**ATHENA SWAN STAFF CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP**

**ANNUAL REPORT TO IHW ATHENA SWAN SAT 2019-20**

**‘Experiences of Performance and Development Review (PDR) process & career development in the Institute of Health & Wellbeing’**

**Interviews and reporting**

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**Athena Swan Staff Consultation:**

**Experiences of Performance and Development Review process & career development in the Institute of Health and Wellbeing**

## 1. Introduction

In keeping with the Institute of Health and Wellbeing’s Self-Assessment Team Action Plan, the Staff Consultation Working Group design and conduct interviews annually with Institute of Health and Wellbeing (IHW) staff. The annual consultation seeks to learn from staff members’ experiences and perceptions and identify further actions to support staff and promote a positive and inclusive working environment.

The aim of the 2019-2020 consultation was to gain a better understanding of staff experiences of the Performance and Development Review (PDR) process and career development in IHW.

PDR is conducted annually and provides the opportunity for all staff and their reviewer, usually the line manager, to reflect upon performance and development in the last year and agree objectives and development plans for the forthcoming year. The PDR process involves the staff member completing a structured self-assessment form which is then discussed with their line manager during the review meeting. At the end of the review meeting, IHW reviewers and reviewees complete a checklist of topics covered and both sign off on the final PDR document. The 2019-2020 consultation topic is a response to findings of an IHW staff survey which highlighted that some staff reported mixed experiences of the PDR process. University plans to modify the current PDR process means that a consultation of IHW staff on PDR experiences and development is timely. This report summarises the responses to these consultative interviews and identifies key themes for the Staff Consultation Working Group and Self-Assessment Team to consider.

## 2. Methodology

Participants were recruited from different job families, research groups, grades, roles, and gender identities from across IHW. An advert seeking participants for the consultation was sent to staff on the IHW mailing list and included in the Hawkeye update. Potential participants responded to the advert, provided their contact details to IHW administration and were contacted by the researcher. The Coronavirus outbreak occurred two months prior to recruitment, which impacted the timeline for recruitment, conducting interviews and drafting the report. All interviews were conducted with video conferencing as social distancing was in place and the majority of IHW staff were working from home. 17 staff members were initially contacted, of whom 15 were interviewed via Zoom. Participant demographics are displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic information of staff participants**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic Information** |  | **N (%)** |
| **Gender** | Male | 3 (20.0%) |
|  | Female | 12 (80.0%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |
|  |  |  |
| **Research Group** | \*MRC/CSO Social & Public Health Sciences Unit | 7 (46.7%) |
|  | Public Health | 4 (26.6%) |
|  | Mental Health & Wellbeing | 3 (20.0%) |
|  | Other (Health Economics & Health Technology Assessment/ Robertson Centre for Biostatistics/ Social Scientists in Health & Wellbeing/ General Practice and Primary Care) | 1 (6.7%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |
|  |  |  |
| **Job Family** | Research & Teaching (R&T) | 11 (73.3%) |
|  | Management, Professional & Admin staff (MPA) / Technical & Specialist/ Operational | 4 (26.7%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |
|  |  |  |
| **Grade** | 5 | 2 (13.3%) |
|  | 6 | 2 (13.3%) |
|  | 7 | 5 (33.3%) |
|  | 8 | 5 (33.3%) |
|  | 9 | 0 |
|  | 10 | 1 (6.7%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |
|  |  |  |
| **Also a reviewer** | Yes | 5 (33.3%) |
|  | No | 10 (66.7%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |
|  |  |  |
| **Work Pattern** | Full-time | 10 (66.7%) |
|  | Part-time | 5 (33.3%) |
|  |  | 15 (100%) |

\*MRC/CSO: Medical Research Council/Chief Scientist Office

The majority of staff who participated in the interviews were female, research and teaching staff, early career researchers (‘ECRs’ pre or postdoctoral researcher funded by their Principal Investigator’s grant on a fixed-term or contract with a funding end date), and from the MRC/CSO Social & Public Health Sciences Unit. It should be noted that the views expressed by those participating in the consultation may not be representative of all IHW staff. It should also be noted that, although the report focused on the experiences of reviewees, a third of those who participated also had experience as a reviewer. Prior to the interview, staff were provided with an information and consent sheet (see Appendix A). To help with recall of their experiences volunteers were also sent a copy of the PDR self-assessment form relevant to their job family.

At the beginning of each interview participants provided their consent to take part in the interview and were assured that all information would be treated confidentially. The interviews were semi-structured and participant-led, lasting 30 minutes to an hour and a half. The majority of interviews lasted around 45 minutes although several lasted an hour to an hour and a half. A topic guide was developed by the Staff Consultation Working Group which touched on a range of topics relevant to preparation for the PDR, the PDR self-assessment form and review, experiences of the review meeting itself, career development, and suggestions for improvement (Appendix A). A support sheet was provided at the end of the interviews, signposting participants to relevant organisations within and outwith the University of Glasgow (Appendix A).

