

Annex A



Northern Ireland
Assembly



Introduction

Having effective performance conversations is fundamental to the success of the Assembly Secretariat ('the Secretariat') achieving its business objectives. This guidance is designed to assist you in understanding the Secretariat's approach to managing and developing performance. We have created a flexible and less bureaucratic approach to managing and developing performance, and you will note that some aspects of the approach are at the discretion of you and your line manager.

Goals

The approach to managing and developing performance in the Secretariat is based on the following goals:

- **Quality Dialogue** – a focus on regular, high-quality conversations linked to corporate objectives, skills and behaviours, professional development, well-being and recognition;
- **Manager as Coach** – the promotion of a coaching style of management to help staff build their competence and confidence;
- **Staff Accountability** – a shift in mindset so that staff understand that they need to take ownership of their own performance and development;
- **Timely Feedback** – a 'real-time' approach to feedback;
- **Simplified Approach** – a focus on the performance conversation and not form filling.

How is performance defined?

Performance is not only *what* we do in our jobs but also *how* we do it. The *what* is the activities that we undertake in order to get our work done, whereas the *how* is about the skills and behaviours that we use to get our work done. The Assembly values of

- professionalism in everything we do,
- respect for each other, Members and the public,

- impartiality and integrity in all our work

are the foundation blocks of how you should do your job. You should also refer to the Assembly Skills and Behaviours [\(insert link\)](#), which sets out the skills and behaviours we expect staff to demonstrate when delivering their work.

What is expected of me as a staff member?

The only person who can ultimately change and improve your performance is you! You own your performance, and your line manager manages it. Therefore, it is crucial that you fully engage in the process. By engaging we expect you to:

- ensure you have clarity about what is expected of you in your job and to what standard;
- seek feedback on your performance through your regular performance conversations;
- take on board the guidance and coaching you receive from managers and others;
- think about better ways to achieve the required results;
- develop a deeper understanding of how your role contributes to the services of the Secretariat;
- take responsibility for your development and career;
- arrange to meet with your line manager for your regular performance and Big Picture Performance conversations; and
- learn from others.

What is expected of me as a line manager?

As a line manager, you need to support your staff member in the management and development of their performance. To support your staff member, we expect you to:

- provide clarity about what is expected of them and to what standard;
- give sufficient feedback to let them know if they are delivering;

- ensure you meet with your staff member for regular performance and Big Picture conversations; and
- provide a range of support if they need it. This support will vary but can include coaching, mentoring, flexibility to attend training, job shadowing, managing work-life balance etc.

What are the types of performance conversations I will have with my line manager?

To manage and develop performance, there need to be frequent and effective performance conversations between you and your line manager. Performance conversations will vary in formality, but we expect them to happen in three ways:

Day to day...



'In the Moment' performance conversations

Monthly...



Regular performance conversations

Every four months...



'Big Picture' performance conversations

'In the moment' Performance Conversations

These are the day-to-day, informal discussions you have with your line manager about work queries that arise. Such conversations are usually to provide advice and/or resolve issues to

allow you to get on with your job and to acknowledge a piece of work that has been done well.

Regular Performance Conversations

This is where you and your line manager meet regularly to discuss your performance and development. The importance of these discussions cannot be overstated. This is how you agree what is expected of you and to what standard; it is where you review how things are going while there is still time to alter your course when needed; and it is how you bring ideas, problems and concerns to each other that can affect the decisions you make and the work you do.

It is also an opportunity to consider whether you are fulfilling your development potential and discuss with your manager opportunities for your personal development. These regular performance conversations also provide an opportunity to discuss your well-being, how you are managing your work-life balance and any additional support you might need.

We expect these conversations to take place once a month, although you and your line manager may agree to meet more frequently if that is more suitable. Someone new to their job will need more frequent performance conversations, but this will likely reduce with the passage of time.

