

# Managers' Toolkit:

## Performance management

Enabling good performance and addressing performance concerns

This toolkit aims to provide guidance on how you, as a manager, can support performance of your team. This includes both managing poor performance and enabling excellence.

**To navigate to the sections that interest you, you can either:**

- **Use the tabs at the top of each page** (as in the screenshot to the right). Each section has a second set of tabs for you to select (also shown on the right).
- **Click anywhere** on screen to page through a page at a time. Some pages will have links to resources on the Queen Mary website or intranet (Connected). Remember that each section may have 2 or 3 pages to look through.



**There are also 3 icons in the lower right of each page:**



Return to the first page of this document.



Return to the contents page.



Visit the Staff Support Hub on Connected.

Please contact [opd@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:opd@qmul.ac.uk) with any queries about this document and its contents.

### Watch out for these “Quick Self-reflection” exercises

They will give you the opportunity to check your response to certain situations, and prompt you to think differently about the options available to you as a manager.



## Supporting staff to flourish and give their best is a central role of line managers and is crucial in helping the University to deliver our Strategy 2030 ambitions.

This toolkit aims to support managers in developing the performance of their teams, both motivating and rewarding high performance as well as recognising and addressing under-performance sensitively and effectively.

The following sections provide guidance on how you, as a manager, can support performance of your team.

### Responsibilities and Tools (11 pages)

- Outlines the role of a manager, employee and HR.
- Describes the tools available to managers to set expectations, monitor and review progress.
- Suggests strategies to support managers acknowledge good work and develop their staff.

### Management Skills (19 pages)

- This section covers the skills you need when enabling performance, particularly:
- Recognising different performance levels
  - Providing feedback
  - Having challenging conversations

### Policies and Processes (11 pages)

The first 2 sections above should be considered before moving on to any formal processes  
There is outline guidance on a manager's responsibility when a member of the team calls in sick  
This section supports managers when considering formal processes and details the Queen Mary Policies and processes which need to be followed in different instances.

### Resources (5 pages)

Links to further Queen Mary resources and will be updated with other useful material

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The model below outlines the different tools a manager can use to enable their team members' performance at Queen Mary and illustrates that supporting performance should be a continuous process.

**Tools to recognise and develop:**

- Discussion, both 1-2-1 and in team meetings, to provide individuals and whole team with appropriate learning and development activities.
- Annual appraisal
- Reward and recognition, including saying 'thank you'

**Tools to set expectations:**

- Ensure objectives are aligned to [Strategy 2030](#), Faculty Enabling Plans and strategic priorities
- Agree [SMART goals](#) (including standards of performance) and expectations around behaviour using [Values in action](#) and [Leading Together](#)
- [Probation](#)
- [Policies](#) – Appraisal, Capability
- Job Profile

**Tools to monitor & support**

- Weekly/fortnightly one-to-ones; regular team meetings
- Offer support and guidance (including [coaching](#))
- Provide access to resources that teams need to do their role and support in removing any blocks
- Monitor progress against objectives, including seeking out others' views
- Provide feedback, including "catching people doing it right"
- Raise issues early with team members and seek early support from HR if there are any concerns

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**Enabling the performance of your team and addressing any concerns promptly is an essential part of being a manager.**

**Everyone is individually accountable** for delivering their roles; as the manager, you have responsibility for making sure that the team as a whole is delivering the service or outputs required.

Under-performance from one member of the team can be detrimental to the morale of the rest of the team and can lead to an unhappy working environment that people may choose to leave.

To be fair to everyone, you need to recognise and address any instances of under-performance.

Everyone is accountable



**Managers are often worried** that in an attempt to manage performance, they may open themselves up to accusations of bullying. Queen Mary is committed to creating an environment for work and study where staff and students are treated with dignity and respect, and where bullying and harassment are not tolerated.

An employee may be informed that their performance falls below required standards; this does not indicate bullying by a manager, provided that the manager has acted appropriately.

Managers worry about bullying



**Managers are allowed to be direct and clear** about performance expectations and to explain what work needs to be done and to what standard or quality, provided they act appropriately in doing so.

You should expect staff to meet reasonable expectations to do their jobs.

Setting clear expectations from the outset will help employees to know where they stand.

It's OK to be clear and direct



The **management skills** section of this toolkit outlines the various stages you should go through when dealing with performance that falls short of those expectations.

The **Policies and Practice** section provides a step-through of the formal processes that might eventually be called upon.

If this is done sensitively, clearly, consistently and proactively, and follows the organisations policies and processes, you should not worry about being perceived as bullying.

Use the management skills section



**And remember:**

Innovation and continuous improvement is often the result of debate and constructive discussion.

Diversity of thought is welcomed and encouraged at Queen Mary: disagreeing how to do something isn't a performance issue.

It's good practise to check your own thinking, **and your biases** –you can do this by going through the **'Challenging Unconscious Bias'** e-learning module (this is part of Introducing Inclusion)

Encourage debate



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**Managers are responsible for:**

- Ensuring they role model good standards of appropriate behaviour (see '[Values in Action](#)'). Advising team members of those standards.
- Setting clear objectives with team members.
- Monitoring progress and responding to ensure performance concerns are managed effectively.
- Familiarising themselves with the University's policies and processes around managing staff and following the requirements.
- Seeking HR advice as necessary to understand Queen Mary's obligations as an employer, and taking any actions that may be necessary.
- Exploring how best to support each team member to work effectively and considering any changes that could be made e.g. [reasonable adjustments](#) to ensure access to work and the working environment.

**Each individual is responsible for:**

- Making themselves aware of Queen Mary's expectations of:
    - General standards of behaviour (see '[Values in Action](#)')
    - Performance while working to agreed objectives to fulfil the expectations of the job (as described in the Job Profile)
  - Informing their manager of any issues or barriers that might prevent these expectations being met, in a timely manner.
  - Keeping Queen Mary informed about any specific requirements related to disabilities or health conditions that will equip them appropriately: [reasonable adjustments](#).
- n.b.** No-one has to share information about their disability, but doing so should prompt their manager to open the space for discussion of what support would be helpful.

**HR is responsible for:**

Upholding policy and legislation that relates to employment practises at Queen Mary by:

- Briefing and advising managers on the implementation of policies and procedures.
- Providing impartial advice to managers relating to employment practise.
- Ensuring that all appropriate documentation is provided to employees in any formal HR processes.
- Ensuring formal panels are convened as necessary and arranging the members to sit on them in any formal HR processes.
- Attending those panels to provide advice and guidance.
- Keeping a record of formal meetings that relate to employment practise.

**The roles involved:**

Although the responsibility for ensuring good performance is shared as shown above, this toolkit will focus on supporting the **manager** in their role.

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**The roles involved:  
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## Managers: make time for managing performance

Enabling the performance of your team and addressing any concerns promptly is a fundamental responsibility of managers, and an essential part of the role.

Investing your time in managing the performance of your employees is essential to ensure that each of your team is delivering excellent work, to the best of their ability, in a manner that meets Queen Mary's expectations.

### Make sure that you:

- **Book in regular time** for line-management activities, e.g. one to one meetings and appraisals.
- **Are available** to your team for any day-to-day concerns.
- **Keep in touch** with each team member so that you can spot any emerging concerns, yours or theirs.



### Take the time to:

- **Get to know your team members' strengths and preferences**
- **Set expectations and give feedback** to make sure your team are equipped, motivated, and know what is expected of them. Setting clear expectations from the outset and checking that they are understood will help to prevent confusion and possible under-performance later on.
- **Check in on progress** – is there any support you could offer? Look at the “[Monitor and Support](#)” section.
- **Acknowledge** both effort and achievement.



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## Managers worry about accusations of bullying

A high number of bullying related claims in the workplace come from employees against their managers, with some claiming they feel bullied when being performance managed. This emphasises the difficulty many experience in differentiating between bullying and performance management.

**A key difference** is whether the management action taken was *reasonable* and whether it was *carried out in a reasonable manner*.

If you have let performance drift, you are more likely to be frustrated which may lead to less constructive behaviours.