**3. Findings**

### 3.1 The role of the line manager

#### 3.1.1 ‘She’s supported me all the way’

Staff across all job families spoke of the important role that their line manager, who was typically also the PDR reviewer, played in supporting their development. Managers who provided encouragement and advice were highly valued. As one interviewee noted: *‘Tips from my line manager have been essential in that regard. And she’s supported me all the way’*. The importance of a supportive line manager was especially emphasised by early career researchers (ECRs), who wanted to develop their skills and work towards promotion. In the absence of this support, ECRs felt unable to pursue opportunities for professional development or were unaware of how to move forwards in their career. One researcher reflected on their time working under an unsupportive line manager as an ECR, ‘*I didn’t feel supported to pursue my needs. Didn’t do any training or anything during those three years, until I had my own grant and could organise my own time.’*

As well as providing practical career and professional development advice, a supportive line manager was considered important for pastoral care. Most staff members who were interviewed felt confident discussing any personal challenges or concerns during the PDR meeting: *‘I feel that they are taken seriously. We’ve got a good relationship, so I don’t need to pretend things are ok when they’re not.’*

#### 3.1.2 ‘It really depends on your line manager’

Staff described their PDR experience as highly dependent upon their line manager. The majority of staff interviewed had completed a PDR with more than one manager over the course of their employment at IHW and so were able to compare their experiences under different managers. For each of these individuals, they reported significant differences in the PDR process between line managers. One individual commented, ‘*I was amazed at how differently two separate reviewers could conduct exactly the same PDR’*. These differences related to every stage of the PDR process, from preparation for the meeting, to the review meeting itself, to the degree of follow-up throughout the year. One staff member noted: *‘It’s very dependent on your manager. I’ve had ones who spend a lot of time on the process and others that treat it as a tick box exercise.’*

All staff agreed that they were given sufficient time to prepare for the PDR, although there was a perception that line managers did not necessarily take time to read their PDR self-assessment form prior to the review meeting. *‘First line manager- yes. She’d prepared properly. Current line manager- I’d be shocked if he’d spent any time looking at it before the meeting.’* Opinions on whether it was important that line managers had reviewed the self-assessment form in advance varied, although most interviewees wanted to feel that their line manager was taking the process seriously, since they had put so much time into completing the form.

Most people felt that they were given adequate and uninterrupted time for the meeting, although some had line managers who discussed PDR as an add-on to a project related meeting. These staff members felt that by tacking it on to the end of another meeting, their line manager demonstrated that they were not really invested in the process or their development. Line managers who appeared to lack engagement with the PDR process made interviewees feel that their progress wasn’t very important. One researcher said, *‘I felt that my first line manager did listen more and made helpful suggestions. It was always chatty and upbeat. I never felt grilled or that I needed to be defensive. I don’t feel that my current line manager is very interested though.’*

The approach to the objective setting aspect of PDR also varied by line manager. Many R&T staff were told to choose six objectives, one for each section of the form. Staff spoke of this as being excessive and that they ended up having to choose objectives that they weren’t invested in or that weren’t very helpful for professional development. One researcher also pointed out that this approach doesn’t take account of the fact that objectives vary in the amount of time necessary to achieve them.Other research staff had a line manager who asked them to choose objectives that would allow them to develop a new skill, and that this was a really helpful part of the PDR process. However, around half did not discuss last years’ objectives with their line managers at the PDR meeting, which made them wonder what the point was.

During objective setting, most interviewees felt that they were free to choose their own objectives while receiving guidance from their line manager: ‘*My line manager helps me set goals that are realistic and yet challenging*.’ This guidance was generally appreciated as staff felt that they were being helped to identify areas which they needed to improve or gaps in their skill set. However, others felt that their line manager pushed them away from selecting objectives that weren’t directly connected to the project they were working on or ‘soft objectives’. One researcher noted, ‘*I feel that objectives have to tick certain boxes and so there’s not that much freedom in what they can be. ‘Soft’ objectives get missed or deprioritised. For example, as an introvert lacking in confidence, I wanted to attend a conference by myself without my research team. This was an important step for me, but I wasn’t able to use this as an objective. Had to be ‘presenting at conference’.*

Development opportunities that were discussed as part of the PDR also appeared to vary by line manager. Staff across job families and grades noted that staff are dependent on their line manager’s willingness to make PDR about the individuals’ development rather than just team goals for the project that they were employed on: *‘We shouldn’t only think about development once a year, but have regular check-ins. That’s partly up to you but if your line manger isn’t interested in supporting you then it’s not possible.’* This was particularly true of ECRs who did not have their own grant income.

#### 3.1.3 Staff recommendations

Around half the staff members interviewed had experience of completing an annual review process outside of IHW. One element that these individuals had found useful in these previous experiences, that was not present in the current IHW process, was the routine opportunity to provide feedback for managers. All staff who had experience of these reviews felt that IHW staff would benefit from adopting a means of providing management with feedback: ‘*If you never rate their ability to line manage and they’re not accountable for the way they line manage then they’ll never change*.’

