

Unit Four

Personal and professional development of health care assistants from an education provider's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- *define the process of personal and professional development*
- *identify opportunities for education providers to support practices and health care assistants (HCAs) with the personal development and appraisal process*
- *provide you with templates and resources developed and used by others.*

What is personal and professional development?

Personal and professional development is a continual process of evaluating learning needs and planning learning to meet those needs. This is underpinned by a system of regular appraisal to review progress and plan future actions. Documenting this process in a personal development plan (PDP) helps the employee and the practice to prioritise and monitor the development process, and to take appropriate action to support the individual.

The role of the education provider

General practices and HCAs will need the support of education providers to get the most out of the personal and professional development process. In particular, education providers can:

1. *support the process of appraisal*
2. *support, train and develop appraisers*
3. *help HCAs to know how to prepare PDPs and collect material for appraisal*
4. *provide the educational resources needed to meet the learning needs identified in PDPs and appraisals*
5. *enable tutors and supervisors to broaden support for continuing professional development for HCAs*
6. *ensure that appraisers accredit (sign off) PDPs satisfactorily*
7. *support, refine, define and establish appraisal outcomes.*

Where the education provider is part of the local NHS, eg PCT or workforce development confederation (WDC), there may be a role in assessing and evaluating the quality of the appraisal process.

Evaluation of the appraisal programme

The appraisal programme itself requires evaluation. Evaluation is a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of conceptualisation, design, implementation and utility of appraisal programmes (see *Unit 9: Completing the cycle – evaluation*).

There are few recommendations about how the appraisal programme can be evaluated, but the following are useful guides when considering evaluation:

- *look at how well it achieves the aims set out for it*
- *consider what appraisal is for from the perspectives of all the key players involved.*

See *Tool - Evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of appraiser facilitation of a PDP* and *Tool - Self-check of communication knowledge and skills as an appraiser* to assist in aiding appraisers and practices in evaluating the appraiser's skills.

It is essential that it is clear who will be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the appraisal programme. Responsibility should be agreed with the PCT or other commissioner of education.

The process of evaluation

There are two main steps involved in evaluating the appraisal process.

- 1. Assess** *how individuals develop following an appraisal and then assess the appraisers to measure how well they have performed in their role.*
- 2. Evaluate** *(measure) how effective the appraisal process itself was in delivering any such development or change.*

Elements of these aspects of assessment should be incorporated into an evaluation of an appraisal programme. In particular, the performance of appraisers may well be a key component in evaluating how well an appraisal programme trained those appraisers. Ultimately, whether an individual member of staff's personal development is enhanced following an effective appraisal, with subsequent improvements in patient care, is a key factor to try and evaluate.

The Department of Health has made extensive investment in the implementation of appraisal in the NHS. An assessment of the effectiveness of the completed appraisal programme is therefore key. This is sometimes called a **product** or **summative evaluation** and is often carried out by **independent observers**. It is desirable to look at programme quality during the earlier stages – sometimes called **process** or **formative evaluation**. This is often carried out by development personnel within an organisation, or even by key participants in the process, and includes feedback from those involved. Education providers might evaluate appraisal from four perspectives¹ (see Table: *Evaluating appraisal – the four sectors*).¹

Evaluating appraisal – the four sectors¹

Evaluation	Measure	Question
Reaction	Satisfaction or happiness	What is the participant's response to the appraisal programme?
Learning	Knowledge or skills acquired Modification of attitudes or perceptions	What did the participant learn?
Behaviour	Transfer of learning to workplace	Did the participant's learning affect their behaviour?
Results	Transfer or impact on society	Did changes in the participant's behaviour affect their organisation? Were any benefits or problems noted as a result of these changes?

Evaluation of personal development plans

In some ways, the most tangible outcome of an individual's appraisal is the PDP. This might also be the most relevant aspect to evaluate in terms of the quality of an appraisal conversation.

To be truly effective, an evaluation tool needs to go beyond how many PDPs were completed to try and make a judgement about how appropriate the learning aims and methods were for a particular individual, and whether any changes influenced patient care (see [Unit 9: Completing the cycle – evaluation](#)). Instructional aids on how to write or help facilitate the development of a PDP exist.^{1,2}

Who undertakes the evaluation of PDPs?

- *Learning lead for the PCT.*
- *General practice or nurse tutor.*
- *Supervisor of appraiser training.*

Consider the evaluation tool in [Tool - Evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of appraiser facilitation of a PDP](#).

This is to be used after the appraisal has finished. An organisation wishing to use this tool to evaluate this aspect of appraisal would additionally need to decide what 'score' would be acceptable, both for an individual appraised and across the organisation's appraisal programme. The PCT, learning tutors within the PCT and education providers need to be able to examine PDPs and the resultant action plans in order to plan for future learning needs, and assess the adequacy of PDPs and their review.

Summary

- *Education providers have three potential roles in supporting practices in personal and professional development:*
 - *supporting best practice in appraisal processes by general practice*
 - *supporting assessors, practices and HCAs to get the most out of the process*
 - *supporting HCAs to participate fully in the appraisal process.*
- *Education providers are in an excellent position to evaluate the appraisal process and the quality of PDPs produced by practices.*
- *Education providers will need to deliver a mixture of learning styles and course lengths to meet the needs of practices, appraisers and HCAs.*

References

1. Chambers R, Tavabie A, Mohanna K, Wakley G. *The Good Appraisal Toolkit for Primary Care*. Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing; 2004.
2. Wakley G, Chambers R. *Continuing Professional Development in Primary Care*. Oxford: Radcliffe Medical Press; 2000.