

# Key Issues behind Appraisal

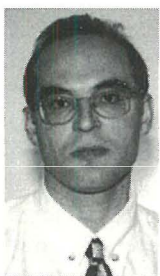
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## Introduction

**A**s schools are being encouraged and prepared to take on more responsibility of what happens at the school site the more central will the issue of standards and quality improvement be raised. One way of setting standards, of identifying the meaning and the way towards quality improvement is through a clearly understood system of appraisal. In this brief article I aim merely to scratch the surface of this sensitive but crucial component within tomorrow's schools.

Few would argue that heads, teachers, the education authorities and most probably the Teachers' Union have mixed feelings about the purposes of appraisal. What are the real purposes of appraisal and how can they be achieved?

**“One way of setting standards, of identifying the meaning and the way towards quality improvement is through a clearly understood system of appraisal”**



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- ☐ Appraisal builds on individual and organisational strengths.
- ☐ Appraisal aims to improve the quality of teaching within a school.
- ☐ Appraisal aims to recognise, acknowledge and celebrate good practice.
- ☐ Appraisal ultimately aims to develop the quality of the learning of pupils within the school.
- ☐ Appraisal is not a disciplinary procedure.
- ☐ Appraisal is not an instrument of management control.

With this in mind one can appreciate the far reaching aims behind appraisal:

- developing a clarity of vision, purpose and direction in the organisation
- maintaining and building on that vision, purpose and direction
- enabling each member of the staff to have a clear understanding of their own role within the school
- enhancing individual and group job satisfaction.
- to act as a source of motivation across all levels within the organisation.

There are a number of concerns behind an appraisal system which we need to address.

## The main principles behind appraisal are:

- ☐ Appraisal is a professional activity.
- ☐ Appraisal is a collaborative process.
- ☐ Appraisal is part of an ongoing monitoring review process involving the whole school.
- ☐ Appraisal aims to facilitate the continuous professional development of all members of staff.

## Central concerns behind an appraisal

Key words	Comments
System	<p>~ appraisals need to form part of the organisation especially within the Human Resources/ Training and Development set-up.</p> <p>~ appraisals need to focus on improving performance as individuals seek to accomplish organisational goals.</p>
Attitude	<p>~ of both appraiser and appraisee needs to be positive sincere and open.</p> <p>~ people need to be motivated</p> <p>~ everyone can learn and improve.</p>
Opportunity	<p>~ to reflect on past, present and future challenges.</p> <p>~ to grow and develop personally and collectively: maximising human potential.</p>
Process:	
• feedback	<p>~ where individuals share positive points and problem areas.</p> <p>~ through such a process individuals learn to receive and give feedback.</p> <p>~ an opportunity to identify what support individuals need so as to improve: performance, skills, etc.</p>
• support	
• targets	<p>~ points raised need to develop into targets/ 'action plans' agreed upon by both parties.</p> <p>~ such intentions need to be clearly stated and dates set for discussion and review.</p>

Fig. 1



These are here presented in a brief and summative manner in *Fig. 1*.

**“Appraisal aims to facilitate the continuous professional development of all members of staff.”**

## **Some tips for handling an appraisal** *a positive attitude*

See appraisals as an opportunity to develop your relationship with your direct superior, increase your self-awareness, express your views and influence and shape your future. Appraisal is a process involving two persons and not an exercise done on the appraisee. It is a joint activity for which both are responsible for its success.

### *an opportunity to reflect*

Before the classroom observation set aside some time to reflect on those areas you will be observing. Discuss and agree on the points that you would like to explore with appraisee.

### *looking ahead*

An appraisal is an opportunity for the appraisee to look ahead. What are the goals you want to achieve, both in

terms of present responsibilities and professional development? What support do you need to achieve these goals, in terms of resources, experience, and/or training?

### *accept feedback*

This is not an opportunity to behave defensively when observations/ criticisms are made. An appraisal provides an opportunity for you to learn how to improve and in the ideal situation both appraiser and appraisee learn from each other.

Most school leaders are not sadists and do not like giving negative feedback just to put you down. So make it easy

for them by showing you value hearing their comments. See it as another opportunity for both to develop particular skills very much lacking in our profession, those of active listening and assertiveness. Your personal growth will determine in the end whether the organisation is improving and moving forward or not.

### *keep calm*

Avoid responding emotionally or impulsively. If you receive a remark or a comment which you feel is unfair, do not regard it as a personal attack. The appraisal offers you the opportunity to react and explain things as you see them.

## *seek information*

When discussing a lesson which has just been observed ask questions to get more information. Do not settle for vague comments. If faced with generalisations about aspects of your performance ask for specific examples so as to make sure that you understand the point the appraiser is trying to make.

## *give feedback*

The best appraisals are opportunities for both parties to improve. Use the discussion session to give some positive strokes and thus encourage behaviours you find useful. A

- **Be realistic**
- **Be specific**
- **Solve problems together**
- **Allow quality time**

guiding principle behind any appraisal is that of selectivity - i.e. being selective in the areas for observation in order to be effective. Do not overload the appraisee with feedback. Focus on one or two things you want to change and tackle those.

## *set goals*

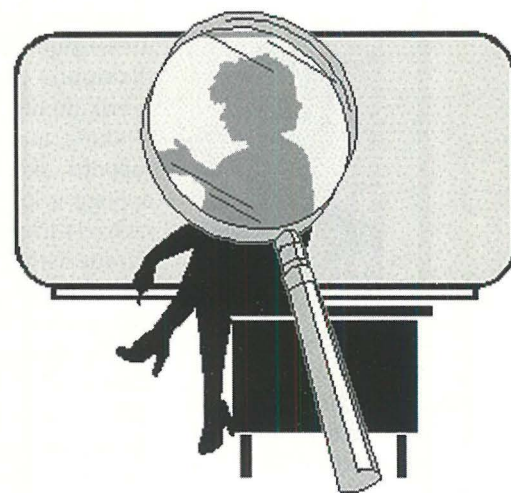
An appraisal is therefore an opportunity to set targets. These targets need to be agreed upon during the discussion. They need to be realistic, attainable, clearly defined and in writing. This will allow both appraiser and appraisee the opportunity to go back to the targets in order to review progress and chart future work accordingly.

**focus on each other as learners**

### **Any obstacles?**

- **gaining acceptance**
- **managing the process**
- **winning mutual respect of appraiser and appraisee**
- **hidden agendas**
- **gaining commitment**
- **time**

**“Appraisal ultimately aims to develop the quality of the learning of pupils within the school.”**



Naturally, there is a lot more that can be said, and the implications behind the process have to be thoroughly understood and owned by the different stakeholders. Definitely, the way we view appraisal will effect school development planning and INSET provision for the future, hence the importance behind the institutionalisation of such a process.