Some individuals suggested that there should be recognition for line managers who go the extra mile and provide high quality support for those who work under them. By holding up examples of good practice, it was hoped that this would encourage other line managers to prioritise the development of junior staff.

Many staff also felt that some form of training was needed for managers to ensure that the PDR experience was consistent across research groups, and that staff had access to the same development opportunities. One interviewee noted ‘*Think managers should get training for how to manage staff, rather than assuming that if you can get promoted you can manage staff- it’s a very different skill than actual research.*’

### 3.2 The PDR self-assessment form

#### 3.2.1 ‘The form can be pretty intimidating’

All interviewed R&T staff felt that certain sections of the form weren’t appropriate for lower grades. Those who had completed the form as a grade 6 staff member remembered feeling worried when they were unable to write something in each box on the form: *‘For junior members of staff that don’t have anything to put in some boxes it feels like you’re doing a bad job if you can’t complete it.’* Many felt that the form needed to be adapted for lower grades, either through altering the language to make it more accessible or by making it clear that not all grades were expected to complete every section of the form: *‘I would change wording for grade 6- I didn’t even know that these things like esteem were expected of me. It’s not even possible to do some of these things as a grade 6.’*

Many staff members felt that it would be helpful for examples to be given for lower grades, either under the boxes or in a separate document, and that this would help to alleviate anxiety associated with the form. One individual remarked ‘*Indicators of esteem- that was the worst! Keynote speeches and membership of editorial journals! It completely freaked me out. I wish they told us what type of esteem indicators you should be aiming for at grade 6.’*

Most MPA and TS staff felt that their PDR form was a good fit for their grade: *‘It was helpful and very geared towards what I was employed to do’.* However, one MPA staff member who had looked at both R&T and MPA self-assessment forms felt that the R&T self-assessment form was better suited to those working towards promotion or seeking professional development than the MPA form.

#### 3.2.2 ‘At the end of the day we know it’s really about papers and grants’

R&T staff all identified the research output sections of the form as the most important for promotion and professional development. Many of the grade 6 and 7 staff members had not initially realised that this was the case at the start of their career: *‘The form makes it look like everything has the same weight but when I attended promotion workshops they said that some areas are more important than others. I had done lots of engagement but no grants and thought it was ok, but now realise that it wasn’t.’*

Among grade 6/7 R&T staff, it was felt that the other sections of the form did represent important aspects of their job role: *‘The positive thing about the form is that it gives you the opportunity to put other things in that are maybe not recognised as much, like being a STEM ambassador, or getting good feedback from students.’* They felt that it was important not to focus only on research output as this was only one aspect of their experience, although many felt that this was not considered during PDR: ‘*The everyday things you do to improve the experiences of your students and colleagues or the life of the university don’t get recognised in the PDR. Some people go above and beyond for their students but that’s not something that is focussed on in the form.’* Again, there was concern that not having enough outputs would make it appear that they had underperformed that year: *‘The form is geared towards outputs but that’s not the whole research process. As an RA you can spend an entire year coding or doing fieldwork so you may not have any outputs, which looks like you haven’t achieved anything.’*

#### 3.2.3 ‘It’s impossible to fill all the silos up to the top’

There was a feeling among R&T staff that it was simply not possible to achieve excellence in each of the sections of the PDR form. ECR’s spoke of the difficulties they experienced making time for anything outside of research output as they felt under pressure to secure their next short-term contract: *‘You may spend most of your time trying to pad out your CV with papers for the next short-term contract, and in that situation, esteem is obviously less of a focus. You don’t have the energy or time to be indulging in that.’* Staff at grades 8 and above also spoke of the challenges of ‘doing everything’ and felt that as they had progressed there was more and more to do but the same hours in the day: *‘I did know one person who got ‘exceptional’. And she deserved it, but she was totally burnt out!’* For these staff members, esteem was identified as a silo that was particularly hard to fill to the top as it was difficult to find the time when focussing on bringing in money with grants. Many described their approach to PDR as one of trying to have something to put in each section of the form, and so not having time to excel in any one area. As one member of staff said, *‘The form suggests that you should be equally good at everything, but I think we should allow people to play to their strengths.’*

#### 3.3 ‘Does strong contributor just mean average?’

Staff across job families and grades expressed issues with the existing PDR grading system. Some staff members found the very act of rating employees to be demoralising: *‘I have mixed feelings about it as it feels like you are being judged, which is stressful. And I worry about what would happen if I was rated as ‘inconsistent’’.* Others felt that a rating scale was not appropriate for R&T staff: *‘Being a good scientist is a subtle and difficult thing to do and you can’t encapsulate that with a rating scale’.* In particular, the fact that the vast majority of staff are graded as ‘strong contributor’, suggested to some that this was not a particularly desirable grade to receive: *‘If everyone gets ‘strong contributor’ does it just mean ‘average’?’* If a rating scale were to remain part of the PDR, the majority of staff believed that the existing scale lacked granularity and that at least one more point on this should be included in order for ‘strong contributor’ to be perceived as a positive rating.

