

Boosting Career Conversations: Rolling out a Tailored Personal Development Review Form for Research Staff

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Introduction

- ☐ **Personal Development Review (PDR):** annual initiative focused on staff development. PDR Involves:
 - ✓ Reviewing progress against previously agreed priorities
 - ✓ Discussing future plans and career aspirations
 - ✓ Setting priorities and development goals
- ☐ **2022 Research Staff (RS) Survey Findings:**
 - × Low engagement with PDR among RS
 - × Skewed focus of discussion on research goals over career and professional development
 - × Limited awareness and uptake of their 10 career development days allocation
- ☐ **RS using PDR documentation designed for other roles;** failed to trigger appropriate & beneficial conversations



Aim: To create PDR resources tailored for Research Staff, focusing on career development and the use of their 10 career development days, to enhance the benefits of the PDR process.

Methods

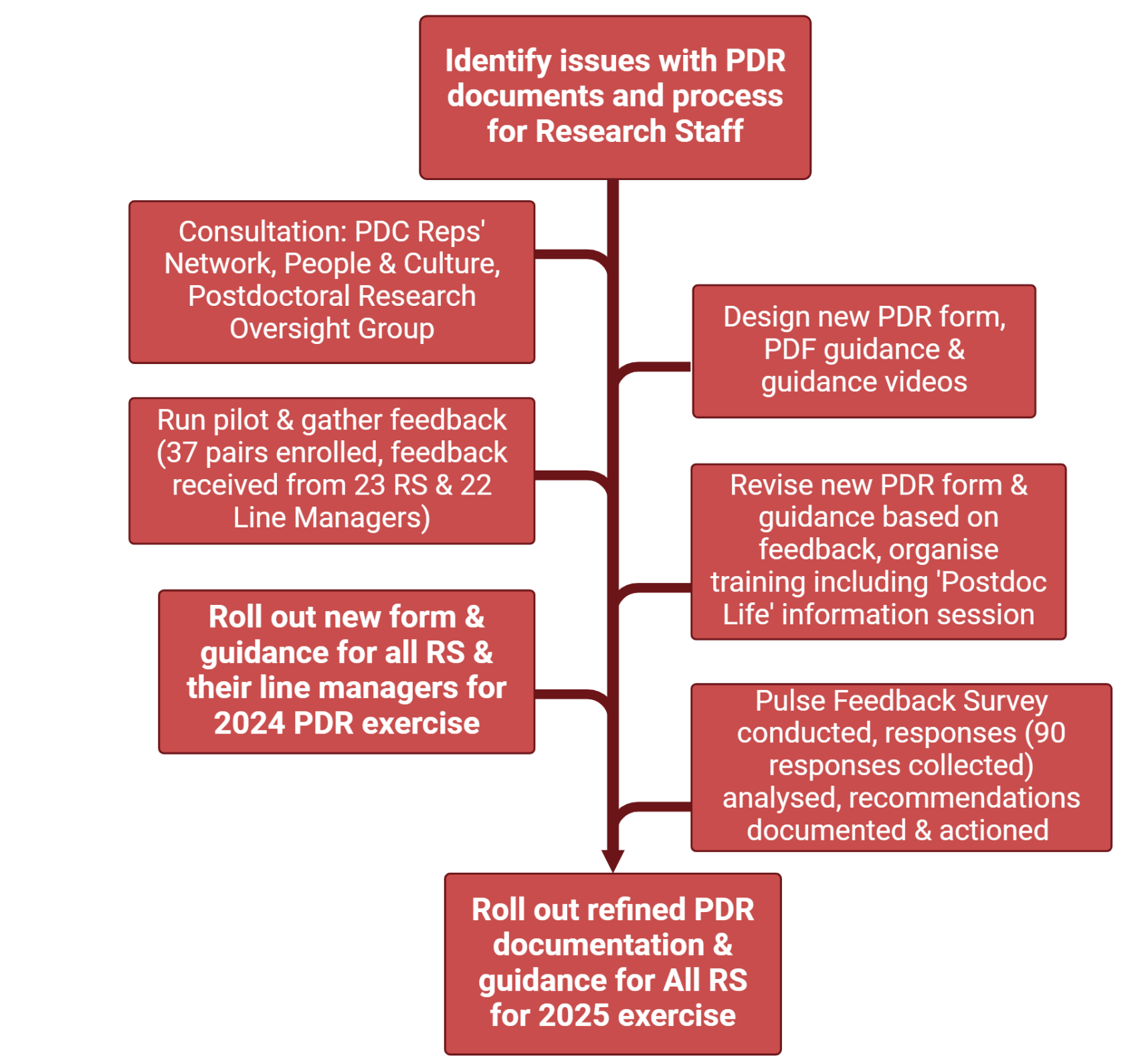


Figure 1: Diagram outlining the process of designing, piloting, rolling out and surveying a new PDR form and associated guidance materials for research staff. Diagram created using BioRender.

