FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) on Performance Review and Development (PRD)

These FAQs are divided into three sections:

1. **Supervisor & Staff FAQs**
   This section is relevant to all staff. It provides answers to some of the most common questions around PRD.

2. **Staff (supervisee) FAQs**
   This section is particularly relevant to staff (supervisees), both in preparing for PRD and in moving through the PRD process with their supervisor.

3. **Supervisor FAQs**
   This section provides answers to many of the questions that supervisors have about the PRD process.

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**SUPERVISOR/STAFF FAQS**

1. **Where has this new process come from?**

   The PRD framework supersedes the General Staff Review and Planning Program (RPP), which was first introduced in the mid-1990s. Changes to RPP to form the new Performance Review and Development (PRD) system are based on objectives from the Collective Workplace Agreement of 2006-2008. New documentation and training and development sessions to support PRD have been developed based on feedback from staff awareness raising sessions held in April – May 2007, as well as from learnings gained in pilot sites that include the Library, the Faculty Office of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology, Personnel Policy and Practice, and Nursing Administration.

2. **We are already doing RPP. Why do we have to change to a new process? What is different?**

   In effect, PRD builds on the RPP system. However, through the University’s Collective Workplace Agreement as well as from manager and staff feedback, it was recognised that RPP could be strengthened and improved in the following aspects:
   - Stronger focus on planning and looking to the future as well as reviewing past achievements
   - Clearer understanding of work goals, how these enable the objectives of the work area and the University, and how goals may be measured and evaluated
   - Stronger ongoing recognition of excellent performance
   - Keeping position descriptions up to date and relevant
   - Facilitating the process of incremental progression
   - Facilitating daily workplace management.

3. **How much time will it take?**

   The time it takes to establish a performance and development plan will vary from work area to work area, depending on the degree to which such plans already exist, the degree to which planning and discussions around work and development already
occur in the work area, and depending on whether position descriptions are up to date or not.

It will take an initial investment of time to set up PRD plans. With these in place, ongoing review throughout the year, as well as the annual review, will be able to occur in a more focussed and efficient manner. Furthermore, an investment of time at the outset will lead to worthwhile outcomes that save time down the track. For example,

- up to date position descriptions will be in place,
- there will be a clear framework for objectively informing incremental progression decisions and reviewing performance,
- accountability will be enhanced, with people having greater clarity about their work goals and performance expectations
- staff will be in a better position to manage themselves and their workload in line with agreed goals and expectations
- under performance due to lack of clarity about performance expectations will be minimised.

In addition to time spent establishing plans, performance and development plans need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain on track. Reviewing performance on an ongoing basis can be done informally, perhaps as part of regular ‘work in progress’ meetings between managers and staff. In this way, it simply becomes part of workplace communication processes that already exist, rather than requiring additional time.

How frequently informal reviews occur will vary with the nature and complexity of the role, the rate of change and the particular needs of the work area.

An annual performance review on its own is of no use as, by the time performance is reviewed, objectives either will have been achieved or not and, if the latter, nothing can be done to get performance ‘back on track’ before the end of the current performance review cycle. Hence, at least once a year, there must be a formal and comprehensive face-to-face review. A review will normally be scheduled for 1 hour.

4. When does each review period start and finish?

Flowing from the university’s strategic directions, management and staff use this information to set direction and ideally develop their work area plans. This planning informs PRD planning at the team and individual level, so that each individual works with his or her line manager to develop performance and development plans for the ensuing period which are directly linked to the achievement of their work area’s goals.

PRD begins as soon as a new staff member takes up employment with the university, as part of induction and to set the framework for probation. The review cycle is therefore often based around a person’s appointment date, which makes sense given the linkage to incremental progression. However, the timing of the review cycle is flexible and it is up to the individual work area to decide what works best for them. For instance, given planning is an ongoing process, a work area may choose to have a particular point in time when all PRD reviews are undertaken – rather than base it around a person’s appointment date – but think about this decision in the context of salary increments.
5. How does Performance Review and Development link to salary increments?

Progression to the next increment is subject to performance in the preceding 12 months being satisfactory. The supervisor and staff member are informed of due increments by an automated email from Human Resources, normally 3 months in advance of the notional incremental date. Refer to the Incremental Progression procedures for more information.

If the timing for the annual PRD meeting does not fall within 3 months of the due date for incremental progression, supervisors and staff should meet to do a ‘mini review’ focussed on informing decisions around the increment and, over time, align the full, formal annual PRD meeting with the increment date.

