

1 Appraisal Policy

The firm is committed to providing a working environment where staff can achieve their potential, at the same time making a contribution to the success of the firm. This means a commitment to training and development and to establishing an atmosphere that encourages staff to participate in the improvement of the firm's services.

2 The Aim of Appraisals

The primary aim behind the appraisal scheme is to assess if the firm is doing the maximum possible to assist staff to meet the objectives of their jobs. Appraisal interviews are an opportunity to review the previous year and to allow you and your appraiser to identify training and development opportunities. The result of the interview will be a plan that will identify steps to allow you to develop your skills, knowledge and experience.

Please remember that your appraisal will be confidential to the Partners and not disclosed to any other members of staff.

3 Structure of the Interview

The appraisal interview will cover the following six areas:

3.1 Assessment of last year

This will be a general discussion of how you feel the previous year has gone, both for you and the firm as a whole. In preparation, you may wish to consider what you think have been the most important events in the last year and the work you feel most satisfied about completing. In future years this section of the discussion will allow you to review and evaluate the training and development plan agreed at the previous appraisal.

3.2 Identification of skills/strengths

The firm needs to know what are your strengths, particularly if you have special skills that are currently not being used. Before the interview you might wish to list, either on paper or mentally, those abilities you use in your job and which you feel are the strongest. This might relate to tasks you perform well and quickly, an ability to work effectively under pressure, or skills in presenting yourself (and therefore the firm) to clients. These will be discussed at the interview and thought given to any ways these can be better employed by the firm to improve overall performance. It is also a chance for the firm to give credit for your abilities.

3.3 Identification of skills gaps/weaknesses

In comparison to the section above, this area of discussion will aim to identify areas where you feel you are not performing as well as possible. It is important to stress that this is not done with the intention of laying blame or making negative criticism. Likewise it will not be used as an occasion to go over old mistakes that might have been made. On the contrary, the discussion is primarily to allow you to request the support or training you need to address the areas you identify as those where you feel weakest. If you prepare as above this should make your appraisal more effective.

It is always difficult to be frank and honest about our own weaknesses. However, to get the most out of your appraisal you will need to be as open about these as possible. It is important to remember that the firm has a genuine need for all staff to be performing as effectively as possible and so has every reason to want to assist you to develop and improve.

3.4 Contribution to the firm's development

This element of the interview will focus on how you feel your work contributes to the firm's overall progress and achievement of its goals. It will look at how well, and how easy it is for you to work with others, your involvement in team working and areas where you have contributed ideas and suggestions for improvements. In preparation, consider areas or instances where your work has made an impact on the firm as a whole and/or led to improvements.

3.5 Development goals (long-term)

Towards the end of the session this section will allow you to consider your longer-term career development within the firm. Jointly with your appraiser, you will be looking to establish some targets for where you want to be in the firm in two to three years. You will also establish some training or development actions that should help to get you there. These could involve formal long-term training courses, the opportunity to work in different areas of the firm or a list of new responsibilities you would like to take on.

When doing this it will be important to reflect back on the earlier discussion about strengths and weaknesses. Spend some time in advance thinking about how you see your future with the firm.

3.6 Training and development targets (year ahead)

Within the context of your longer-term aims, this discussion should conclude the appraisal and establish a clear set of training and development targets for the next 12 months. These should address the needs identified in earlier sections.

The aim is to set goals which, in a year's time, it will be possible to prove have been achieved. This might be by reference to a qualification gained or through evidence of improvement in work performance; for example, the successful performance of new responsibilities or quicker and more efficient work. It is also important that you do not agree targets with your appraiser that you feel are too demanding and at which you are likely to fail. Lastly, everything you agree should have dates set for starting and, if possible, for completion.

A useful way to remember how best to set targets is that they should be SMART, that is:

S **specific**
M **measurable**
A **agreed**
R **realistic**
T **timed**

4 Recording

It is most important that the result of the appraisal is one that you feel confident will assist you to develop within the firm. To help achieve this, you will complete a record of the discussion by simply summarising the topics of conversation in the six sections described above. Within this, listing the training and development targets identified in the last two sections will be the most important.

Once completed, this record will be agreed and signed by you both, and you will both keep a copy, which you will review at your next appraisal.

5 Conclusion

It is the firm's aim to keep appraisals as informal and friendly as possible. They are not about blame and criticism but about establishing development targets for the future, in which both you and the firm have a common interest. Try and come to the interview prepared with some idea of what you would like to get out of it.

Lastly, try not to be nervous and remember that this is an opportunity for you to comment on how the firm, as well as yourself, is performing.