How does a good appraisal work?

We all feel much happier and more productive at work when we have strong relationships with the people we work with and when we feel valued. In other words we feel most comfortable to do our best when we feel trusted to work out what needs to be done and apply our knowledge, skill and experience to deciding how best to carry it out.

A good appraisal works on the premise that most people in the organisation have the knowledge and ability to do a good job most of the time provided they are given the right support. Appraisal conversations therefore should focus on planning for the future, what we need to do, how we will do it and what support we need to achieve to our full potential. We will expect to spend a little time looking back and identifying our achievements and our challenges so that we can use the lessons learned for the purpose of building on our strengths and developing our abilities to meet new challenges.

Appraisal conversations

Appraisal conversations provide time and space for the manager and team member to look back at what has been achieved, agree on the work objectives for the year ahead and talk about what development needs the team member might have and what support they may need from their manager.

The work plan for the year ahead comprises SMART objectives drawn up by the manager and team member together, which will contribute to the delivery of the Operation Team's Service Strategy and Academy Improvement Plans. Discussions about development needs encompass acknowledging the support team members might want and need from their manager to deliver objectives according to the Trust/Academy's values. Conversation includes enough time and space to ensure that both the manager and the team member have sufficient opportunity to respond to feedback and raise points.

The way we work together has a big impact on how we feel about work. The organisation's values are an expression of what we judge important in the approach we take to working with one another to get the job done. In thinking about our achievements, our challenges and our overall approach to our performance, it is, therefore, important to focus on how we go about working with others as much as focussing on delivering our objectives to collectively improve all aspects of STEP Academy Trust.

Successful appraisal conversations give time to reflect on the way we work with others in achieving our goals and take those reflections into account when reaching a conclusion about our overall performance in the year.

Following the end of year appraisal discussion, both parties together produce a written record of the discussion, through the use of the BlueSky Education platform. This will subsequently be approved by the line manager before it is reviewed for authorisation by the relevant Director of Service or Executive team member.

Mid-year review

Appraisal continues throughout the course of the year at regular meetings which are more informal opportunities to talk about how we are doing, what we are succeeding, evidence of impact to date and where we would like some help.

A mid-year review should happen in each year at the mid-point in the annual appraisal cycle. This conversation is an opportunity for the line manager and team member together to look again at the objectives that were set in the Autumn Term, recognise how any team or organisational changes might have impacted on the delivery of objectives and agree any changes to objectives to ensure they remain relevant and achievable. It is also a good time to check on development and improvement plans to make sure they are contributing as was intended towards helping the team member succeed and positively address Trust and Academy priorities, making adjustments where they are needed.

Regular 1-2-1/Line management meetings

Regular protected time for a line manager and team member to meet is important because it means that day-to-day issues can be dealt with together as they arise, and because we all need time to recognise and celebrate our progress and our achievements.

Successful 1-2-1 conversations ideally take place every half term and happen consistently and regularly. The conversations give plenty of time and space for exchanging positive and constructive

feedback both ways between manager and team member. Following these meetings, as agreed, the appraiser should decide what key information to add to their evidence and comments section within their online BlueSky Education folder. In this way, team members are more in control of their own progress towards meeting agreed objectives and the evidence that demonstrates the positive impact of their work.

Our personal responsibilities

We all have a personal responsibility for reflecting on our own performance and being prepared to talk about how we think we can develop our personal and professional skills and abilities. Being prepared to discuss our performance and contribute to appraisal conversations means spending time preparing for appraisal discussions. Both the line manager and team member have a responsibility to reflect equally so that appraisal conversations can be a meaningful two-way discussion. This is where the team member will find it useful to add notes and reflections against their appraisal objectives and action plan within their appraisal section on BlueSky. By uploading any relevant documents to support their reflections the Appraiser gives their line manager, in advance of their scheduled meeting, an opportunity to know the context of their successes to date.

For the team member and the manager coming to appraisal conversations with an open mind is really important for a positive experience.

Why is feedback important?

Most people would agree that feedback is a good thing to give and receive, even though it may sometimes feel uncomfortable. Meaningful feedback is an essential part of an effective appraisal conversation. By giving and receiving feedback, we are highlighting to one another what we can do more or less of to help ourselves succeed. This makes feedback a very powerful tool. By providing feedback as managers and by taking feedback on board as staff we can help one another to sign post changes in how we work as well as what we do in order to develop further. Appraisal is most effective when we feel encouraged to respond to the feedback we receive. There may be occasions when we do not agree with feedback, in which case we all have a right to say this and give our reasons.

A key purpose of feedback is to decide on some action to be taken.

Setting SMART objectives

The number of objectives we set depends on the team member and the manager and the overall Service Strategy/plan or Academy Improvement Plan for the team.

Set objectives with STEP Academy Trust's values in mind. Part of our discussion when we set and agree our objectives requires us to think about how we work towards meeting our objectives in terms of bringing the values to life as well as the tasks themselves.

Using competencies

There is a legal requirement for all teachers to have their performance assessed against the Teacher Standards on an annual basis. The purpose of the standards is to encourage dialogue about effective teaching that contributes to improved pupil outcomes.

The same legal requirement does not apply to support staff, however, some schools find it helpful to identify competencies and include an assessment against them as part of the appraisal process. The use of competencies and standards should feed into the process of identifying development needs.

