

Guidance rationale

This generic guidance underpins the Personal Review and Development Plan (PRDP) for all job families within Imperial College (clinical academics undergo a joint process with their appropriate Trust for which the principles remain the same). It outlines principles and good practice and is useful for appraisers and appraisees. This guidance covers:

- What is a PRDP?
- The aims of PRDPs
- Conditions for success
- Maximising the PRDP process
- Understanding the paperwork
- Challenges to effective PRDPs
- Further sources of support

Effective PRDP conversations are supported by [Imperial Expectations](#).

What is a PRDP?

A PRDP is an annual conversation that focuses both on the previous year's work and plans for the forthcoming year. It is recommended that PRDPs take place on a regular annual cycle, in line with local requirements. The conversation in a PRDP is broader in focus than in more regular one-to-ones. Time should be specifically allocated to cover a review of the previous year and to discuss and agree specific aims and objectives for the next year, which should include details of personal and career development and aspirations.

The aims and benefits of a PRDP

When PRDPs are done well they make a positive contribution to strengthening motivation and a sense of engagement. They help people understand how their contribution fits in with the work of the wider team or department. The appraisee's work is appreciated and recognised. All of this strengthens individual productivity and potential, and the development of a motivated, energetic workforce. PRDPs are undertaken within the framework of [Imperial Expectations](#) where communication is open and honest, views and thoughts are explored and respected, and there is a focus on supporting staff to develop and make the most of their abilities.

In short PRDPs:

- Celebrate achievements
- Enhance performance
- Help staff to develop their careers
- Identify individual development plans

Conditions for successful PRDPs

It is important that the designated appraiser is someone well acquainted with the work and conduct of the appraisee. This will, in all but a very few cases, be the person who oversees, directs, or approves the work of the appraisee. In most circumstances this will be the line manager, PI, etc. On occasion (e.g. PI stationed abroad) this may prove inappropriate and in these circumstances, and with senior management (e.g. HoD) approval, an alternative may be allocated. Those who consider their group to be excessively large may wish to delegate some of their appraiser responsibilities. If so, this should be done in such a manner that the appraisees still gain the benefits of a good appraisal.

PRDPs work best when:

- Both appraiser and appraisee are committed to the process, plan for the meeting, and use it constructively.
- They build on a foundation of good communication and regular feedback.
- They operate as a quality conversation with the emphasis on the conversation rather than diligently completing a form, and is referred to throughout the year as a means of checking and celebrating progress.

Maximising the PRDP process

Before the PRDP meeting:

- It can be helpful to remind all staff when local deadlines are approaching, with information on the relevant paperwork, and any local agreements for sharing and retention of forms.
- The appraiser usually starts the process by alerting the appraisee, in line with their departmental calendar. However, an appraisee can also alert the appraiser if, for whatever reason, they think their PRDP is overdue.
- Both parties should look at last year's PRDP or probation paperwork, as appropriate, and take time to gather their thoughts and views.
- At the preparatory stage input may be sought from a variety of sources (e.g. mentors, stakeholders, customers) with both parties agreement.
- The parties should agree the location and timing of the meeting – find a place that offers a degree of comfort, is free from distractions, and allows for a confidential conversation.

During the PRDP meeting:

- PRDPs can take between 45 and 90 minutes; however, they usually take about 60 minutes.
- Allocate the available time across the three parts of the PRDP and decide who will record the key points. Either party can take the notes; both need to keep a copy. Check local arrangements and, if required, ensure a copy is sent to a departmental administrator or Head of Department.
- **Review** the last year's work - both appraiser and appraisee have valid perspectives to offer:
 - *What were the achievements of last year/what are we proud of?*
 - *What were the challenges and what was learnt?*
 - *Talk about the extent to which last year's objectives were met. What helped or hindered?*Where differences of opinion occur these need to be explored in the spirit of both parties understanding what occurred and reaching agreement about extracting learning and implications for the future:
 - *I can see we have different views on this.*
 - *What would you have needed to manage it better?*
 - *This is what I needed in order to view it as successful.*
 - *What can we learn from this?*
- Focus on the **forthcoming year** - the appraiser may offer information about the direction the team or department is going, the strategic objectives, and any challenges or changes that they know about. The ensuing discussion should result in a number of objectives that suit the needs and style of the appraisee and build on departmental goals within the strategic plan. Wherever possible objectives should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound or Timely.
 - *What existing tasks need further development?*
 - *How can the skills and experience discussed be built on within the forthcoming year?*
- Identify personal (individual) **development plans** - this starts with a discussion about the new skills and knowledge that would enhance capacity and capability to meet the objectives for the forthcoming year as well as supporting more long term development and career aspirations. For many people this is the only opportunity they have to talk with someone more knowledgeable/experienced about their career aspirations.
 1. *What new skills or knowledge would be of help in the forthcoming year?*
 2. *What approach to learning is most likely to have a positive impact?*
 3. *What is available within the College/elsewhere?*
 4. *How does it fit in with wider aspirations?*

During the **development planning** part of the meeting, issues such as changes to the job description, job reviews, and possible promotion aspirations or possibilities may be explored in more detail.