6. Does everything have to be documented? What records will be kept?

The templates designed to support PRD outline the areas to be documented, though it is not expected that there is a need to set out and examine in fine detail all the activities staff are involved in. The purpose is to discuss performance priorities, key objectives for the coming review period, areas where new activity may be planned or where staff may need support for development.

The record of the action plan and key outcomes from the discussion are kept by the supervisor and the staff member in a local secure place for a period of 12 months i.e. until the annual review meeting when the plan is renewed and updated for the next 12 month period. There is no need for a copy of the PRD plan to be sent to HR for storage on personal files.

7. What happens if staff and supervisors are unable to agree on the expectations, goals and/or measures to be achieved?

Provision is made in the template (s) for participants to sign, in order to indicate they understand their PRD plan. There is also provision for comments by both, which enables the staff member to write comments if he/she does not agree with any aspect of the contents of the plan. Remember, though, that a key value of the plan is as a means of identifying the areas, which need to be carried forward, and captured in the next PRD plan. If there is wide-ranging disagreement between a staff member and supervisor around performance expectations, either party may seek guidance from HR or the head of the work area, in working with both parties to resolve the disagreement.

8. How do I recognise excellent performance?

To be most effective, it is vital to recognise performance according to individual needs and wants; so ask staff what kind of recognition they most appreciate. Everyone is different! Make sure you are providing positive feedback, praise and recognition throughout the PRD cycle of excellent performance.

Consider also how you may also use some of the following to recognise excellent performance: an award, preferably given in front of peers (remember the University’s Awards for Outstanding Service), a thank you note, a chance to be on an exciting, leading-edge project or on one of the important steering committees in the university, access to career development opportunities, conference attendance

Supervisors/supervisor/managers should also refer to Recognising and Reward Staff – Guidelines for Supervisors
9. Where can I obtain assistance in undertaking PRD?

Contact your personnel consultant for guidance on implementing PRD in your work area. For training or skill development needs, contact the Staff Development and Training Unit or see courses about PRD at http://www.flinders.edu.au/staffdev/enrol/courses.php?EBC http://www.flinders.edu.au/staffdev/enrol/courses.php?EBB.

STAFF (SUPERVISEE) FAQs

1. Do I have to have an up to date position description in order to participate in PRD?

Performance planning and PRD discussions can begin in the context of the work area’s priorities and what this means for individual roles. Staff may still have their roles described in the form of a duty statement. An important part of the PRD process is the opportunity to review roles and update position descriptions for currency and accuracy. If your position description is not up to date or you still have a duty statement, PRD is the ideal starting point for updating these documents. Clarifying work goals and performance expectations provides the information to not only establish a performance and development plan for the coming review period, but also to update your position description.

2. We have no defined unit/work area plan so how do we do PRD?

The PRD process is the ideal time to discuss the future directions and priorities for the work area. If these are not captured in a formal plan, clarity around the work area objectives can still be gained through discussion, perhaps at a team meeting as well as in your individual conversations with your supervisor. This may be the time to suggest to your manager that to capture work area goals in a formal plan would be useful to everyone and for the team to work together in developing the plan. Your individual position description, potentially along with other plans relevant to your work area, is an important reference point for you in developing your own PRD plan.

3. Can I modify the review template to better suit my role?

Work areas may choose to modify the review templates to suit their local level needs. This is fine, as long as the elements to be included in the annual performance review (refer Procedures section 2.1) are not eliminated. If you as an individual have some ideas about changes to the template, discuss these with your line manager.

4. Who can access and use the information from the PRD process?

The record of the action plan and key outcomes from the discussion are kept by the supervisor and the staff member in a local secure place. In addition, where there is a change of supervisor, it is expected that the staff member's PRD plan would be made available to the incoming supervisor, so this person can gain an understanding of the workplace and staff member roles and responsibilities.

Around these key principles, there is some discretion. Some work areas may agree that:

- a copy of the PRD plan can be sent to the next line manager
• a copy of the training and development needs be sent to Staff Development or a local staff development coordinator
• at the team level, sharing of PRD plans as part of team planning and team development activities may occur.
These are all at the discretion of the local work area.

5. How confidential is the annual review discussion?

Usually only the individual staff member and the supervisor will have access to documentation resulting from the PRD process. The annual formal review record is a document, which remains with the two participants. There is no central file of PRD documentation. Each work area needs to consider at the local level the security of all documentation used in this process. Access to PRD documentation is strictly controlled.