Try and reflect on whether your behaviour and approach to managing performance is reasonable and remind yourself of your own and your team's collective intent to improve.

### Performance Management means:



- **Expectations** are set with reasonable performance goals, standards and deadlines
- **Communication** is open, respectful and focused on improvement
- **Feedback** is constructive and focusses on specific behaviours or performance issues
- **The relationship is a collaborative** one between manager and staff member

### It moves to bullying when:



- **Expectations** are unreasonable whether it be too much, or information needed to do the job is withheld.
- **Communication** is one-sided, aimed at belittling/punishing an individual, and 'winning'
- **Feedback** is personal, vague and often unrelated to performance
- **The relationship is based on an abuse of power**, where one person holds authority over another and uses it to create an unfair advantage

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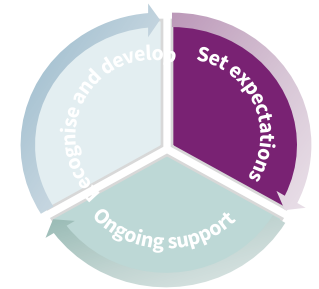
**Set expectations**

Monitor and support

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### Why set objectives?

- They enable a shared understanding of what success will look like.
- They ensure work is prioritised based on areas that are aligned to Strategy 2030, Enabling Plans, Department plans and (where possible) the individual's interests and ambitions.
- They help people see the link between their work and wider team/University objectives.



### How to set objectives

- Have a look at the [Appraisal guidance](#) and [e-learning](#), or watch this [LinkedIn video](#) for a reminder about SMART objectives.
- Normally objectives are expressed as outcomes (what a success would look like), rather than detailed descriptions of how work is to be done – this will encourage ownership and accountability.
- They should relate to all the main areas of a person's role, including:
  - Continuing or 'business as usual' work – here the standards expected would be included
  - one-off projects – focussing on the outcome of the project
- Objectives should be aligned to what you would expect at a particular grade; link these to [Appraisal and Probation](#) objectives.

**Remember:** Some objectives will change in the face of shifting circumstances and opportunities; others may depend on the availability of support and resources. It's your responsibility to keep that in mind when monitoring progress.

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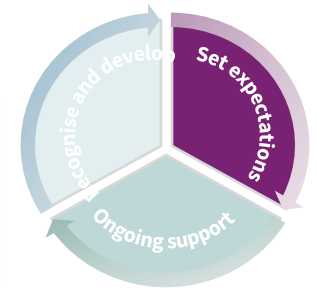
Recognise and develop

**Be clear about expectations:**

- Expectations sometimes go unspoken or can be misunderstood which can cause tension and frustration for both manager and team member.
- It's important to be clear about expectations from Day One and pay particular regard to individual circumstances and support needs.

Expectations can be set in a variety of ways:

- Discussing [Values in action](#) and other behavioural expectations
  - in team meetings (the [Manager's values toolkit](#) will help)
  - and in one to ones
- Sharing strategic documents and plans
- Referring back to Job Profiles
- Role modelling

**Quick Self-reflection exercise:**

- How would you say your team's work demonstrates Queen Mary's Values?
- When have you discussed Queen Mary's Values with your team?



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**Performance management is not just about managing poor performance. It is also about providing ongoing support and motivating your team members on a day-to-day basis.**

**Regular one-to-one meetings** are one of the best ways to provide ongoing support.

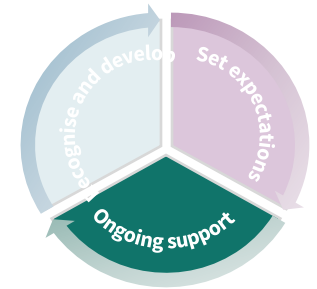
**The One-to-One toolkit** provides guidance on:

- What to cover in a one to one
- Tips and troubleshooting, including a coaching approach
- Guidance on giving feedback
- Links to resources including wellbeing support

**In your daily interactions with your team, remember to:**

- Be mindful of agreed ways of working and any reasonable adjustments that have been put in place (have they been delivered, are they working as intended, do they need to be reviewed)?
- Catch people 'doing it right' and recognise work that is being delivered well.
- Get to know your team and identify what a 'normal' level of performance looks like.
- Address performance dips in one-to-one meetings, making specific observations. 'Recently, I've noticed that...'
- Help remove obstacles

In the [Management Skills](#) section of this toolkit, you'll find guidance on diagnosing the causes of poor performance or performance dips. You'll also find information on when to seek guidance from HR and the importance of intervening early informally – and knowing when moving to formal stages of the policy may be necessary.



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## What support your team members need will depend on the work and the individual.

Here are some aspects to consider:

- Find out what your team members want to achieve, in terms of both their work and their career aspirations. For PS staff, the **PS Career Development resources** might help.
- People typically value a sense of purpose – so ensure that your staff know what's expected of them, and how this contributes to the overall vision of the University.
- Give regular feedback on how the person is achieving their objectives (see the **Management Skills** section)
- Communicate what is happening in your own area and the University more broadly, so that people feel informed at a local level and understand the 'big picture'. Consult them on decisions that impact on them.
- Understand what your team wants from **you** – and be clear about whether you can deliver on their expectations.
- Show interest in your team and their work.



### Quick self-reflection exercise

- Do you know what motivates the members of your team (this may well be different to what motivates you)?
- Do you know the personal circumstances of your team members?
- How do you communicate/consult on changes and developments in your area / the University? Do you do this before you make decisions?
- How do you show your enthusiasm for your/their work?
- When did you last say 'thank you' to members of your team?
- Do you **actively listen**?
- How might you be able to do any of these in a different way for greater impact?



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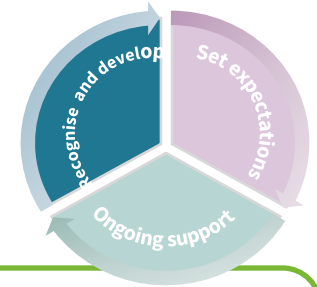
## Monitor and support

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Regular one-to-ones and informal interactions can recognise day-to-day contributions.

The Queen Mary **appraisal** process provides a great opportunity to review, acknowledge and reward contributions and achievements in a more structured way.

An appraisal conversation also provides time to discuss development requirements to support objectives and growth as well as career aspirations.

**Quick self-reflection exercise:**

- Which employees get most of your time?
- How much time do you spend with those people who get on with the job, and consistently meet the expectations of their role?
- When did you last thank a team member for effort and not just results?
- What do you know about the various staff reward and recognition processes?
- When have you nominated any of your team for a staff bonus?



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## Recognition

**Queen Mary reward and recognition schemes** enable you to acknowledge great contributions from individuals or teams. Other ways to recognise and say thank you to team members include:

### Individual recognition

- When you hear a positive comment about someone or observe positive behaviour, let them know as soon as possible



- Offer time to work on a project they are really keen on, or to attend a conference, seminar etc.

### Team Recognition

- Arrange time for your team to reflect on their achievements
- Share these with other teams – in group e-mails, meetings
- Celebrate these achievements – perhaps a team lunch or social activity
- Involve the team in decision making, acknowledging their ideas
- Send an e-mail of appreciation to all the team members
- Use the Praise function on Microsoft Teams
- Share email accolades about someone's work from colleagues and stakeholders
- Acknowledge and celebrate key personal events such as birthdays, work anniversaries, moving home, etc. as well as important cultural events for your team members.

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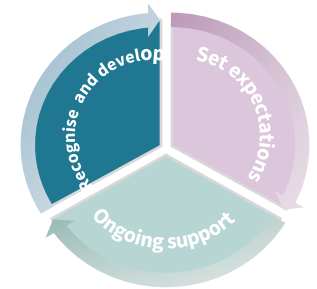
Recognise and  
develop

## Development

Encourage the team member to **self-reflect** using the [Leading Together self assessment tool](#).

