**GUIDANCE FOR PIs/REVIEWERS**

**Researcher’s Career & Development Review**

****

This document provides additional information for principal investigators and others conducting researchers’ career and development reviews, and supplements the ‘Researcher’s Career & Development’ form, which has instructions about the Career & Development Review (CDR) process and questions for the researcher to complete. Please review that form and read the guidance below, which outlines good practice and provides tips for conducting the actual CDR meeting with the researcher.

**Before the meeting**

1. **Date/Time/Location**: Set a mutually convenient date and time for the meeting, and allocate enough time to complete the CDR (approximately one hour). Consider the appropriate location for the meeting, and ensure that it is a quiet, private, and professional space (with minimal distractions) where the researcher feels comfortable discussing her/his career and potentially sensitive issues.
2. **Review CV and CDR form**: Carefully read the researcher’s CV and CDR form that s/he was instructed to fill out and send to you at least a week before the meeting. Jot down your suggestions for possible changes to the CV and advice on how the researcher can achieve her/his career goals. S/he will appreciate that you have taken the time to review the documents in advance and to give thoughtful feedback. Remember, the objectives of CDR are to give researchers an opportunity to reflect on their current work and develop an ambitious career plan for the future.

**During the meeting**

1. **Give an introduction and brief overview**: Giving a short summary of what will happen at the meeting at the outset will give some structure to the meeting and help put the researcher at ease by setting the tone for a relaxed and confidential discussion. The structure is flexible – you may want to go through the CV or CDR form sections to prompt discussion, or start off by asking the researcher where she/he wants to be in a year’s time. Remind her/him that CDR is not linked in any way to references, discipline, reappointment or promotion. Check that the researcher understands and agrees with the process/structure of the meeting that you had in mind. It may be helpful to begin by asking the researcher what s/he hopes to get out of this meeting to ensure that it is useful and meets expectations. (If you cannot meet an expectation, explain why not and say what you can do.)
2. **Let them talk:** An important thing to remember is that this is *the researcher’s* meeting, so encourage them to talk, give their views and reflect. Listen as much as possible and encourage them to suggest ideas and to come to valid conclusions.
3. **Be flexible**: Each meeting can differ substantially depending on the researcher. Some individuals may be clear about their goals and have specific questions for you; while others may not have given much thought to their career progression and you may have to help steer the conversation. Considering the University’s international staff profile, keep in mind that there may be cultural differences and varying understandings or expectations of what a career and development meeting is meant to entail. Adjust your approach as needed and be flexible.
4. **Providing constructive feedback**: In helping researchers identify further actions to take to enhance their experience to meet their career goals, do not forget to recognise good performance and achievements! This can be an opportunity to say thank you for work well done and to show your appreciation. You may assume that the researcher knows how highly you regard them and their work, but it can be encouraging to actually hear that.

To be constructive, your feedback should be:

* Balanced – seeing the positive as well as the negative;
* Forward looking – focusing on how to achieve desired goals; and
* Supportive – offering any guidance and help needed.

When addressing areas for improvement, be specific. For example, ‘your writing is not strong enough’ is vague and unhelpful; instead, give particular examples and suggest ways to improve. Along with being specific about the issue, be specific about possible actions. Additionally, avoid using absolutes like ‘never’, ‘ever’, ‘always’, etc., as those usually exaggerate the case and elicit defensive responses. You are sharing *your* opinion and expertise. The goal is to open up a dialogue and act as a guide. Encourage them to talk to others to get a range of opinions and advice.

Take care in giving feedback and do it in a way that is thoughtful and authentic. Be aware of your tone and body language – it is not just the words that you use to convey a message.

1. **Difficult conversations**: There may be times when you have to give honest, critical feedback that needs to be conveyed (for everyone’s benefit), but can be difficult to do. These conversations, while potentially uncomfortable, are important to have. If they are couched in terms of concern for the individual rather than merely criticism or judgement, that sets the foundation for a constructive – even positive – experience.
   1. **Poor performance**: A CDR meeting is generally not the place to raise new performance issues, as these matters should generally be dealt with as and when they arise rather than at a much later time. Nevertheless, ‘poor performance’ or areas for improvement may arise. Again, be specific and suggest options/actions. Focus on the facts and on the behaviour rather than the person. Explain the impact of the behaviour or poor performance on others or the project. Invite their response to understand their perspective (e.g. ‘I’d like to hear your thoughts’ or ‘what is your reaction to this?’); there may be something you are not fully understanding or aware of. Ask for their ideas on how their performance could be improved and what support they may need.
   2. **Unreasonable career goals based on existing experience**: No one likes to be told that they cannot do something (and that might even prompt a stronger response to prove you wrong), but in some cases, given the evidence at hand, certain career goals may be extremely unlikely (e.g. given the low number of publications a researcher has, a permanent academic post is likely to be out of reach). Be honest with your opinion and explain how you formed that viewpoint, giving examples where appropriate. Encourage them to consider alternative goals (e.g. ‘I’m worried that if you go down this route\_\_\_’, or ‘I see that you have a strong interest in \_\_, have you considered this\_\_?’ or ‘what do you think about\_\_?’).
   3. **Personal issues affecting work**: It is common for people to think that personal issues should stay out of the workplace, but those matters typically do not. Invariably things like poor physical or mental health, family concerns or tragedies, broken relationships, and the myriad of personal concerns ‘outside of work’ can affect performance. Recognising that fact rather than pretending everything else shuts off when a person comes to the office can help lead to more honest and productive conversations. Understanding a researcher’s career path or journey can also give you a fuller picture. For example, the researcher may have taken a career break for caring or health reasons, which can help explain why her/his publication record is less strong; and then you can provide appropriate advice.

