

Explanation of Appraisal for Project Supervisors to share with student-researchers

When people join an organisation or company, they are usually required to take part in some form of appraisal system. This enables the organisation to ensure that its employees are working towards its goals; and for the employee to clarify their role in meeting these goals and any development needs they have for their present work and future career plans. At Queen Mary the appraisal system is conceived as a dialogue between an employee and a more senior colleague in the same work area (usually a line manager). The dialogue focusses on:

- What the person is expected to achieve in the coming period
- How s/he would like to develop during the coming period and further in the future.
- The resources s/h will need to succeed

We are drawing on Queen Mary's model to frame your research work-experience. We hope it will help make the experience purposeful and meaningful, as well as prepare you for similar evaluative systems you are likely to encounter in the work place.

Guidance on Setting Objectives

The idea of setting objectives as part of an appraisal process is to help you identify, plan and manage your research activities and work on the project you are involved in. They can also serve as a useful reminder at a later date, when you are fully immersed in the project and might want to take stock of your progress.

Writing objectives does take practice and in many appraisal systems in the workplace, employees are given guidance on how best to approach writing their objectives. A common acronym you may have heard used is SMART when describing objectives, i.e.: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-related.

Here are edited extracts from Queen Mary's guidelines on writing objectives (available on the HR website). If you substitute 'the research project' for Queen Mary, it should begin to make sense:

Objectives are agreed statements of intent that benefit both Queen Mary and the individual. They are tailored to the individual, arising out of a combination of their work responsibilities, interests and ambitions, as well as the aims and needs of Queen Mary. Objectives should be proposed by the appraisee in the first instance. They are expressed as outcomes and are not detailed descriptions of how work is to be done. They should not constrain the freedom of enquiry and expression enshrined in the tradition of academic freedom.

Objectives should help individuals move forward on their career paths as well as contributing to the Department/School/Institute. Whilst a firm statement of intent, some objectives will inevitably change in the face of shifting circumstances and opportunities. Objectives are expressed with as much clarity as possible to avoid subsequent uncertainty as to whether they were achieved. Objectives should be:

Specific. The outcome is tangible and concrete.

Measurable. Describe the features of a successful outcome. Some may be quantifiable. Where it is not possible to quantify, the challenge is: has the outcome been described sufficiently clearly that both sides know what success would look like?

Achievable. Objectives should be achievable by the appraisee in normal working time and within the control of the individual, in the anticipated context, including the resources likely to be available.

Relevant. Objectives must be relevant to the activities and ambitions of the appraisee.

Time-related. Objectives have a deadline which should be appropriate to the nature of the work.