**Meet and Discuss** their self-reflection:

- **Listen and ask questions** to help them explore their self-reflection, provide some insight e.g. a skill they don't think they have but you have seen them use (and perhaps where they can use it more), identifying a skill/knowledge/experience area which you will be important for their work
- **Discuss what might help**, diagnose the problem when things don't go well – are there any resources they need? Is there any support they need from the team/you (e.g. talk through to clarify objectives, support with the detail). Can work be changed to play more to their strengths.
- **Identify possible options** for development. There's a list in the box opposite; consider a variety of activities for each member of the team.



### Quick self-reflection exercise:

When could you consider these development approaches for your staff:

**Guided learning** e.g. workshop, LinkedIn learning, Apprenticeship (or other technical training)

**Self-directed** e.g. Job shadowing, mentor or coach, project placement a community of practice or being a mentor, secondments, using a Self-assessment tool (e.g. Leading Together)



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## Tips and tools



**This section of the toolkit gives an overview of some of the skills you may need to use when managing the performance of your team members.**

Remember, as their manager, you are probably the person best able to both influence and support the performance of each member of your team. You are also in a good position to spot when an individual is either achieving good results or starting to fall short of the mark, and you will need to respond appropriately: it's important to give relevant, timely feedback in each case.

The pages in this section offer guidance on how to recognise where your team members are performing well or not meeting the agreed expectations, and how to support them regardless of their performance levels.

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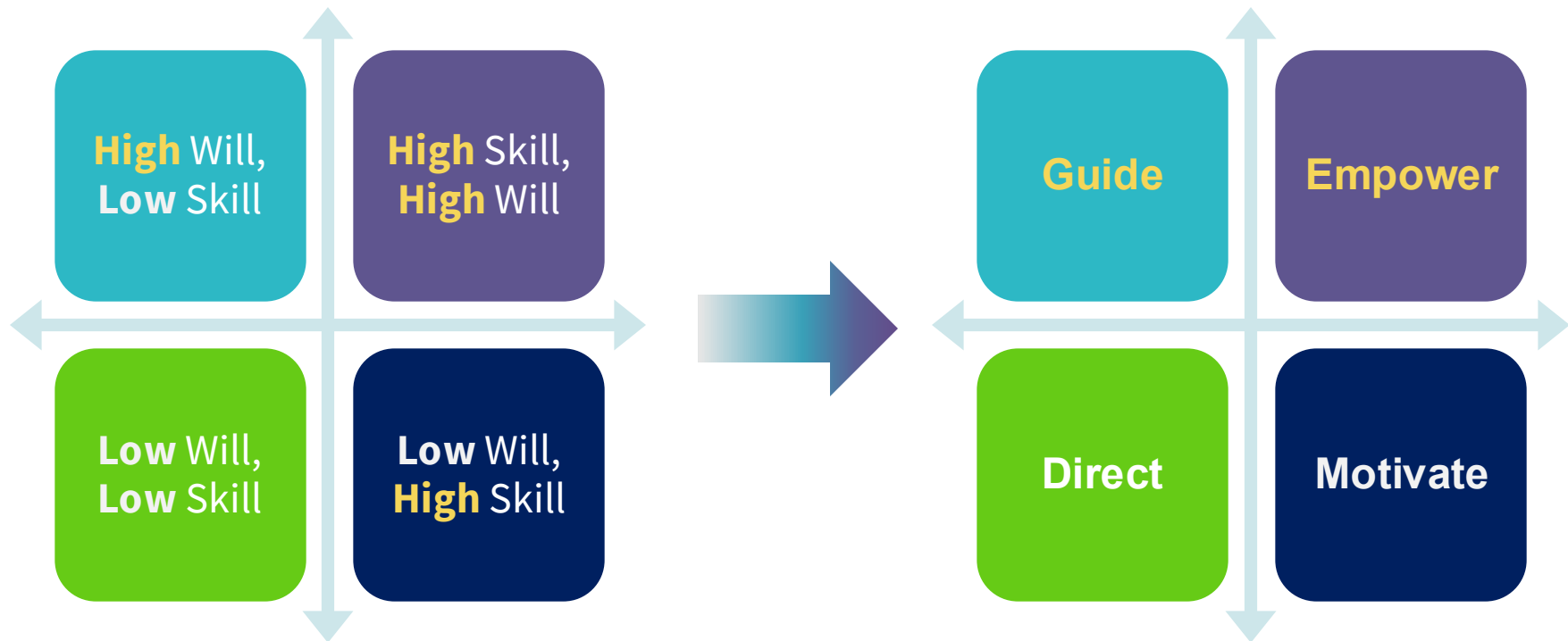
Giving feedback

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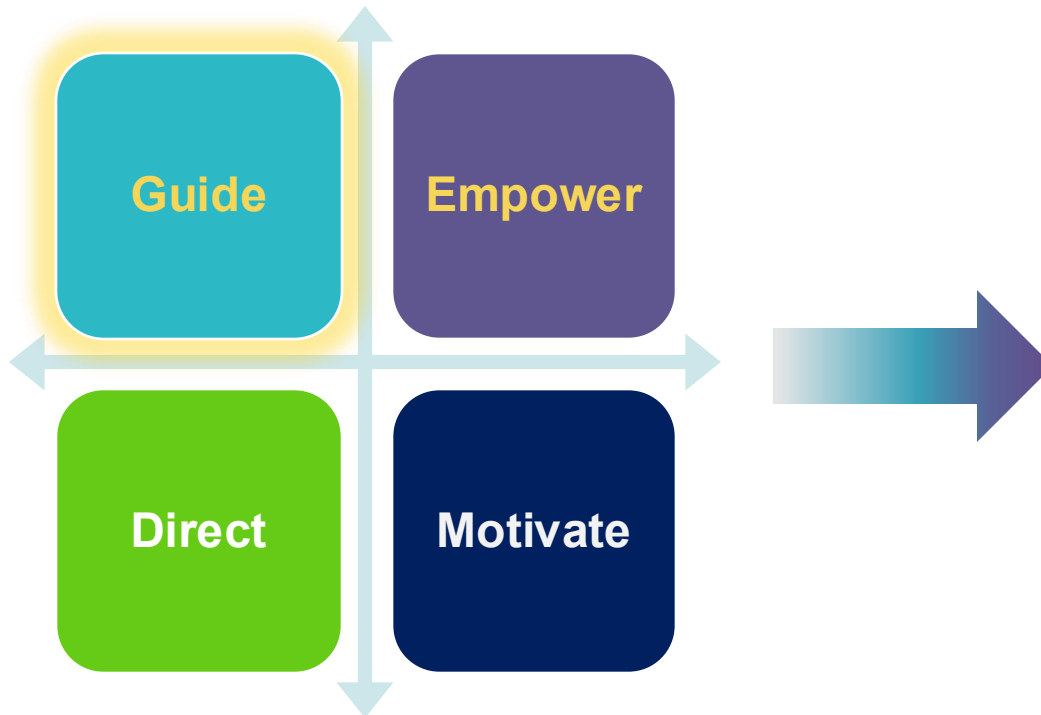
Tips and tools

Managing performance means recognising  
where an individual sits on this matrix ...

... and using the appropriate  
strategies to support them.



## High Will - Low Skill



Someone in this quadrant already has the motivation that they need to improve but may need support to find the right development.

Your task is to look for opportunities for them to build key skills (or knowledge) and then give them confidence to apply those new skills to their work.

Allow time to explore opportunities for their development together. You might consider using a coaching approach here: for more on this, sign up for "Coaching as a Manager" (book on the [CPD booking system](#)), or work through this [LinkedIn module for "Manager as Coach"](#)

You may also need to encourage them to think about how to make the most of different learning opportunities.

Then, support them so that they can put that learning into practise.