Enhanced PDR Materials (examples)



Scan for full version of form & associated PDF and video guidance

PDF guidance excerpt:

- Section 3 - Objectives and development related to the current review period

Aim of the section / overview:

Enable the reviewee and reviewer to discuss the skills and experience developed over the period, notably assessing the impact of development activities planned the year before on the delivery of objectives and the reviewee's progress towards their development goals. This includes both development that resulted from delivering role-specific objectives, and career development activities not directly linked to their contracted role (see the above section 'Which development is role-related or not?' for details).

What to discuss:

- The impact of your contributions on the project, team, School, strategy (big picture)
- How development activities helped you deliver your role and objectives
- What you have done (in or outside your role) that brings you closer to your career goals
- Reasons why some development activities didn't get completed and how to avoid development being overlooked in the future (if relevant)
- Time spent on development (for role and as part of 10 days allocation) and related pressures in relation to workload, work-life balance, and lessons learned when it comes to estimating time requirements
- Actions that may need follow up or repetition in the next period (they would need to be included in section 4)
- The support you received from your manager and how helpful it was

PDR form excerpt with examples:

Section 3 - Objectives and development related to the current review period		
• Role-related development		
Reviewees should list up to five role-related objectives agreed upon with the reviewer from the previous PDR meeting or the start of their contract. If objectives were not clearly defined, they can list main work aspects. When relevant, reviewees should then note development activities done in line with objectives (e.g., training, shadowing), reflect on progress, gained skills/experience, faced issues, and needed further development. It is acceptable for priorities to have changed.		
Role-related priority or objective	Associated development / learning activities	Progress and comments
Coordinate delivery of project	Learn about project management (including use of project management software or tools) improve how I work with the teams and stakeholders involved in my project. Undertake internal leadership training.	Project deadlines met. Completed Postdoctoral Leadership Programme which increased my understanding of how to manage the different stakeholders involved in my project. I embedded project management tool MS Planner in my work.
• Additional career development		
Reviewees should list additional career development goals and actions not directly related to their role, previously discussed with the reviewer or undertaken since the last review or since starting their role. These activities are part of their 10 career development days or done in their own time. Reviewees can add unplanned activities and explain any uncompleted planned activities. They should estimate time spent on each goal and reflect on progress, learnings, and benefits. It is acceptable for priorities to have changed.		
Development goal / action undertaken (e.g. skill, experience needed and concrete ways to do it)	Approx. time spent	Progress and comments
Research papers reviewing experience: Watch relevant Nature Masterclass; manager to share reviewing requests and provide mentorship about the peer review process	2d	Reviewed 3 papers with increasing autonomy. Learned about peer-review, critically assessing research, and I now feel better prepared writing my own papers and planning rigorous research. I was happy to be contributing to my field.

Results of PDR Pulse Feedback Survey

- PDR Response Rate**
 - ☐ 67% of respondents had completed a PDR in 2024.
 - ☐ Reasons for not completing PDR are summarised in Fig 2.
- Perception of Updated PDR Form & Guidance**
 - ☐ 64% of respondents found the new form **better** (Fig 3).
 - ☐ Respondents reported especially benefitting from the new form facilitating **self-reflection** & allowing them to **seek advice** from their line manager.
 - ☐ Line manager support is critical to positive PDR outcomes.
- Awareness of the 10 Development Days**
 - ☐ 23% of respondents learned about the 10 development days policy through using new form (Fig 4).