There was also a perceived lack of transparency around what was required to be rated as an ‘exceptional contributor’. ‘*There’s no benchmark for what exceptional contribution is at your grade, which would be helpful. I got strong contribution, but he supported my promotion and described me as exceptional in his statement, so he obviously believes I’m exceptional. Would be good to know if there’s consistency across line managers.’* The fact that there is a limit on the number of individuals who can be rated as ‘exceptional’ was not supported by staff at any grade: ‘*I find it frustrating that there is a quota for how many people can get ‘exceptional’. I don’t think that’s fair’. If there are more people than the quota who deserve to get that grade, then how do managers decide who gets it? Seems subjective.’*  Concern about variability in how criteria are interpreted and applied by line managers was also expressed by a number of staff members across job families.

Many staff members wanted the link between financial reward and PDR rating to be decoupled. This was particularly true of staff who had line management responsibilities themselves and had experience of rating staff at PDR. One individual said, ‘*The budget dictates how many staff can be exceptional. But that seems the wrong way around. Performance ratings shouldn’t be based on the budget’.*

#### 3.2.4 Staff recommendations

R&T staff felt that the PDR form needed to be adapted for lower grades, either through altering the language to make it more accessible or by making it clear that not all grades were expected to complete every section of the form. Providing examples of what could reasonably be expected of staff at different grades in each part of the form was strongly recommended. Within this job family, staff also suggested that more weight should be placed on areas outside of research output.

While most R&T staff felt that it was important to include sections of the form that didn’t relate to research outputs, it was considered impossible to excel in all areas. Many felt that this should be clearly acknowledged to reduce stress and enable researchers to focus on developing a few skill areas at a time: *‘The focus seems to be on quantity for each section, rather than quality. You could just write two papers that are amazing and not do any supervision or engagement, but maybe that’s enough for one year*.’

### 3.3 PDR as a vehicle for professional development’

#### 3.3.1 ‘It can be really helpful’

Many felt that the PDR process was helpful as it provided them with direction and encouraged structured conversations about career progression. This feeling was expressed by staff across job families. One MPA staff member appreciated these opportunities to discuss professional development, even though they didn’t intend to apply for promotion: ‘*I feel that IHW is exemplary in this area. I’m always encouraged by my manager to take up opportunities and supported to do this even if I’m not looking for promotion.’* Other staff commented on how the PDR process contributed to the feeling of being valued by the IHW community more broadly. One individual said, ‘*I feel that IHW actually care about how I am and are not just checking up on you with PDR. They care about my development, about how they could be helping me’.*

As promotion is one of the items listed for discussion on the PDR checklist, staff members found the close alignment between the PDR form and the criteria required for promotion to be helpful: *‘The structure does reflect the promotion criteria which is useful. It’s maybe helpful for me to focus on what I need to do next. Reminds you that you need to look for esteem activities that aren’t core to your everyday job.’* However, many staff from both R&T and MPA job families had not been aware that promotion criteria were linked to the PDR content areas until they had been working at IHW for a number of years. ECRs were particularly surprised to learn that sections like ‘esteem’ were part of the promotion criteria as they felt this section of the PDR form was often not applicable to them. These individuals felt that it would have been beneficial to have this explained to them at the first PDR meeting so that they had a clearer idea of what was expected of them and how they could progress: ‘*Initially I thought it was an administrative issue and didn’t realise that it was in your own interests to write a strong case.’* Other staff members found that their line manager was unclear about the criteria for promotion or had discouraged them from applying on a year when they had gone on to receive promotion *‘He advised me to hang on but I went ahead anyway as I felt I met the grade 7 criteria, and I got it. He didn’t seem to realise that I was suitable for grade 7.’*

For some interviewees, their line manager would discuss their progress and development throughout the year. *‘With my previous line manger there was a regular meeting where I could lead the discussion and she checked in on career development stuff.’* However, the majority described PDR as an annual event that didn’t contribute very significantly to their development throughout the year: *‘The overall idea of PDR is good because you don’t get feedback during the year so it’s nice to have a time where you talk about your progress.’* Staff who didn’t have other structured conversations about development throughout the year appreciated this time to get advice and guidance from their line manager, and to make plans for the following year.

However, some R&T staff felt that the PDR created a pressure to progress, and that this was not appropriate for everyone: *‘I came into research later. I’m happy where I am. I don’t really want to be a professor. I really enjoy my work and I don’t particularly want to progress. So, it would be good if objectives weren’t automatically pushing you towards that*.’ On the other hand, MPA staff often felt that not enough focus was placed on their development and career progression.