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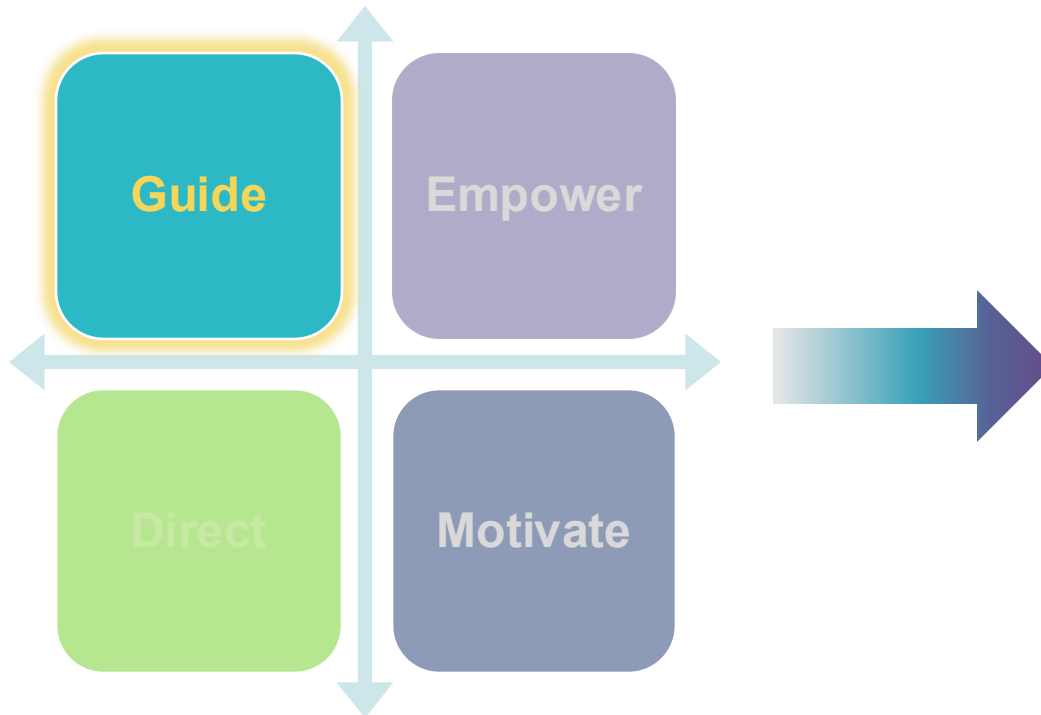
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## High Will - Low Skill



Someone in this area already has the motivation that they need to improve.

Your task is to look for opportunities for them to build key skills (or knowledge) and then give them confidence to apply those new skills.

Allow time to explore opportunities for their development together. You might consider using a coaching approach here: for more on this, sign up for "Coaching as a Manager" (book on the [CPD Training system](#))

You may also need to encourage them to think about how to make the most of different learning opportunities.

Then, continue to support them so that they can apply their learning from those experiences.

## People not yet meeting expectations in their current role

### Guide

#### Work with the team member to diagnose the issues:

- Do they have the resources they need to do the job well?
- Are they clear on expectations? Their job profile, [SMART objectives](#), [Our Values in action](#), and [Leading Together](#) can help here.
- Is ill health or disability causing issues? Have you discussed [reasonable adjustments](#)?
- Can the job be redesigned to suit them e.g. reassigning or delegating certain tasks?
- Have a look at the '[Development](#)' page in the Managing Performance section

#### Your observation on their strengths and development areas

- What do you go to them for (Strengths) - what are your examples ?
- What do you find yourself supporting (Development) - do they show consistent issues?

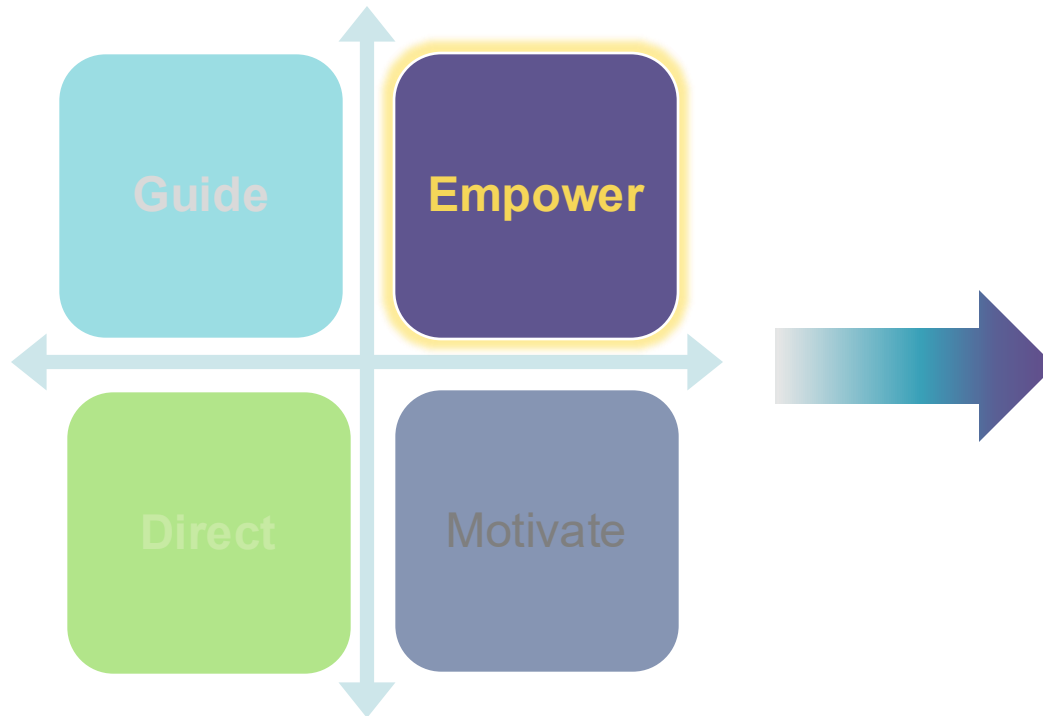
Try to ensure you get others' perspectives on your team member and that your judgements are objective

**Staff tools:** Encourage the team member to **self-reflect** using the [Leading Together self-assessment](#)

#### Identify possible development options:

- **Structured learning** e.g. workshops (if they are a manager [Pathways to Leadership Programmes](#)), [LinkedIn learning](#) , or an [Apprenticeship](#) (or other technical training). Ask them to look at the [CPD Training system](#).
- **Self-directed:** e.g. a [mentor or coach](#) could help them consider how to address any gaps or any roles that might suit their strengths; [job shadowing](#) someone in a similar role who is strong in areas they find challenging; joining a [community of practice](#).

## High Will - High Skill



Someone with high skill and high motivation needs you to be less of a coach, and more of a mentor or "sounding board" for ideas.

Let them know that you're available if they need to brainstorm and encourage them to adopt a self-coaching approach to personal development.

Make sure that you're clear on your responsibilities as a mentor, and check that there are no conflicts of interest.

Be clear about the work that needs to be done while also supporting this person to look at opportunities to stretch.

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## People performing consistently well in their current role and aspiring to a more senior role

### Empower

**Consider your observations** on their strengths (what do you go to them for) and development areas (what do you find yourself supporting). Try to get other's perspectives on your team member and ensure your judgements are objective – what examples do you have?

### Know when to 'fast forward'



#### Staff tools

Suggest they **self-reflect** on their skills and experience:

