



**Stellenbosch**  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

Human Resources  
Ulawulo lwezabasebenzi  
Menslike Hulpbronbestuur

# **Performance Advancement Resource Guide**

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# 1. Overview of Performance Advancement

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**P**erformance advancement is essential to achieve both institutional and individual success at Stellenbosch University (SU).

Staff must set clear key performance areas (KPAs) and objectives in the context of their roles. These are directly linked to the university's strategic direction, requirements

and goals to ensure that the university meets its strategic objectives.

The aim of this guide is to help line managers and staff operationalise the above by implementing the performance advancement process.

## 1.1 What is Performance Advancement?

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Performance advancement is a process where academic, professional and administrative support staff engage with their line managers to assess and review key responsibilities, expectations, performance outcomes,

and professional development. It ensures the recognition and reward of top performers who significantly contribute to the institutional goals of the university. It also provides support for both personal growth and institutional success.

## 1.2 Performance Advancement Goals

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The aim of performance advancement is to:

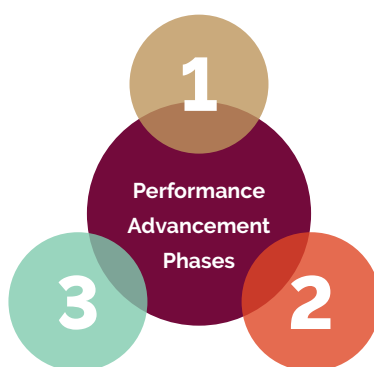
- improve institutional performance;
- align staff deliverables and behaviour to organisational objectives;
- help staff realise their full potential;
- develop a system to recognise and reward staff and create incentives for accomplishment; and
- boost productivity

## 2. Performance Advancement Process

The Performance Advancement (PA) process includes three phases as shown below:

Compiling the Performance Work Plan and Personal Development Plan for the year ahead

The formal annual review, rating and compilation of the PWP for the next cycle must be completed by 30 April. Under performing staff members will be reviewed by November of the previous year.



Ongoing feedback and coaching

### 2.1 Phase 1:

#### Compiling the Performance Work Plan and Development Plan for the year ahead

The planning phase begins with compiling a comprehensive Performance Work Plan, comprising multiple components including a Personal Development Plan (PDP).

##### 2.1.1 Performance Work Plan

The PWP should outline specific Key Performance Areas (KPAs), identified in job descriptions, that are aligned to the university's strategic goals. Staff and line managers will collaboratively set objectives and SMART measurement indicators to ensure the achievement of these KPAs. The components of the PWP will be discussed below. There are six [SU Core Strategic Themes](#) at SU:



A thriving Stellenbosch University



A transformative student experience



Purposeful partnerships and inclusive networks



Networked and collaborative teaching and learning



Research for impact



Employer of choice

When compiling the PWP, staff members should align their individual contributions with the relevant core strategic theme that supports the university's goals. It is possible that multiple themes may apply to your KPAs.

2.1.1.2 Setting Key Performance Areas (KPAs)

Through collaborative discussion, the staff member and line manager must jointly establish KPAs. For newly appointed staff, line managers will establish the initial set of KPAs. It is recommended that each role have between three to five KPAs, including the following two mandatory KPAs.

Transformation KPA

TAs part of the University's commitment to transformation, each staff member's PWP will include a dedicated Transformation-related Key Performance Area (KPA). Staff are encouraged to align their individual weightings with the University's transformation objectives.

SU Values KPA

SU's values are central to our identity and inform our work, interactions, and community service. To uphold these values, staff members are required to set personal value objectives that outline how they will embody and demonstrate these values in their daily roles.

2.1.1.3 Setting Objectives and Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) Measurement Indicators

It is important to develop clear, measurable objectives and SMART measurement indicators that align with individual roles and institutional goals. For each objective, a unique SMART measurement indicator should be created, providing clarity on expected outcomes, deadlines, and quantifiable targets.

	Objective	SMART Measurement Indicators
ACADEMIC STAFF	By the end of the academic year, improve curriculum content by developing and launching a new course that addresses a key emerging area in the field.	Develop and launch a new course in an emerging academic area by June 30. Evidence alignment with industry standards and gather student feedback, with at least 80% positive response in post-launch evaluations.
PROFESSIONAL STAFF	Improve operational efficiency by implementing a new system or tool to reduce manual workload.	Implement a new automated system by November 30, resulting in a 25% reduction in manual processes within the team as measured by error reports and time-tracking data.

### 2.1.2 Personal Development Plans (PDP)

While a PDP is not formally evaluated, it is a critical tool to identify and address development needs linked to the required competencies for a staff member's current role. Development priorities should first focus on addressing current job requirements. Development of competency needs for future jobs can only be considered once competency needs for current jobs requirements are met. This must be aligned with university goals and are subject to available resources.