#### 3.3.2 ‘There definitely are barriers to professional development’

A number of barriers to professional development were discussed during the interviews. Some staff who worked part-time or had caring responsibilities discussed the challenges of being compared to staff within their research group who worked full-time or did not have caring responsibilities. In particular, part-time staff often found it difficult to gain experience in knowledge exchange and impact or esteem, as they had less time available to them than full-time staff members. During the year these staff found that the emphasis was on producing research outputs, but that during PDR they were expected to have items to put in the other sections of the form. Part-time staff were also unclear how the promotion criteria applied to them, as this wasn’t clear from the university website*: ‘The biggest problem about part-time is that we haven’t changed anything in the workplace to allow for it. If the staff meeting is always on a Wednesday and their day off is Wednesday, then they always miss the staff meeting. Most people I know who work part-time work over this to attend meetings and keep up with expectations.’* However, other part-time staff did not feel that they were unfairly compared to full-time staff in this way.

Two R&T staff had indicated that they would like a mentor but that this hadn’t been followed up on, despite mentioning it during PDR and signing up for the IHW mentoring scheme. Within this job family, a number of interviewees spoke of the importance of having a mentor to help guide professional development. This was seen as particularly valuable when they had a line manager who was less engaged with the PDR process, as they were still able to get advice and guidance from another senior member of staff.

There was also some uncertainty over what type of development opportunities are allowed to be objectives on the PDR form. For example, both MPA and R&T staff were sometimes unclear what funding was available for outside training courses and how relevant a course had to be to their current project. One researcher said, *‘Is a programming camp relevant enough to be funded? It would develop my skills but if it’s not specific to the project I’m working on then I don’t feel encouraged.’* For most staff, they were only encouraged to undertake training when this was offered by the university.

MPA staff felt particularly restricted by development opportunities within the PDR process or IHW more broadly. When asked about support provided by IHW to pursue professional development, one individual said ‘*I had to write a two-page business case to justify going on an outside course which would have been really useful for me, and my case didn’t get selected, so I couldn’t go’.* Most staff within this job family felt restricted in what internal or external training was available to them, and that this served as a barrier to their development. Some staff would welcome the opportunity to attend training sessions designed for R&T staff as they felt this would help them better understand the jobs of the R&T staff in their team, and therefore allow them to better support these individuals in their role. However, MPA staff who expressed interest in this had not been able to attend such training sessions in the past.

#### 3.3.3 ‘It’s about taking ownership of your PDR’

Some staff spoke about taking ownership of their PDR, and that this was necessary in order to maximise what they got out of the process: *‘It should be you that takes ownership and wants to achieve those goals and your line manager supports you and gives you guidance’.* Some staff members in both R&T and MPA kept a log of their progress throughout the year to remind themselves of where they had gaps in experience or skills. They described this as a helpful way of pushing themselves to seek opportunities in each area on the PDR form.

Staff spoke about the balance between taking ownership of their own development and needing help and guidance from their line-manager or other more senior members of staff. This dependency on line managers for developmental opportunities was expressed most by ECRs, who found that it could be hard to meet their objectives of publishing papers as they were dependent on senior staff getting back to them with feedback. The need for support from line managers to develop grant proposals was also discussed*: ‘It would be great if my line manager would include me in a grant proposal. I’m happy to do all the work but I just don’t have experience in this- I put this in the form every year.’* ECR’s and other staff on short-term contracts also faced barriers to developing their teaching and supervision skills, as they were told that they could not serve as a main supervisor to a PhD student unless they were employed for the duration of the PhD.

#### 3.3.4 Staff recommendations

Staff from all job families, but particularly R&T, felt that the link between the sections of the PDR self-assessment form and promotion should be clearly explained from the first review meeting as this would assist researchers interested in progressing to undertake necessary professional development: ‘*I think we should be told about promotion criteria from the first PDR and start working towards it, not just focussing on that the year you want to actually go for promotion.’* R&T line managers should be mindful of the importance of supporting staff to undertake career development activities throughout the year. ‘*I haven’t had a single conversation with my line manager about my development this year.’* Again, the dependence on line managers supporting staff was apparent when it came to providing advice and opportunities for ECRs.

A number of part-time staff felt that their line manager didn’t take their working hours into account during the PDR review meeting, and that how their working hours impacted promotion criteria should be made clearer: ‘*To tick all the boxes each year you really can’t be part-time or be a single parent. I don’t think we’ve got part-time staff right yet*.’

Both MPA and R&T staff wanted more flexibility and clarity on what training opportunities they could pursue as an objective for the coming year.