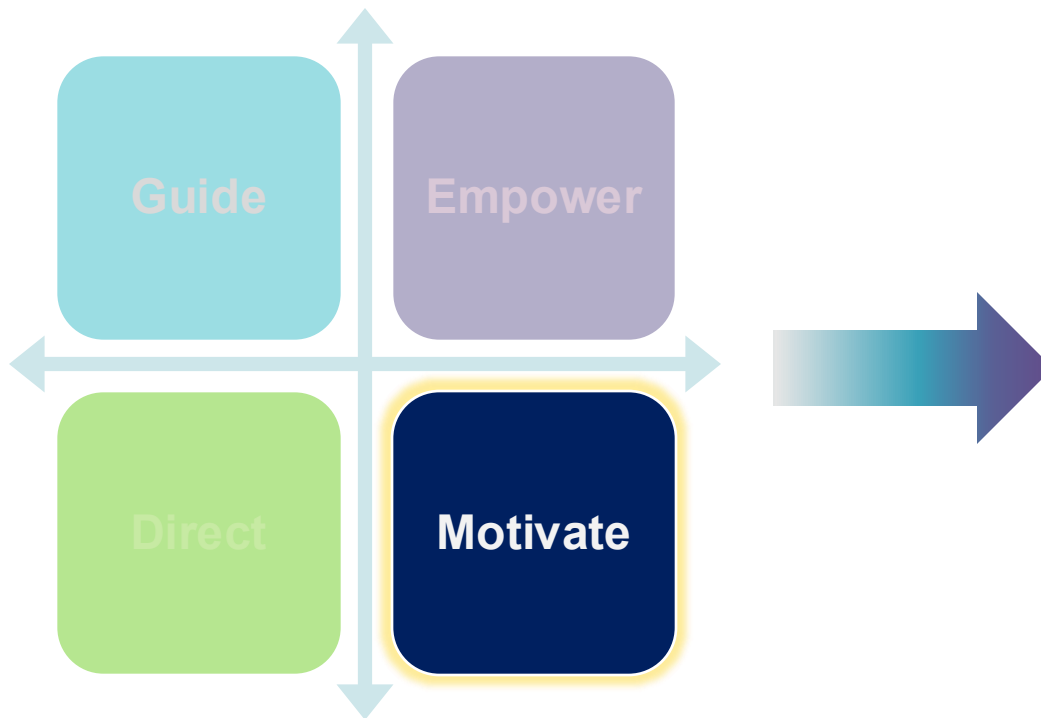
- [The career development resources on CPD Training](#) will help them identify what they need for their next step and [Leading Together self-assessment tool](#) will help them consider their behaviours, where they are strong and where they might want to develop (along with giving suggestions for leadership or management development).
- Sign up for the [Queen Mary job alerts](#) to identify the technical/professional skills they may need for jobs they are interested in. Consider [job shadowing](#).
- To consider different routes they may take to further their career read the [Career Case studies](#).

#### Meet and Discuss

Ensure you acknowledge their success and strengths. Discuss their thoughts and plan for their future – in their current role and the future.

- **Listen and ask questions** to help them explore their self-reflection, provide some insight e.g. a skill they don't think they have but you have seen them or identifying a skill area which you will be important for their next step
- **Identify possible areas for growth** (look at '[Development](#)' in the Managing performance section)

## Low Will - High Skill



Someone who falls into this quadrant has the skills needed to perform effectively but lacks the motivation to use them.

Explore what motivates this person. Then, make a link between this and their motivation in this role.

Your team member may reveal that elements of the role or working environment are negatively affecting motivation. If this is the case, explore how you, or they, can reduce or remove these demotivating factors.

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## People performing consistently well who may not aspire to a more senior role

### Motivate

**Some of this group may have other priorities**, but it's important that they still keep up with progress in their area; they are valued team members and need to be acknowledged as much as your high performers.

### Keep up the momentum



#### Manager tools

- [One to one toolkit](#)
- [Pathways to Leadership Programmes](#) including Enabling performance workshop and Coaching as a manager (book on the [CPD Training platform](#))

#### Staff tools

- Reflect on whether they perform well on both delivering outcomes and demonstrating [Our Values](#) and [Leading Together](#).
- Acknowledge their successes and recognise their strengths.
- Discuss what motivates/interests them about their role and where they can get some stretch to ensure they are challenged. Consider also where they need to update their skills/knowledge and continuously improve.
- [Job shadowing](#) or a [project placement](#) may help to widen their interests

You could also consider how they might share their skills by:

- [Coaching or mentoring](#) others
- joining a [community of practice](#) - this will also develop their networks

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People performing consistently well who may not aspire to a more senior role

Motivate

Some members of this group may need to regain their enthusiasm.

Keep up the momentum



### Manager tools

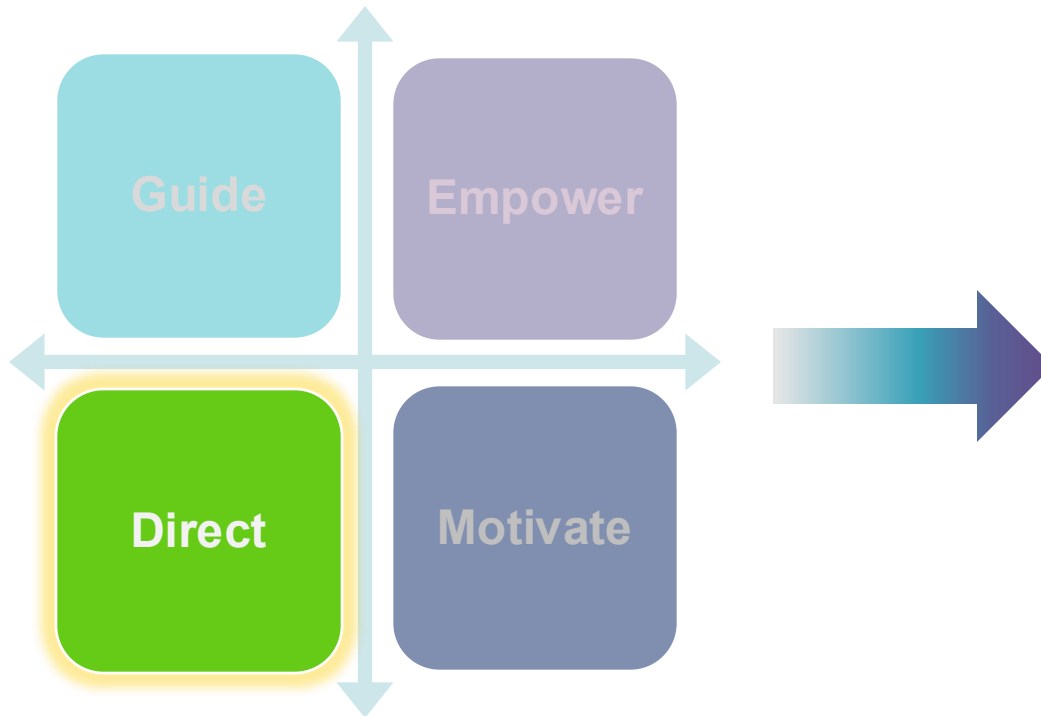
- [Career Development toolkit](#) might be useful
- This LinkedIn module that discusses “[The Manager as Coach](#)” may also be helpful

### Other ways you might motivate your team member include:

- Getting to know your team and their individual drivers and motivators
- Saying thank you and acknowledging successes in a way that works for both of you.
- Acknowledging and recognising people’s contributions both individually and in team meetings: ‘catching people doing things right’ is a positive approach and is most impactful when it’s done in a way that the individual will recognise and value.
- Maintain a regular pattern of 1-to-1 meetings with each member of staff: these are the time to discuss their career aspirations and development so you can help to create opportunities for them to develop
- Working towards creating a psychologically safe work environment, so your team members feel able to raise their concerns with you
- [Queen Mary reward and recognition schemes](#) will enable you to offer a more formal ‘thank you’

## Low Will - Low Skill

Pause and consider



Working with someone who is in the “Direct” area takes a lot of time and effort. As their manager be sure that you agree clear deadlines with them and monitor progress closely.

Encourage them to discuss deadlines and instructions with you, and to ask for help if they are struggling.

Consider using some of the tools and approaches later in this section to focus on skills development, and on increasing motivation.

## Dips in performance



Dips in performance can be caused by a variety of reasons both in and outside of work and should be dealt with sensitively. They may only be short-term, but not addressing these issues can impact the productivity and wellbeing of the individual and the team.



While most staff will meet or exceed the expectations and objectives set with them, occasionally performance problems arise and an honest conversation may be needed to highlight the areas of concern and to get back on track.

### Indications that performance has dipped include:

- Struggling to achieve personal objectives
- Not meeting the required performance standards for their role
- Making repeated mistakes
- Lacking energy and enthusiasm e.g. persistent lateness
- Failing to demonstrate the necessary initiative for their role
- Causing conflict with others through poor interpersonal skills
- Poor feedback from others
- Taking repeated short periods of time off sick
- Reacting in a disproportionate manner to certain situations
- Being rude to colleagues

### Some suggestions on how to approach:

- Be available for your team member; check in with them about how they're doing
- Be clear about the purpose of any meeting if you need to discuss performance; allow time for the staff member to prepare.
- Be open about the changes you've noticed
- Be willing to listen and prepared to dedicate time
- Be clear about what you can/can't do
- Be prepared for the conversation:
  - practise what you need to say
  - think through what you need to achieve
  - allow space for innovation



## Identifying causes of under-performance

Pause and consider



It is important to determine the reason(s) for under-performance, so that you can discuss practical solutions with the employee. Remember: disagreeing on how to do something isn't necessarily a performance issue and can present innovative suggestions for improvement.