After the PRDP meeting:

- The paperwork needs to be completed and copies made.
- Local administration or HR should be informed that the meeting has taken place.
- PRDPs may be reviewed by the Head of Department/appraiser's line manager – this is dependent on local requirements.
- The PRDP should be jointly reviewed during the year at the six month point as a minimum. This enables progress in meeting objectives and implementing the development plan to be discussed and further action to be agreed as necessary.
- Both parties have an ongoing responsibility to review and to take action.

Challenges to effective PRDPs

No feedback has been given during the course of the year:

- Lack of on-going feedback makes PRDPs more difficult and may well be a symptom of wider problems in the relationship or nature of the job.
- Lack of feedback – appreciation, positive and constructive feedback – should be discussed in the PRDP with plans to rectify any absence of this in the forthcoming year.
- Feedback in the PRDP will need to be balanced and of an amount that is useful to the appraisee. The appraisee needs to be able to absorb the feedback. It should not be an excuse for the appraiser to get everything off their chest.

Unresolved performance issues have not been addressed before the PRDP:

- Performance issues should not be saved up for an annual PRDP but raised and explored as swiftly as possible.
- The appraiser should schedule a separate and earlier meeting to discuss and resolve the specific performance issues, and use the PRDP to discuss the breadth of the appraisee's job of which the performance issue is likely to be only one aspect.
- If the performance issues are overwhelming they should be addressed and the PRDP postponed.

Differences of opinion between appraiser and appraisee cannot be resolved:

- An exploration of the different perspectives can be useful as a first step to resolving the situation.
- Asking for more information and each party aiming to understand the other more fully are useful techniques in this situation.
- Both parties are responsible for tackling differences of opinion swiftly and constructively.
- If the issue is relatively insignificant, agree to record the differences and move on.
- If the issue is significant and the exploration has not generated results it may be necessary to involve a third party – possibly the appraiser's line manager.
- If the relationship is working well and there have been regular one-to-ones and exchange of feedback it reduces the likelihood that immovable differences will emerge during the PRDP.

Relationship to pay/promotion:

- Clearly there is a relationship between the actions discussed in an appraisal and the judgements made concerning pay and promotion. However, these activities should not be conducted concurrently.

Understanding the paperwork

The College produces PRDP forms as templates to support meaningful PRDPs. They are *prompts*, to shape and support meaningful conversations. They suggest topics to be covered and provide a basic means of recording the most useful areas of the PRDP conversation. The forms include an achievement scale to help quantify and describe progress in support of the conversation. These achievement scales are *not compulsory*; they offer a shared language to help the appraisee and appraiser define achievements.

To reflect the general differences in roles and responsibilities, sample forms have been created as follows:

1. PRDP form 2015 – Academic version
2. PRDP form 2015 – Learning and Teaching version
3. PRDP form 2015 – Professional, Technical, and Operational Services version
4. PRDP form 2015 – Research Family: Postdoc and Fellow version

In general these should suffice, but departments may create their own documentation so long as they contain the core elements of review, job and career planning, and refer directly to Imperial Expectations and responsibilities for safety, security, equality and diversity, etc. Departments wishing to vary the documentation must clear their version with a Learning and Development Centre Consultant to ensure that guidelines are met.

Both parties should have a copy of the completed PRDP form so that it can be reviewed at appropriate times during the year and used as a benchmark at the following year's PRDP. It is meant to be a 'living' document.

Further sources of support

Further sources of support for development may be sought by the appraisee including [mentoring](#), the Imperial College [Coaching Academy](#), the [Educational Development Unit](#), the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Centre the [Learning and Development Centre](#), and the [Postdoc Development Centre](#).

LDC also offers a range of programmes to develop skills and knowledge that underpin effective PRDPs:

- [Imperial Leadership and Management Development Programme](#) is aimed at leaders, managers, and supervisors.
- [Imperial Professional Development Programme](#) focuses on developing key skills, knowledge, and attitudes expected for effective performance across all roles.

The Equality Diversity and Inclusion Centre provides advice about adjustments for staff and how people can get involved in supporting equality and diversity.

The Postdoc Development Centre provides tailored support for postdocs and fellows.

The Educational Development Unit can support applications for the Imperial College [Supporting Teaching Accreditation and Recognition \(STAR\) Framework](#), designed for those who teach and support student learning.