**4. Summary of findings**

Fifteen members of IHW staff participated in the consultation, with representation across grades, job families and work patterns; however, those identifying as female, R&T staff, and early career researchers, are likely to be overrepresented and the findings of the report should therefore be considered in relation to this. Overall, staff who participated in the interviews felt that the PDR process could be a very useful means of developing their skills and planning for the year ahead. However, the extent to which this was the case depended largely upon the attitude and approach of their reviewer. The high degree of variability in the way that line managers approach the PDR process, as well as the degree to which they support their reviewee’s professional development during the year, was evident throughout the interviews. Staff who did feel well supported by their line managers emphasised the important role that these reviewers had played in increasing their confidence and providing them with necessary guidance to develop their career. Staff made a number of recommendations for how the PDR process could better support their development, which are outlined throughout the report.

**5. Strengths, limitations and reflection**

Interviews with participants were organised and conducted during the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak. Advertising, recruitment and the conduct of interviews took place while staff were predominantly working from home. Although it might be expected that a shift to remote working and interviews might limit the consultation in a number of ways (including technical issues when relying on home IT or poor engagement of staff) few issues were encountered by the interviewer and a total of fifteen members of staff volunteered and were interviewed during a limited window of time. All those interviewed did comment that working from home came with a number of challenges, such as balancing work and childcare, and it is possible this may have prevented some staff members who had young children or other commitments from participating in the consultation interviews. However, a number of participants did have young children, suggesting this was not always a barrier to participation. Some staff members found it easier to fit in the time to participate in the consultation as they were aware the interview would be conducted remotely. This was particularly true for members of staff who normally work in shared offices and who might have been unable to speak confidentially otherwise. A further strength of the consultation was the range of staff who participated. Interviewees ranged from grades 5-10, including a third who were experienced reviewers and a third who were part-time. While the majority of staff were in the R&T job family, interviews were also conducted with individuals from MPA and TS job families.

## 6. Report recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings of this report are presented according to the scope of action indicated. This reflects two separate issues: (a) a range of guidance and training resources already exist to support good practice in the existing PDR process, yet the review findings suggest the availability of these resources does not always lead to the recommended practice (b) University wide changes to the existing PDR are planned and a number of recommendations are for changes to the PDR process.

*6.1 Recommendations for PDR reviewees and reviewers*

1. Staff experiences of PDR vary and depend on reviewer attitudes and investment in the process. Mandatory training for reviewers is recommended to improve consistency in how the PDR process is carried out and support staff development.
2. PDR can be a useful vehicle for career development, but many staff at an early stage of career are unaware of complementary relationships across PDR, career development and progression. That ‘progression/ promotion/ rezoning’ is included in the post-PDR IHW checklist also does not necessarily translate into meaningful discussion. Appropriate methods to improve awareness of the complementary relationships between PDR, career development and progression are recommended. For reviewees this could involve information provided as part of the induction process or through existing workshops on promotion. For reviewers this should be incorporated into mandatory training or guidance resources.
3. Annual PDR should not be the only opportunity for staff to review and discuss development throughout the year. Staff value more regular conversations with line managers in these areas and appropriate methods to encourage this should be identified and implemented. For reviewers this should be incorporated into mandatory training resources or guidance and reminders should be provided that it is good practice to engage in regular conversations around development or PDR objectives/standards.

*6.2 Recommendations for the PDR process*

1. Annual review procedures which include routine opportunities to provide feedback to line managers on staff member’s PDR experience are valued. An appropriate method of providing feedback to reviewers on PDR experiences should be considered.
2. Self- assessment forms should be accessible for all staff. Examples of what could reasonably be expected of staff across different grades and levels of experience in each part of the forms should be provided.
3. Staff should not expect or feel it is necessary to excel across all elements of PDR and there should be greater acknowledgement and opportunity to focus on areas of individual strength.
4. Greater flexibility in the number and scope of objectives/standards is recommended and these should be aligned with individual staff member’s aspirations and development plans.
5. Improved consistency and fairness in how contribution ratings are allocated is needed. More granular rating scales should be used and the link between contribution ratings and financial reward should be reviewed.
6. The particular experience of part-time staff in the PDR process should be considered: expectations of part-time staff should be more clearly defined in university guidance for line managers. Related to this, expectation for part time staff and promotions criteria should also be more clearly defined.

**Acknowledgements**

The Staff Consultation subgroup would like to thank members of staff who participated in the interviews, Dr Kirsty Dunn for carrying out the interviews and drafting the report, IHW Administration for assisting with the organisation of interviews and the IHW Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team for providing constructive feedback.

**Appendix A: Athena Swan Staff Consultation Interview Materials**

1. *Information Sheet and Consent Form*

**Information sheet and consent form**

Athena Swan Staff Consultation: Experiences of Performance and Development Review process & career development in IHW

# Information Sheet

The purpose of this interview is to understand staff experiences of the Performance and Development Review (PDR) process and career development in the Institute. This interview is in response to an IHW staff survey highlighting that some staff had mixed feelings about their experiences of the PDR process. The findings of these interviews will form a written report with recommendations to the Institute’s Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT).