### Some suggestions on how to manage this situation:

- Follow the tips for '[dips in performance](#)'
- Explore the reasons behind the underperformance – sympathetically, but clearly; often these are around differences in working style that can be discussed and resolved.
- Discuss your concerns with your team member: '[Performance Conversations](#)' tips might help
- Review regularly to monitor progress, and record the observations
- Ensure that you confirm each step with your team member after each review, and share the record with them

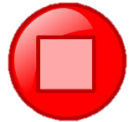


**Resources:** Video: [Guidelines for navigating performance issues](#)  
Article: [Questions to ask to find out the root cause of underperformance in your team](#)

**Consistent under-performance** needs to be addressed promptly; not doing so could lead to tensions and divisions within the team and will put others under unnecessary stress.

If there is little or no improvement within the agreed timescales, [contact your Employee Relations team](#) for advice on your next steps as you may need to be moving toward formal action.

**Stop and take advice**



### Reasons for under-performance can include:

- A lack of training
- Equipment/resource issues
- Lack of clarity about job requirements
- Lack of timely feedback
- Workload issues e.g. conflicting deadlines
- Unhelpful working relationships
- Policies and procedures being a barrier to performance
- Ill-health or other personal issues outside work

### Some questions for you

It's your role to establish whether this is a 'skill' or 'will' issue:

- Have the (SMART) objectives and expectations been clearly communicated?
- Has this person performed to the required standard before?
- Does the employee have the skills and the interest/motivation to perform the duties successfully?
- Do they have support needed to achieve the results, including systems and processes?
- Does the employee have confidence in their ability?
- Is this a clash of styles of disagreement on how something should be done or a performance issue?
- How serious is the problem and how long has it been going on?



## Introduction

## Levels of Performance

## Giving feedback

## Performance Conversations

## Tips and tools

## Feedback is a key skill of a good manager.

Feedback can be positive – encouraging staff to continue with good work, or developmental – when managers need to address problem areas.

Managers often avoid discussing poor performance because they fear the member of staff will react badly or emotionally.

When giving performance feedback:

- Communicate in a non-judgemental, objective way (i.e. don't be emotional)
- Be very specific – give clear examples of what concerns you
- Outline exactly what is the problem then identify the impact of the work/others and be very clear about what you want to happen in future.

Many feel defensive about criticism. When this happens, acknowledge it and aim to defuse it. You can do this by:

- **Listening actively and questioning** – by using reflective questions e.g. “How would you deal with that situation again?”
- **Role reversal** – if the situation involved other colleagues, you could ask how those colleagues would describe their perspective .
- **Self disclosure** – explain how the situation has made you feel.
- **Be assertive** – you can acknowledge another person's perspective or feeling but make a clear statement about your perspective about the situation.
- **Seek ideas** – help engage the individual in seeking a mutual solution.

### Quick self-reflection exercise

- How often do you provide positive feedback?
- How confident do you feel in giving developmental or constructive feedback?
- Have you checked to see what Leadership and management training is available including Coaching for managers,

Go to the [OPD webpages](#) to learn more.



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It can be useful to follow a structure to prepare and give feedback (both positive and constructive) but remember it needs to be a two-way conversation. The following “CEDAR” approach may be helpful:

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Clarify/ Context</b>   | Consider the context of the feedback, e.g. where the behaviour that you think needs changing takes place, but more importantly why it's relevant to the team and to the individual. Frame your feedback with positive aspirations that will matter to them, for example: “We want to ensure we provide good experience for our students,” “I want to make sure we get the best out of working together,” etc.                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Examples</b>           | Ensure you have specific examples, and stay objective: describe behaviour, rather than ‘mind reading’ about why it might have happened. Ask questions to understand. Instead of “you weren’t engaged in the meeting,” for example, use specifics: “In the last team meeting, I noticed you had your camera off for the last 30 minutes and only spoke two or three times - was there anything wrong?” Use data and evidence. Don’t exaggerate – don’t use ‘rarely’, ‘always’, ‘never’ – they are likely to be inaccurate and cause people to react emotionally. |
| <b>Diagnosis/ Discuss</b> | Ask what's happening as neutrally as possible. There will be reasons for the behaviour that you don’t understand. Encourage self-reflection: What might have been the impact of your behaviour? How might you do it differently?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Action/ Agree</b>      | Agree next steps. It’s best if these come from them but offer suggestions if they struggle to come up with any. Develop specific actions. What is to be done, and by when? What support will be in place?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Review</b>             | Set up a time to review. Ask your team member when you should check back in together. Give positive feedback where you see the change happening.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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Before having a challenging conversation, it can be useful to consider how you might deal with negative or emotional reactions to it. The following is the **PACR technique**, which might help you to manage the discussion.

## Pause

- Don't take it personally
- Hold back on your impulsive response
- Diffuse your tension by breathing out
- Give the other person a chance to let off steam.

## Acknowledge

- Show you are listening
- Work hard to see the situation from their perspective then...
- Empathise by reflecting what they said and how they might feel
- Use their name – it's a great diffuser and personalises the interaction.

## Clarify

- Ask questions to fully explore their problem
- Check back your understanding of the situation
- Flag questions and personalise them
  - So, I can help you, I need to check a few details with you...
  - 'I'd like to make sure I've understood the problem correctly. We need to resolve...'
- Take notes to help you concentrate.

## Respond

- Keep an assertive and sympathetic tone but match their pace. (Initially, at least)
- Offer suggestions confidently
- If you can't do something, say why not and immediately link it with a 'can', e.g.:
  - "We are not able to do...because... However, what I **can** suggest is..."
- If the person still insists on what you can't do, re-iterate, and empathise.

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## Top tips for a performance conversation

- Always address your concerns quickly. It is better to raise them early.
- Speak from your own experience: 'I noticed... it had this impact on me'.

### Fundamentals of effective conversation

- Words, tone and body language are all important elements in a successful conversation
- Building rapport: remember the basics – smile, make eye contact, use their name
- Asking open questions to encourage deeper conversation
- Be genuine, sincere and authentic

### Building empathy through active listening

EARS may help:

- **E**ncourage
- **A**sk questions (to clarify)
- **R**eflect back
- **S**ummarise

Avoid delay

Speak from  
the 'I'Be  
sensitive

Be clear

Avoid  
overloadDescribe,  
don't judgeFocus on  
**behaviour**

Be positive

Avoid  
**comparing**No need to  
apologise

## Six tips to help you have difficult conversations

(from [From HaloPsychology](#))

- **Preparation is key.** It can be helpful to jot down key points in priority order in advance; you'll be less likely to be thrown off-course. These should include examples and any data you have.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Have a dry-run with a trusted colleague, or your coach. This can help reduce your fear, give you feedback on your style, and hone your message.
- **Silence is golden.** When you've said your initial piece, then stop. Allow the other person to reflect and take it in.
- **Environment is important.** The type of space you use can have an impact on how the conversation goes. A private meeting room, a local coffee shop, a 'walk and talk', a seat in a local park...
- **Specifics are important.** Have one or two detailed examples to add weight to the point you're making; these should be recent and first-hand accounts.
- **Put yourself in their shoes.** How would you feel to hear the feedback you have to give? What would make it easier to accept?

## Things to avoid...



The praise sandwich

This is where you 'sandwich' some constructive feedback in between two pieces of positive feedback. This is to be avoided as the recipient may either miss the constructive or positive feedback and may feel manipulated in either case.