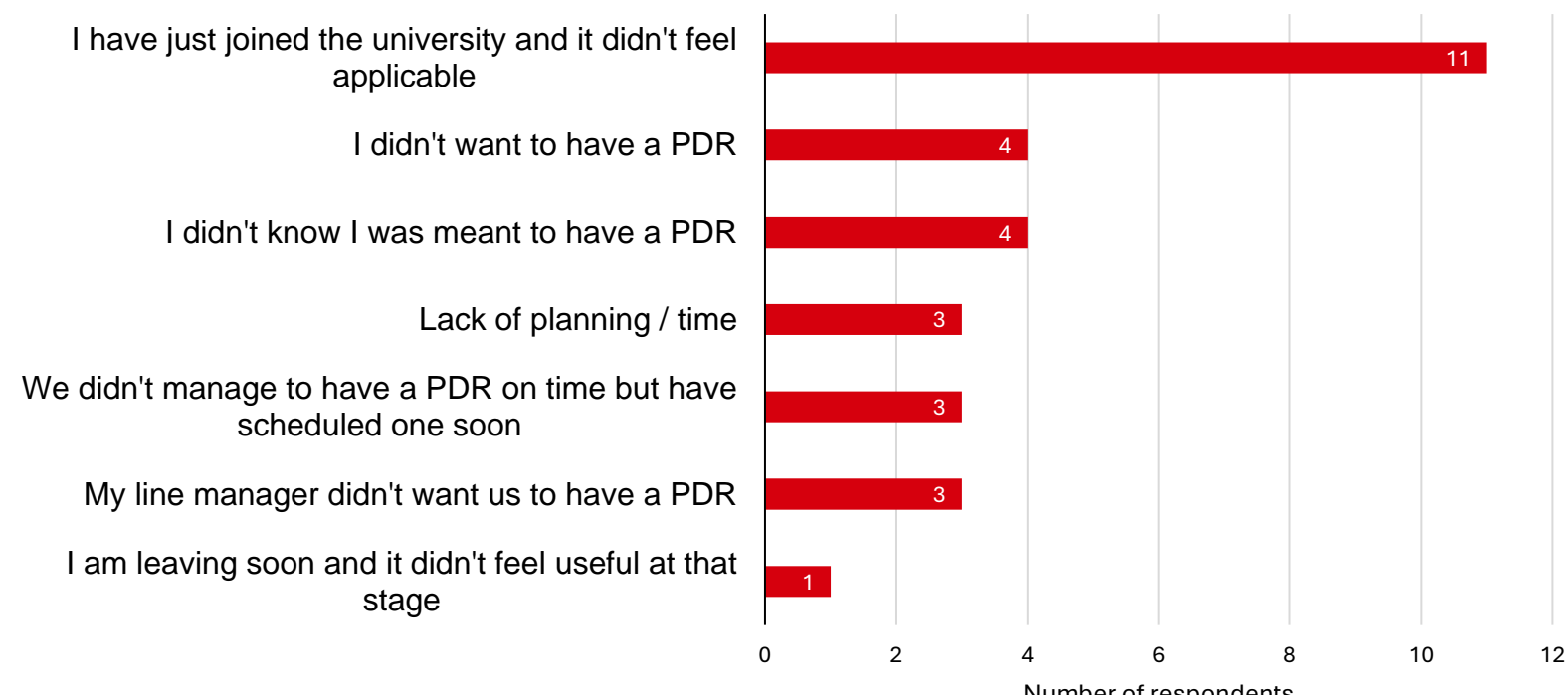


Figure 2: A summary of the reasons participants (n=29), did not complete a PDR in 2024.

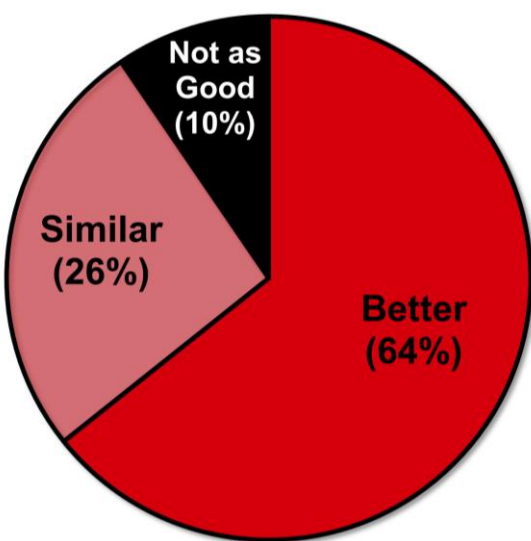


Figure 3: Perception of new form compared with the previous form (those who had not used previous documentation have been excluded for clarity, n=42).

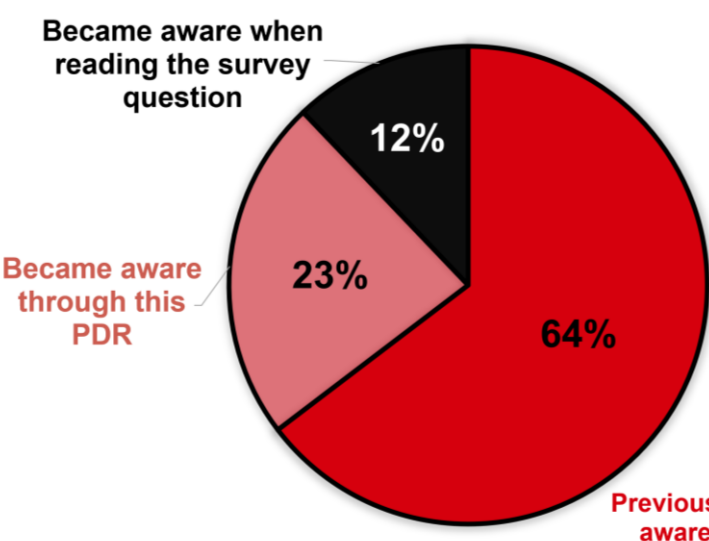


Figure 4: Research Staff awareness of the 10 development days (shown as a % of 90 respondents). *Values don't total 100% due to rounding.

Key Outcomes & Future Work

- ☐ The results of the survey clearly indicate a benefit of the new PDR resources to research staff and their career development.
- ☐ The new form for RS improved **self-reflection for researchers** and fostered **open, productive career discussions** with line managers.
- ☐ **Awareness of the 10 development days policy** has significantly increased as a direct result of the introduction of the new PDR resources.

Future plans: training sessions with support from peers & PDC on filling form and planning career development. Capturing & sharing examples of use of the 10 development days. Supporting PIs with their line management duties, notably by clarifying expectations.

Acknowledgements

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