Information should be made available to subsequent supervisors and decision makers, for example, next level line managers and above, for matters including incremental progression, probation management, unsatisfactory performance, and discipline. Furthermore, it will be important for supervisors to discuss with their line manager how PRD is progressing in their area and to provide an overview of key trends and outcomes, such as training and development needs and overall staff morale.

6. I have more than one line manager. What happens in this situation?

Where a dual reporting relationship exists, it is important for the staff member and two managers to discuss how all can contribute to the PRD process. There are various options, for instance, one supervisor takes the lead in the annual formal review, but discusses with the other supervisor their perspective of work goals, priorities, and performance so this can be incorporated into the annual formal review. It may be that the 3 parties agree that all 3 meet as part of the annual formal review, but be mindful of whether this may be intimidating for the staff member and how this approach may compromise upward feedback. Key is that there is some common understanding around how PRD will occur in this situation before the annual review is due.

7. Can the information from the PRD process be used as part of a job application?

Yes. If a staff member wishes to draw on their PRD plan as part of a job application, that is fine.

8. We’re doing our jobs well already and don’t need any further development. Do we really need Performance Review and Development?

If you are already participating in planning, review and feedback sessions in relation to your role in your work area, you may only need to consider if what you are doing can be improved and/or better documented in line with the PRD procedures. If you are not already participating in planning, review and feedback sessions, but believe performance is good and everything is ‘on track’, you are still likely to find that there is room for having effort recognised in a more structured and formal way and that clarity of direction and opportunities for future work challenges are still areas that would benefit from a structured and focused discussion.
9. I'm at the top of my increment. What's in it for me?

Incremental progression is only one small element of PRD. This is the time to gain feedback and recognition of the contribution that you make and your achievements, to enjoy a conversation about your future aspirations, and discuss opportunities to continually develop your knowledge and skills base. Furthermore, you have the opportunity to increase your job satisfaction through setting ‘stretch’ goals that you find motivating and to identify with your supervisor obstacles to you getting your job done and to problem solve how to remove these. In essence it is the process for you to continually enjoy your work and achieve your goals in a positive workplace environment.

10. Performance Review and Development is all very well for some jobs, but in my work I don't need goals as my job is the same every day, so how does it apply to me?

Without doubt, some jobs are more routine than others. Don’t forget though that day to day service delivery and performance standards around undertaking daily work is equally important as defining goals around specific projects or new work. Furthermore, most people can think of improvements to their daily work or process reviews of routine work that need to occur in line with new technology or new working relationships. Remember that PRD is about looking forward and planning for changes to work that may need to occur as change occurs in our workplace.

11. Career progression is not possible in my work area so what's the point of talking about future development goals?

In today’s working environment, having a career doesn’t just mean climbing up the career ladder to increased responsibility. It is about a continuous process of learning whereby we can all keep up with changing roles and therefore can mean:

- continuing to grow in the current role,
- shifting the focus of current work into a new area at the same level,
- developing new skills,
- expanding current skills, or
- shifting to a new career path.
- For some staff, their focus may be on successfully blending life and work, taking a career break to have children or study, or on preparing for retirement.

It is important that staff and managers discuss the future aspirations of staff in their area of responsibility, so that the appropriate workforce planning can be undertaken within the work area.

12. We work as a team, not as individuals. How does Performance Review and Development apply to us?

There will be occasions when more than one individual performs similar tasks or shares responsibility for one particular outcome through teamwork or job-sharing. In such circumstances, the team can work together to establish the nature of the outcomes required, and thereby each individual’s responsibility within the team. Each person’s performance plan should reflect the particular contribution they make, although certain outcomes may appear on the plans for several team members.
13. Do I have to improve in every key area of responsibility each year?

Not necessarily. The idea of PRD is that you and your supervisor work together to determine what strategic developments may occur in your work over the coming review period and therefore where your focus needs to be. It may be that some areas of your work and performance need to be maintained at the current standard, whereas there may be goals to improve in other areas.

14. What happens if plans or development needs are identified with resource implications for the cost centre?

It may be that your discussions raise opportunities or development needs that require resources. It is part of your supervisor’s role to consider opportunities and needs and to make decisions about what may be resourced, to help identify sources of funds or support, and to advocate as appropriate.

15. I don’t think my supervisor understands what I do. How do I deal with this?

There are aspects to everyone’s job that are unknown to others. This is the ideal opportunity to let your supervisor know what you do and talk with him or her about any assistance you need or obstacles you are facing or can foresee with regard to achieving your work.