'I know best'

To get the best outcome, try to aim for adult-to-adult language. If we treat people like children, they are unlikely to respond positively. We also want to encourage people to identify actions that will work for them, rather than telling them how to do something. For more information, see this [short video](#)

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**This section deals with Queen Mary's policies and guidance around managing staff, focussing on those areas that can be uncomfortable to handle.**

We should remember that Queen Mary's policies are binding on University managers. They set out the way that the Council, the University's governing body, expects its managers to manage people.

The Policies are designed to:

- be easy to use and understand
- be lawful, fair and effective.

This toolkit offers a summary and some “how to” steps to follow, to help managers navigate each of the following:

- Capability policy
- Probation - including adverse probation decisions
- Attendance - including sickness absence

Full details of all of the Policies can be found on the [HR policies](#) section of our website.

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## If you have concerns about how a team members is performing in their role, the first step is always to talk to them.

Often performance dips, changes in behaviour, poor timekeeping, unexplained absence or increased short-term sickness levels can be an indication that this colleague is struggling with something. We should recognise that anyone's capability and coping capacity can fluctuate for a number of reasons e.g. due to personal circumstances. Your team members' wellbeing is your concern but might be difficult for them to discuss.

Checking in with them promptly when you notice one of these things could offer them the support they need. They might be experiencing a temporary change in circumstances which, with sensitive and timely support from you, could be made much easier. If necessary, you could discuss short-term options that will help them while they get back on track.

**The One-to-One toolkit** provides a helpful structure for this: see the section on "Support and Engagement".

### Quick self-reflection exercise:

- How do you pick up when a team member is struggling?
- How do you currently handle those situations?



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## Can't or Won't?

- When somebody "**can't**" do something, it's because they lack the skill to do it – this is Capability, otherwise known as poor performance.
- When somebody "**won't**" do something, it's because they lack the will to do it. If it's persistent despite reminders on expectations, priorities and deadlines for the work, this is misconduct (disciplinary) for which you should seek advice from Employee Relations (ER).

In either case, start with informal discussion: look at the '[Levels of Performance](#)' section for some guidance, and keep to the checklist.

**Capability** covers the employee's ability to do the job and does not imply on any "fault" on the part of the employee; this route is used when there are consistent issues with an employee's ability to do the job.

Remember that this process should be carried out in a fair and respectful manner, with the goal of helping the employee improve their performance whenever possible. Open and honest communication throughout the process is essential.

Where potential incapability is caused by ill-health, then the [Attendance Policy and associated procedures](#) should be used.

## Manager's checklist

Before putting the capability process in action, check you have...

- ☐ **Identified Root Causes** - Are there any external factors or personal circumstances that may be contributing to the situation?
- ☐ **Given the employee constructive feedback** on their performance and offered opportunities for improvement. Provide coaching and support where necessary. Check the [Management Skills](#) section for 'how to' tips
- ☐ **Ensure you have a factual record - of all discussions**, meetings related to the employee's performance issues. This documentation will be crucial if the situation escalates.
- ☐ **Considered Reasonable Adjustments?** Where staff have a disability or health condition, please contact Employee Relations (ER) see the [Contact Us pages](#) to discuss Occupational Health Advice or Access to Work.
- ☐ **Considered Alternative Solutions** - Be open to exploring alternative solutions, e.g. a change in role or responsibilities if it becomes clear that the employee may not be able to meet the required standards in their current role.
- ☐ **Spoken to your own manager** and agreed a way forward.
- ☐ **Read the Capability policy** – so that you understand the outcomes of the process which may, in extreme cases result in dismissal.

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**Purpose and aim:**

**The purpose** of the Capability Policy is to address concerns around 'ability to do the job'

**The aim** is to support, encourage and promote improved performance in a transparent and fair manner

**Remember** that the capability policy process should be carried out in a fair and respectful manner, with the goal of helping the employee improve their performance whenever possible. Open and honest communication throughout the process is essential.

Check the [Management Skills](#) section for 'how to' approach this

**The informal stage**

- Clarify with the employee this is the informal stage of the process
- Conversations of concerns should already have taken place before so there should be no surprises
- Identify a SMART plan and agree dates for review
- Set the agreed review period (usually not more than 4-6 weeks).

**Remember! This is a two-way conversation**

The possible outcomes:

1

Improvement =  
No formal action,  
continue to support

2

Some improvement =  
Extend the review  
period

3

No improvement =

**Formal Process**

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**Formal  
Process****STAGE 1**  
Formal meeting and  
review**Seek ER Advice.** This stage is led by the line manager with an agreed review period.If performance  
improves, close case  
no further actionIf some improvement,  
extend review period**No improvement,  
move to Stage 2****STAGE 2**  
Formal meeting and  
review

The case is now heard by independent manager (usually the line manager's manager). Agreed review period continues

If performance  
improves, close case  
no further actionIf some improvement,  
extend review period**No improvement,  
move to Stage 3****STAGE 3**  
Formal meeting  
resulting in outcome  
1 **OR** outcome 2**Outcome 1**  
Further review**OR****Outcome 2**  
Action short of  
dismissal, OR dismissal**Appeal**

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**Probation** is the period in which a new team member is supported to establish themselves in their new role.

During this time, they will have agreed goals to work to, and appropriate support will be provided.

By the end of the period, a decision will have been made about whether they can continue in the role.

### Purpose and aim:

**The purpose** of this policy is to set out your responsibilities and the appropriate way to support your member of staff during their probationary period, up to the point of confirming them in post or, where necessary, ending the employment.

**The aim** is to ensure that we support the new staff member, identify and address any training needs they might have.

## Manager's checklist

Before putting the Probation Code of Practice in action, check that you have...

- ☐ **Set SMART Objectives** – This is a powerful tool for goal setting and performance management to help focus on what matters most and facilitate effective planning and evaluation of progress
- ☐ **Looked at Training and Resources** – to ensure that the employee has had access to necessary training, resources and support to meet performance expectations.
- ☐ **Provided Regular Feedback** – Schedule regular check-in meetings to provide feedback and assess progress during the probationary period. We would recommend at least fortnightly for most roles. [The one-to-one guide](#) will help.
- ☐ **Ensure you have a factual documented record - of all discussions**, of all discussions and meetings, related to the employee's performance. This documentation will be crucial if the situation escalates
- ☐ **Given feedback to Employee Relations-HR Team** – Informed the ER team of any issues that have arisen during the probationary period to ensure you receive guidance as needed, especially if you plan to extend the probation period or write an adverse probation report
- ☐ **Spoken to your own manager** and agreed a way forward.
- ☐ **Read the Policy** – which sets out your responsibilities and the appropriate way to support your member of staff during their probationary period, up to the point of confirming them in post or, where necessary, ending the employment.

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## The key stages of the Probation process

Set up

- Set & agree objectives, discuss standards required including training and support

First  
Review  
MeetingSecond  
Review  
MeetingFinal  
Review  
Meeting

The purpose of **both First and Second** Review meetings is to:

- Review objectives set,
- Assess progress
- Review concerns around attendance and conduct.
- Re-set objective not met and agree new objective as applicable

- Final assessment to review suitability to confirm in post

Final Review  
Decision**Adverse Probation  
hearing****Confirm in post**

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## Managing staff sickness absence

**Make sure you read the Attendance Policy.** All staff should be aware of our attendance policy and its expectations, around reporting their sickness and around what would trigger the formal stages of the policy. Keep in mind the [certification requirements](#) at each stage of the absence.

Line managers are responsible for managing sickness absence issues and should approach this in a consistent and fair manner.

This includes:

- Treating employees in a way that is sensitive and fair which balances the needs of the individual and QMUL
- Dealing with problems caused by sickness absence as early as possible
- Supporting staff to improve their wellbeing by promoting a healthy working environment
- Offering support to employees who are sick to enable them to return to work as soon as their condition allows
- Dealing effectively with sickness absence and minimise the impact on service delivery
- Being consistent in the reporting, monitoring and management of attendance

### On the first day of absence:

- Your member of staff should contact you to let you know they won't be working that day.
- **It's ok to show concern** and ask what they would like you to tell the rest of the team. There is no legal requirement for them to tell you what their condition is, or to provide medical evidence at this point, but making QM aware of the reason for absence could help the individual if they should be offered additional support, or if the absence should be recorded separately (eg if it's Maternity-related).
- **Agree with the individual how you will keep in touch** (phone, email, Teams ..) and how frequently.
- **N.B.** Keep a note of the date: you will need to record this in MyHR.