During this interview, we would like to learn a bit more about you, including your role at the University. We would like to understand your experience of the annual PDR process, including your views on its overall purpose and value as well as the role of the PDR process in your career development. We would also like to hear any suggestions you may have for improving the PDR experience for staff.

All interviews will be conducted ‘remotely’ and you can chose to take part in the interview by telephone or videoconference.

All information that you provide during this interview will be in the strictest of confidence. We will ask for some information about your work role at the University. If you prefer you do not have to provide detailed information that may be identifiable. We will seek your consent to audio record these interviews, but they will not be transcribed. If you agree, the audio files will be retained in a secure folder until the report has been completed, after which the audio files will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Anonymised quotes from interviews may appear in the report, but these will not identify you in any way.

We would also like to provide you with a support sheet which includes sources of information and advice. Before we begin please, can you read carefully the consent form and ask any question you may have to help to decide if you would like to participate in this consultation.

**CONSENT FORM (Athena Swan Staff Consultation Group) v1.2 21.05.20**

You are being asked to sign a consent form because we will use the findings from this interview to inform a written report with recommendations to the Institute’s Self-Assessment Team.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | *Please initial box* |
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet (v1.2 21.05.20). |  |
| 1. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. |  |
| 1. I agree to my contribution to this event being audio-recorded and the recording retained until completion of the consultation report. | *Optional* |
| 1. I agree to my contribution to this event being anonymously quoted in reports, web pages and other outputs (i.e. written report of recommendations to the IHW). |  |
| 1. I consent to take part in this staff consultation.   = |  |

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant Date Signature

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher Date Signature

1. *Interviewer Topic Guide*

## AS STAFF INTERVIEWS: Experiences of PDR and career development in IHW

## Interview number

## Date

## Interviewer Format

## (phone or VC)

## Participant background

Could you tell me a little about your role in IHW?

***Circle all that apply below***

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Research Group | Job Family | Grade | Work Pattern |
| HEALTH ECON AND HEALTH TECH ASSESSMENT | Management, Professional & Admin staff | 2 | Full time |
| PUBLIC HEALTH | Technical & Specialist | 3 | Part time  Full time equivalent if mentioned: |
| MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING | Research & Teaching | 4 |  |
| GENERAL PRACTICE & PRIMARY CARE | Operational | 5 |  |
| MRC/CSO SPHU |  | 6 |  |
| ROBERTSON CENTRE |  | 7 |  |
| SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN HEALTH |  | 8 |  |
| OTHER |  | 9 |  |
|  |  | 10 |  |
|  |  | Other |  |

How often have you been involved in a PDR process as a reviewee? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If you have acted as a reviewer in the PDR process, approximately how many reviews have you been involved in? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
(please specify number of people reviewed as opposed to number of annual PDR cycles that you have been a reviewer)

Comments:

## General experiences of the PDR

* Can you tell me a bit about your general experiences of PDR in IHW? *[From this point on we are interested in their experience as a reviewee rather than a reviewer]*
* How helpful do you find the PDR process?
  + Can you talk about the parts you find particularly helpful?
  + Which parts did you find unhelpful, if any?
* Have you been involved with similar appraisal type systems in other workplaces and how does your experience of PDR compare?

# Preparing for the PDR

* Do you find the purpose of the PDR clear?
  + Has the purpose been explained to you as a reviewee?
  + Do you know where to find out more about the purpose of the PDR process?
* How have you found the process of preparing for the PDR?
  + Are you given enough time to prepare?
  + Do you feel that your reviewer prepares properly?

# The content of the PDR (self-assessment and review)

* What do you think about the form? (usually completed online, but see offline template)
  + To what extent do you feel PDR values your full range of skills, experiences and contribution? Are some skills and contributions valued more than others?
  + Are there skills and contributions you find important that are not included?
  + Do you find the questions relevant to your grade and/or experience?
* How do you find the ‘objectives setting and review’ part of the PDR process?
  + Do you feel involved in setting and agreeing your objectives?
  + Do you discuss objectives set the previous year as part of your current review?
  + Are timescales for achieving objectives reasonable?

# Experiences of the review meeting

* Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of the review meeting?
  + Did you find it simple to arrange?
  + Is adequate and uninterrupted time made available?
* As a reviewee, how did you feel during the meeting?
  + Did you feel like you could freely discuss your needs and concerns?
  + Why/why not?
  + What could make it easier?
* Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of the people reviewing you?
  + Did you feel like they
    - asked appropriate questions?
    - actively listened?
    - were capable of dealing with difficult conversations, if there were any?
  + What was your reviewers’ attitude towards the review? Did you find them invested or committed to the process?

# PDR and career development

* To what extent does the PDR feel important to your career development?
  + Does PDR feel like part of your career development?
  + Does it feel like a one-off annual event or does it have ongoing relevance for you?
* Would you like the PDR to be more relevant to your career development?
* To what extent do you feel aware of opportunities for career development in IHW?
  + Do you feel encouraged to take up career development opportunities?
  + If grade 6/7 ‘research’ staff - are you aware of protected CPD [continuing professional development] time available to you? *This means you can take a certain amount of time off to pursue activities that support your professional development but are not directly related to your job.*
* How do you think your career development within IHW could be better supported?