Of course, you are not expected to be a professional counsellor, so if the conversation veers too far away from the focus of the meeting (i.e. issues concerning career development and progression), you can acknowledge that and bring the discussion back to the aim of the meeting. Importantly, if you feel that the person would benefit from additional help or resources, you can direct them to Departmental HR Manager or Administrator, or Occupational Health Services, <https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/uohs/>. The point is, you do not need to immediately shy away from personal circumstances that a researcher may bring up; an open conversation can lead to a better understanding of your team members.

* 1. **Inappropriate behaviour in the workplace**: Similar to ‘poor performance’, a CDR meeting is generally not the place to bring these matters up in the first instance. Any inappropriate behaviour, bullying or harassment needs to be addressed immediately once you become aware of it. In these situations or any others you are unsure about, please contact your Departmental HR Manager or Administrator \_\_\_\_\_.

1. **Help develop objectives for the next 6-12 months.** Review the area(s) that the researcher felt s/he needed the most work in, and help suggest specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely objectives. Help the researcher identify the training and support s/he may need to complete the objectives. Ideally help the researcher select and prioritise 3-5 objectives to work towards.
2. **Summarise**: Give a short summary of the key points, and see that the researcher has understood what you have said and know what the next steps are. Reiterate that you are here to help them succeed. Check if they have any questions or need further clarification.

**After the meeting**

1. **Complete and revise the CDR form as needed**: Make any changes to the form that is needed and submit it to\_\_\_\_\_\_. Retain a copy for your records and for follow-up, and give one to the researcher. Encourage the researcher to keep a record of their actions against the objectives. [Adjust if online.]

1. **Encourage on-going discussion and support**: The CDR meeting, while completed, is not the end of the process. As a result of the meeting, researchers have identified short and long term goals to achieve. Regularly check in with them to see how things are going, and give encouragement and feedback as appropriate. Showing your support will go a long way towards enhanced morale, better engagement, and higher productivity.

Any further questions, please contact \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Resources and Further Information**:

**Central University**

[University’s Support for Researchers webpage](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers?wssl=1): central portal for researchers to understand the support provided by the University, ranging from career advice, to help finding research funding, to resources for those new to Oxford.

[Oxford Research Staff Society (OxRSS):](https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/connecting-other-researchers/oxford-research-staff-society?wssl=1)this group organises social and professional networking activities across departments and divisions; and serves as a collective voice for researchers employed by the University.

[Oxford Learning Institute](https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/): provides personal and professional development opportunities for all staff, with specific courses for researchers.

[The Careers Service](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/research-staff-options-2/): offers careers support and advice for researchers, and has a Careers Advisor dedicated to assisting researchers and DPhils.

[IT Service](http://www.it.ox.ac.uk/do/training-and-facilities): there are a broad range of IT courses available, both classroom-based and online, for all staff.

**MPLS Division**

[MPLS Postdoctoral Researchers webpage](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/postdocs): includes information on divisional training courses, career development reviews, and fellowship and grant applications.

[Oxford Sparks](http://www.oxfordsparks.ox.ac.uk/content/researchers): this is a public engagement portal run through the MPLS Division, which seeks to share our amazing science with everyone, and provides a range of courses for researchers to learn about and explore public engagement and science communication, including introductory courses, practical workshops and one-to-one support.

[MPLS Enterprise Programme](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/enterprise): offers opportunities for researchers, staff and students to become more informed and active in the Oxford entrepreneurial ecosystem through a series of Enterprise courses and events. The [Enterprising Oxford](http://www.eship.ox.ac.uk/) portal makes it easy for everyone who is interested to find out more and to participate actively in this rapidly developing area.

[Outreach activities](https://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/schools-liaison): a number of opportunities to reach out to students and schools are available through departments, MPLS and central University.

[Springboard development programme for women](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/springboard-programme-for-women): MPLS Division runs a researcher-specific Springboard programme tailored to the needs of postdocs, researchers and graduate research students to develop core personal effectiveness skills in the context of the research environment and research careers. There is also a broader Springboard programme for all staff run through the [Oxford Learning Institute](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/support/women/programmes/springboard/).

[Navigator development programme for men](http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/training/course-programme-for-graduate-students/navigator-development-programme-for-men): this programme helps men to identify the clear and practical steps they want to take in their lives, and then develop the skills and determination to achieve their personal and career goals.

**Department**

[INCLUDE DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT/TRAINING AND WEBPAGES]