Furthermore, feedback on your work and performance effectiveness can be gleaned from a variety of sources, not just your supervisor. This enables a more comprehensive and objective approach to performance review and development as it provides feedback from others who work with you or are in contact with you on a regular basis. Useful sources of feedback could include: co-workers or peers who are an invaluable source of information on how you are contributing to the achievement of team outcomes, or to team harmony and morale and/or internal customers, who are in the best position to comment on the effectiveness of the service being provided, and your ‘customer skills’.

16. Is this about managing poor performance?

No. PRD is about assisting both staff and supervisors to reflect on their work and their conduct in achieving work goals as well as to achieve clarity around performance expectations. It is anticipated that regular and meaningful PRD discussions that make performance expectations clear and provide ongoing positive and constructive feedback to staff on their performance will in most cases prevent staff from experiencing difficulties in meeting performance expectations relevant to their position.

Should any staff member (either a supervisor or an employee) experience difficulties in meeting the agreed performance expectations for their position, PRD discussions are an appropriate forum to address performance issues. If a person has not performed / behaved in line with expectations, constructive feedback can be used to highlight where and why performance was not up to the expectations and explore how it might be done better next time. Taking a constructive problem solving and coaching approach will more likely encourage learning and be a positive way of improving future performance.
17. I'm on a fixed term contract. Does PRD apply to me?

PRD applies to all general staff (other than casual staff), who are employed on a continuing basis or employed on a fixed-term appointment which exceeds 12 months.

**SUPERVISOR FAQS**

1. I am uncomfortable talking with people about their performance – it seems like I’m ‘checking up’ on them. How can I handle this?

   Perhaps the most significant strategy to enable you to work with PRD as a supervisor is the coaching process.

   See yourself as a coach and your role as facilitating staff to work through job-related problems with the aim of learning new skills and know-how and continually improving their performance – rather than as needing to ‘check up’ on staff. In this way, both you and your staff will enjoy the PRD experience as a problem solving and learning process necessary to enhance performance, as opposed to a traditional appraisal process. PRD is not about ‘spying on’ or ‘tricking’ staff. It is about supervisors and staff working together to plan work and facilitate the achievement of goals.

   To operate effectively as a manager-coach, you may need to reflect on your capacity to provide feedback, question and guide effectively and, if necessary, build on your skills or confidence in these areas. This would be useful to discuss with your line manager in the context of your own development plan. It may also be helpful to discuss your discomfort with a colleague or a mentor.

2. What will happen if people I supervise are not performing to the expected standards?

   Where it is clearly identified that performance is not to the expected standards, it is important that this be addressed quickly. Immediate action in such situations ensures that performance problems do not become entrenched. It also provides a clear signal that the University expects a certain level of performance and that the level being delivered is not acceptable. Entrenched poor performance is more challenging for both staff and supervisors to address.

   In such instances, it is likely that it will be necessary to implement structured counselling. Refer the General Staff Performance Review and Development Framework for further information. Further advice and guidance must be sought from your Personnel Consultant before beginning structured counselling.

3. How does it apply for staff on probation?

   PRD begins as soon as a new staff member takes up employment with the University, as part of induction and to set the framework for probation. It is important that supervisors introduce new staff to the concept of PRD as part of their induction, as well as make them aware of the University’s framework, procedures and other supporting documentation. Refer to the Performance Management website.

   To manage probation appropriately, supervisors introduce new staff to an overview of their work area’s directions as well as performance expectations and the expected
outcomes of their role. In effect, the work goals and performance objectives are
established at the beginning of the probationary period and, on confirmation of the
appointment, are reviewed and a longer term PRD plan established and confirmed with
the staff member. Refer to the Probation Procedures for General Staff for details of
the probationary process.

4. How do I do PRD with staff located off campus/in a remote area?

One benefit of establishing a clear PRD plan with individuals is that it facilitates staff to
manage their own performance – because they have clear goals and can track against
measures how they are going in achieving them. Where staff are located off campus,
PRD is therefore an ideal tool for self management!

That said, face to face meetings either in person or via videolink are useful at strategic
points - to communicate at the outset about objectives and expectations and to
commence the process of establishing the plan, and to provide feedback and ongoing
recognition in a more personal forum throughout the cycle. In between, phone
conversations and email exchange are useful mechanisms for finalising plans and
communicating on an ongoing basis around issues throughout the PRD cycle. A face
to face meeting for the annual PRD review meeting would be important.

Human Resources Division
13 February 2008