# Suggestions for improvement

* Do you have any suggestions for improving the PDR process if any?

# Closing comments

Is there anything you’d like to add that you feel we haven’t covered?

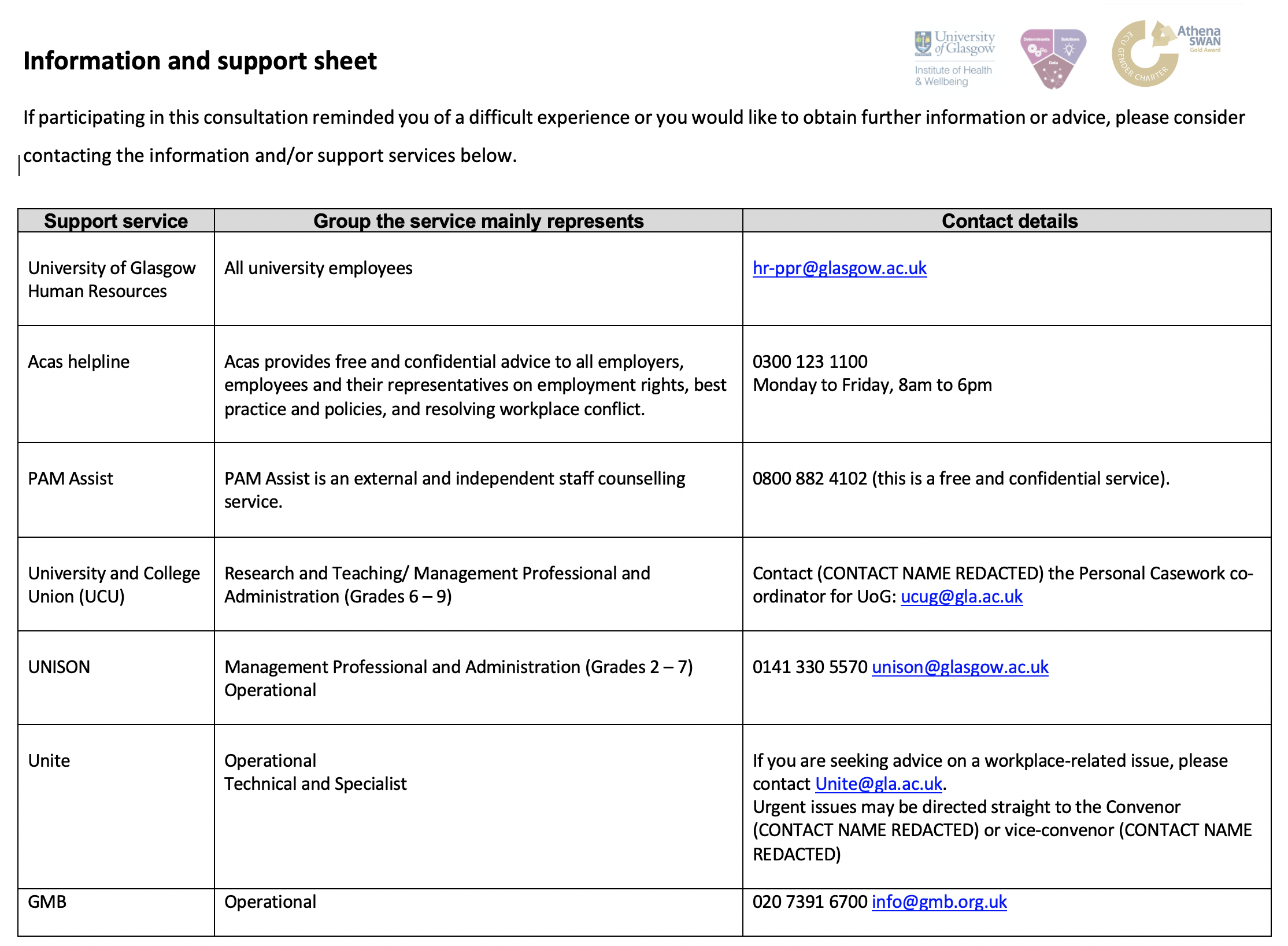
## Debrief

Thank-you for taking part in this staff consultation interview. We hope that the findings from this process will help to improve PDR process and career development within IHW. The report and its recommendations will be submitted to the institute’s Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team for consideration and contribute towards the Institute’s continuing commitment to advancement of gender equality through the Athena Swan Charter.

We realise this topic may possibly bring up some difficult experiences for you. We have developed a support and information sheet which includes staff information, advice and support services you may find helpful.

**Remember to provide support and information sheet at end of interview.**

1. *Information and Support Sheet*

**