### While they are off :

- Keep in touch as you agreed on Day 1 – it shows concern and helps you plan ahead. Are there any temporary changes that would help them return safely?
- BUT:
- Ensure that they are not approached about work while they are off sick.

### When they return to work:

- **Welcome** them back
- **Have a 'return to work'** discussion to check:
  - How they are – fit to work? Perhaps a risk assessment is needed, or an Occupational Health referral.
  - Are there any underlying factors?
- **Update** them on any work-related developments relevant to their role.
- **Update MyHR with the return date**

### Quick self-reflection exercise:

- Do you know how to have a [Return to Work discussion](#)?



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Most unexpected absences are due to sickness.

If there is a concern about an individual's sickness absence it should be tackled informally first where possible.

If it has not been resolved informally then formal action may be taken.

**Purpose and aim:**

**The purpose** of the attendance policy is to maximise attendance and minimise any work-related causes of sickness absence.

**The aim** is to support health, wellbeing and attendance.

**Remember** that the attendance policy should be applied with empathy, fairness and compassion, taking into account individual circumstances.

When in doubt, please **contact the Employee Relations – HR Team**.

Check the [Management Skills](#) section for 'how to' pick up on this.

**Manager's checklist.**

Before putting [the Attendance policy](#) into action, check that you have...

- ☐ **Considered Reasonable Adjustments** - If applicable, explore whether any reasonable adjustments can be made to accommodate the employee's needs or help them improve their attendance. Please contact Employee Relations (ER) in the HR department to discuss Occupational Health Advice or Access to Work
- ☐ **Communicated from the start** – Conversation with the employee to discuss an attendance problem may help you understand the underlying causes. Are there any external factors or personal issues that may be contributing to the situation?
- ☐ **Considered alternative solutions** - Be open to exploring alternative solutions, such as a change in role or responsibilities if it becomes clear that the employee may not be able to meet the required standards in their current role
- ☐ **Documented a factual record of your team members attendance** (on MyHR), and of all conversations and meetings relating to their attendance.
- ☐ **Spoken to your own manager** and agreed a way forward.
- ☐ **Read and shared the Attendance Policy** – Ensure that the employee is aware of our attendance policy and its expectations, particularly around what would trigger the formal stages of the policy.

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**The indicators** that you need to address an attendance issue with a team member are:

1. **Repeated short-term absences**, that meet one or more of these 'trigger points':
  - 3 separate occasions during any 4 months
  - 15 days over any 12 months
  - A recurring pattern / trend
2. **A long-term period of absence**: a continuous period of 20 working days (4 calendar weeks)

In any of these cases, you are advised to start with informal action.

### The informal stage

- Inform employee in writing (email or letter) stating **informal** meeting/stage under the policy (no right to representation)
- Establish reasons for Sickness Absence and discuss wellbeing.
- Explore any support measures that will enable the individual to return to work
- Set review period (**12 weeks**)

### The possible outcomes:

1

Return to work by end of review period  
=  
No formal action, continue to support and monitor wellbeing

2

No return to work  
=

**Formal Stage 1**

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## Attendance - process

**Formal STAGE 1**  
Formal meeting and  
review**Seek ER Advice.**

Line Manager will prepare and present management report (reasons for absence and support offered)

This stage is led by an independent manager; agree review period and support plan

**Appeal**

Review period dependent on  
prognosis – NOT more than 12  
weeks (set date of meeting)

**If return to work no further action****If absence continues move to Stage 2****Formal STAGE 2**  
Formal meeting and  
review

This stage is led by an independent manager agree review period and support plan.  
Line Manager will present management report (reasons for absence and support offered)

**Appeal**

Review period dependent on  
prognosis – NOT more than 12  
weeks (set date of meeting)

**If return to work no further action****If absence continues move to Stage 3****Formal STAGE 3**  
Formal meeting  
resulting in item 1  
OR item 2

Outcome 1  
Extend review  
period

**OR**

Outcome 2  
Action short of  
termination OR  
termination

**Appeal**

## Our Values in action

Our [Strategy 2030](#) describes Queen Mary's commitment to *create a truly inclusive environment, building on our cherished cultural diversity, where students and staff flourish, reach their full potential and are proud to be part of the University.*

It describes our core values: Inclusive; Proud; Ambitious; Collegial; Ethical.

Working to these Values is essential if we are going to achieve our ambitions, and so we need a common understanding of what that means for all of us.

*Our Values in action* is a framework that translates our Values into a description of the expectations that we should have of ourselves and of each other; of how we act and interact with each other every day.

The framework itself is brief, and gives a description of the behaviours that we should see across Queen Mary, regardless of grade or role:

[Our Values in action \[PDF 2,954KB\]](#)



## Learn more about Leading Together and how to use it

[This framework](#) sets out the behaviours we can all embody, across all areas and levels of the University, as Queen Mary leaders.

Developing leadership behaviours is relevant to all of us, not simply managers or those in senior roles.

The framework is a developmental tool which describes the behaviours - at every level of leadership - that demonstrate our Queen Mary Values.

[Leading Together](#) is based on the core principles of citizenship, inclusivity, and role modelling [Our Values in action](#), and recognises that leadership across the University is central to achieving our [Strategy 2030](#).

The document (linked above) explains the five elements of Leading Together, the behaviours associated with each element, and how those behaviours change with increasing seniority. It also contains advice about how to use the toolkit to give feedback, ask powerful coaching questions, and plan for personal and professional development.



## Grade profiles for Professional Services Staff are described in the [Career Development toolkit](#)

- These profiles provide some guidance around what to expect at each grade to help provide consistent expectations across Professional Services. Links are also provided to the full generic profile of each grade, which go into more detail on the typical responsibilities and accountabilities of colleagues at that grade.
- These descriptions are necessarily broad to cover a large variety of roles; they provide an **indicator** of the behaviours you should typically expect to see at each grade –there will be exceptions depending on the specific function and role.
- The individual's **Job Profile** provides clarity on individual responsibility, accountability, and necessary skills/qualifications. If it doesn't, or is out of date, these profiles (along with Our Values in action and Leading Together) could help update the profile.
- Alongside the Job Profile, this information can help to inform discussions around probation, appraisal, and career development.
- They should **not** be used to inform discussions of regrading. In addition to organisational needs, grading and regrading are based on several factors alongside the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the role. It is the demands of the job that are graded, rather than the ability of the person doing the job at any given time

## Advice, training and other resources to develop your skills and confidence in managing performance:

### Courses

Look on the [CPD Training system](#) for:

- [Enabling Excellent Performance through Constructive Conversations](#) – a one day course organised by OPD which is run regularly through the year
- [Manager Induction](#) – an overview of Queen Mary's expectations of managers and signpost to information and sources of support
- [Leading and supporting Career Development](#)
- [Coaching as a Manager](#)
- You can also receive coaching support from Queen Mary's coaching network. Complete the form [here](#).

### Toolkits

You will find the toolkits on the [OPD pages](#), including:

- Flourishing at Queen Mary – for all colleagues include clarity of expectations for current role and to consider their development.
- Career development toolkit and framework
- One to One meetings

**LinkedIn learning** (video) course content that might be helpful:

- [Performance Management: Setting goals and managing performance](#)
- [Leading and motivating people](#)

### Other resources

- [Appraisal e-learning](#)
- [Appraisal guidance](#)

Values in action

Leading Together

Grade Profiles

Links and resources

For more support see the [HR Contact page](#):

**HR Strategic Partner:** See [here](#) for your faculty contact to discuss strategic input into managing performance, overall advice at department/school level rather than individual/team level

**ER Support:** Individual advice on performance management

**OPD Adviser:** [Organisational development](#) for support around change projects, wider culture change and career development

**EDI support:** See [here](#) for more information about the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Team, and the help they can offer you.