'Big Picture' Performance Conversations

This is where you and your line manager meet every four months to discuss a number of questions that are linked to the achievement of the corporate strategy. These questions are designed to help relate the corporate strategy to your daily work, and they will be discussed between managers and staff right across the Secretariat. The questions to be discussed can be found here [\[insert link\]](#), and they will be updated by Secretariat Management Group as the corporate strategy evolves.

Please note: if a 'Big Picture' performance conversation is due in a particular month, we do not expect you to also have a Regular performance conversation in that same month.

What are the key features of the approach to managing and developing performance?

Setting Objectives

You and your line manager should discuss whether you should establish and record job and/or development objectives for the period ahead on the performance management software. Staff members will differ on this. In respect to job objectives, some staff will wish to have all of their normal day-to-day objectives recorded and others will only wish to record those objectives that do not form part of their normal day-to-day tasks.

It is for your line manager to make the final decision as to what objectives are to be recorded, but your views will be taken on board. If your line manager considers that you should record job and/or development objectives for the period ahead on the performance management software, they will explain their reasons to you.

If you are deputised or temporarily promoted into a higher graded post, then you must record the main job and development objectives associated with the higher post on the performance management software.

If you are being managed under the Probation Policy, specific job and development objectives are to be discussed between you and your line manager and must be recorded on the performance management software. Following the successful completion of your probation period, you and your line manager should discuss whether you should continue to record job and/or development objectives for the period ahead.

Setting up the Performance Conversations

We expect you to arrange to meet with your line manager for your Regular performance conversations and Big Picture performance conversations using the new performance management software. The performance management software will keep a record of the date and time of the conversation and will link to your calendar on MS Outlook.

For those staff without individual personal computers, performance conversations will be arranged by a central coordinator within the Business Area.

Managers with larger numbers of staff may wish to have the performance conversations on dedicated days each month. If that is the preferred approach, the manager will need to communicate those dates to their staff members.

Preparing for your Performance Conversation

In preparation for your performance conversations, you should reflect on your work and the progress made since the last time you met with your line manager and review any issues/actions that you were expected to address. You should reflect not only on what you have done but on how you have carried out your work referring to the Assembly Skills and Behaviours as necessary. Bring to the conversation any thoughts about how you can enhance your contribution to your team/office goals.

If you are a manager, you should reflect on your staff member's work and progress since the last performance conversation and prepare to discuss any issues and resulting actions that need to be addressed by the staff member. Using coaching-type questions, you should encourage your staff member to lead the conversation and to think about what they have done and how they have done it referencing the Assembly Skills and Behaviours as necessary.

Recording the Performance Conversation

The level of detail which you wish to record about your performance conversations is really for you and your line manager to discuss and agree. Some staff members like to record lots of detail on what they have done in their job, as it can act as a good reminder when they need to refer to that information (say) for a future recruitment competition.

At the very minimum, you must record any issues that have arisen during the performance conversations with your line manager and any actions that you have agreed to take forward. The record will be agreed with your line manager.

All information pertaining to your performance conversations must all be recorded on the performance management software.

All learning and development records, e.g. attendance at a conference or training course, will still be recorded on the central Human Resources system. If the learning and development has been organised by the Human Resources Office, then they will record it on to the system. If the learning and development is done more informally, e.g. job shadowing in the Secretariat, you will need to record this on to the system.

What if I disagree with my line manager's comments on my performance?

Your line manager should be able to justify all of the comments that they make about your performance during the performance conversations. If you disagree with them, you should be able to produce evidence to explain and justify your point of view.

In the event that you and your line manager cannot reach agreement on this matter, you can note this on a performance disagreement form which can be requested from the Human Resources Office. The Human Resources Office will also advise you on the disagreement process.

What happens if my performance falls below the standard expected of me?

If your performance falls below the standard expected of you, your line manager may invoke the Capability Policy procedures ([attach link](#)).

Questions?

If you have any questions about the application of this guidance, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Resources Office.