Planning our development

Our 1-2-1, mid-year review and annual appraisal conversations will be most successful if the main focus of discussion is dedicated to support and development for meeting objectives in a way that brings the Trust/Academy's values to life.

It is important that we are all aware of our development needs and consider how they can be addressed. Development activities are most effective when we apply our learning to your work, so discussions between a manager and team member about how we can make the most of our development are an important part of our conversations. Achievement of our improvement/development plan remains our own personal responsibility.

As team members, important ways in which we can help ourselves stay focused on supporting performance development include:

- Take time to notice your personal strengths and achievements throughout the year.
- This will help you find ways to bring your work objectives together with your own ideas, interests and motivations.
- You know best what development you most want and need. So be prepared to have a say in forming your objectives.
- Take responsibility for your performance by working towards meeting agreed objectives and standards.
- Be clear about how your individual objectives link to addressing a wider set of objectives: STEP Compass Priorities and Operational Service Strategy or Academy Improvement Plan.
- Use your 1-2-1s wisely: be honest and open about your progress against objectives. Share your achievements and ask for help where you need it.
- Identify how you would like to develop and what you need to develop and then participate fully in development activities. Then make sure you put your learning into practice.
- Identify your specific contributions and achievements across the year to use as examples.
- Be willing to share your ideas to improve how your team or service works.
- Be creative about learning opportunities. Only a small amount of our work place learning actually takes place in the classroom. Explore mentoring, coaching, shadowing, secondments and additional responsibilities opportunities as well.

As managers we support our team members to develop by:

- Thinking about what our team member will want to know or may be worried about.
- Really listening to what our team member has to say... and be sure to give positive and constructive feedback.
- Being willing to ask for feedback as to how we can best support your team member's development.
- At end of year, review performance and award overall year-end ratings. This should not be a surprise for a team member so throughout the year use 1-2-1 meetings to discuss development activity.
- Tackling under-performance constructively and promptly – don't wait for the end of your review to raise performance issues.
- Setting and agreeing a work plan with smart objectives which link to School service plans and values.
- Regularly revising and updating objectives if necessary; things change; be prepared to reflect.
- Discussing and agreeing development needs for team members and seeing through sponsorship of any agreed learning and development activities.
- Ensuring that the process is applied consistently and fairly, as each team member deserves.

Trust, fairness and transparency in appraisal conversations

An effective appraisal is one that is fair. This means we all need to fulfil our own individual responsibilities in participating in preparing for, participating in and recording appraisal conversations and following up on agreed activities.

Managers have a particular role in fulfilling obligations to evaluate performance and development needs in a consistent and fair manner. This includes ensuring that we do not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation or age. Our managers should also ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments have been made for disabled staff in their roles and that these are taken into consideration when assessing performance, acknowledging that differences in how the role is performed may not necessarily mean that the duties are not being fulfilled.

The role of the grandparent manager in our appraisal process is an important check on fairness and transparency. Managers all have responsibility for ensuring that all completed appraisals are reviewed with an eye to balance and consistency to ensure that across the team:

- We all have suitable objectives, and our performance has been assessed fairly, using evidence.
- The appraisal is of a good quality in that it will effectively contribute to improving performance the process is being carried out and used fairly and consistently; and that equality and diversity issues are considered when setting work objectives and in planning development activity.

Appraisal - frequently asked questions

What should a successful appraisal look like?

Too often, appraisals are seen as a one-off annual event unconnected to our everyday tasks. Successful appraisals are the outcome of ongoing, regular two-way discussions between the manager and employee during the year.

Appraisals should always link explicitly to the STEP Compass priorities, as well as relevant Service Strategy or Academy Improvement Plan.

An appraisal meeting is a two-way conversation and an ongoing process, not an annual event.

How can I get the most out of an appraisal?

One way to ensure a positive conversation at the appraisal meeting is for everyone to understand their own role and responsibilities.

A good appraisal focuses on having honest and open conversations, and to get the best out of it, both parties need to prepare. Both the appraiser and appraisee have responsibilities for ensuring that appraisals are successful. Providing feedback is critical to improving performance.

What should I focus on?

Under a good appraisal scheme, we are all encouraged to focus on development. Investing in the development of our team is a priority and should be planned, implemented and evaluated to ensure it is effective.

Development planning is a key component of a good appraisal, as it provides the opportunity to discuss the support an individual needs to meet their objectives.

How does appraisal contribute to the Trust/Academy's values?

Objectives need to be set with the Trust/Academy's values in mind. Part of our conversation when we set and agree our objectives requires us to think about how we work towards meeting our objectives in terms of bringing the values to life as well as the tasks themselves. We also, through BlueSky Education's online platform, have an opportunity to select the STEP Compass priorities that are relevant to each of our appraisal objectives.

How can I go about reframing my objectives / helping my staff to reframe their objectives in line with our values?

Use an upcoming 1:1 conversation to talk about what upholding our values means for the way in which they go about their work. Reframing the objectives doesn't mean a wholesale review of what you or your staff will have achieved. Mid-year reviews are a good time to discuss how objectives will be achieved in a way that supports our values.

For most of us, we should find it easy to describe how our behaviours already support the School's values. The discussion can focus on articulating – in personal and explicit terms – how our approach to achieving our objectives is aligned with particular values. How one person achieves one objective may support one value very clearly above other values. For another person, achieving a similar objective may align with several values. That's OK! The important thing is for every one of us to be clear about how we do what we do.