	Academic Staff	Professional and Support Staff
Competency	Improving research leadership skills for better grant acquisition.	Improving financial management and budgeting skills for department operations.
Development Intervention	Attend a specialised short course about research funding strategies.	Participate in a university-hosted skills programme about advanced financial planning and budgeting.
Development Type	Short course (Qualification).	Skills programme (On-the-Job Training).
Objective	Improve research grant success rates by 15% over the next two years.	Ensure departmental budgets are aligned with financial projections and deliver quarterly reports with no variances.

## 2.2 Phase 2:

### Ongoing Feedback and Coaching

Ongoing feedback and coaching are optional, but it is recommended to be provided throughout the performance cycle. Ongoing feedback aims to provide staff members with constructive support and insights to enhance their performance in their roles and align their efforts with university goals. Ongoing feedback can be formal and /or informal.

Formal, documented, feedback is particularly important where the staff member is experiencing performance challenges.

Informal feedback is an opportunity for staff members and line managers to engage on progress against objectives.

## 2.3 Phase 3:

### Formal Annual Review, Rating and Compiling the Performance Work Plan for the next cycle

The assessment phase involves evaluating the staff member's achievement of performance goals, their demonstration of SU values, and progress towards their Personal Development Plan (PDP) objectives.

#### 2.3.1 Formal Annual Review

The staff member must complete a self-assessment based on the agreed KPAs and objectives outlined in their current PWP. The performance review is a joint discussion between line manager and staff member focusing on the staff member's achievement of KPA's. Supporting documents may also be used as part of the staff member's records.

#### 2.3.2 Rating of KPAs and Objectives

Ratings must be provided for all objectives. Decimal increments of 0.5 (e.g. 1.5) may be used to accurately reflect performance. Ratings in other decimal increments (e.g. 0.3) are not permitted, as these distinctions are difficult to justify in terms of performance discrepancy and are often disputed. Cumulative overall ratings will automatically be calculated, based on each weighted KPA and objective. See ratings table below. The final overall rating can be amended by the line manager to more meaningfully reflect the performance discussion.

<b>1</b>	<b>Extensive development need</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Some development need</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Succeeds (expected level)</b>
<p>The staff member constantly performed below expectations and did not achieve the agreed upon performance objectives.</p> <p>Significant improvement is needed. The line manager must implement and monitor an improvement strategy with clear timelines and outcomes. Achievement of the performance indicators is in below the expected standard in all respects.</p>		<p>The staff member did not meet expectations and may need additional training and/or assistance to improve performance.</p> <p>Agree on performance barriers and provide effective support. Achievement of the performance indicator meets the expected standard in most respects.</p>		<p>The staff member performed reasonably, fulfilled expectations and delivered on the agreed objectives. Achievement of the performance indicator meets the requirements set in the performance contract in all respects.</p>	
<b>4</b>	<b>Surpasses</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Exceeds</b>	<b>Unrated</b>	
<p>The staff member fulfilled expectations and delivered on the agreed objectives. Achievement of the performance indicators surpass the expected standards in most respects</p>		<p>The staff member reached the agreed objectives and exceeded the anticipated expectations of the role.</p> <p>Achievement of the performance indicators is excellent. It exceeds the expected standards in all respects.</p>		<p>The staff member is new in the role and the period is too short to rate their performance. Or the staff member was away with a justified reason which makes it difficult to rate performance.</p>	

### 2.3.3 Rating of SU Value Objectives

The staff member and line manager must meaningfully reflect on the staff member's demonstration of SU's values, assessing how they have embodied these values. While these unweighted objectives do not directly impact the staff member's overall performance rating, it recognises staff members who consistently embody the university's values or identify areas of behavioural concern that needs attention. The following diagram shows examples of SMART measures that can be set for value-based objectives.

#### ACADEMIC STAFF

Mentor at least two students from underrepresented groups in the faculty to support their academic development and improve their chances of success in postgraduate applications.

Offer additional office hours and personalised support for students struggling with coursework, ensuring to improve the performance of at least 80% of these students by the next assessment.

Ensure compliance with ethical standards and timely submission of all research projects for review. Avoiding any lapses in ethical compliance and missed deadlines throughout the academic year.

Create a respectful classroom environment by integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, and soliciting student feedback through surveys to ensure that all voices are heard.

Increase student engagement in large undergraduate classes by designing and implementing innovative teaching methods to improve student feedback by 10%.

#### EQUITY

#### COMPASSION

#### ACCOUNT- ABILITY

#### RESPECT

#### EXCELLENCE

#### PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Collaborate with HR to develop a diversity and inclusion initiative, ensuring equitable hiring practices within the department. Set a target to increase the representation of under represented groups by over 10% within the next year.

Create a compassionate work environment by actively listening to colleagues' concerns in team meetings and provide constructive support. Facilitate at least one mental health awareness session.

Take ownership of the department's annual budget. Provide quarterly reports to ensure expenditure alignment with projections and identify cost-saving opportunities.

Ensure respectful communication in all team interactions by actively promoting inclusive language and resolving conflicts professionally, as reflected in improved team feedback during the staff climate survey.

Ensure the timely and error-free processing of procurement requests within five working days, enhancing service quality and contributing to the efficiency of departmental operations.

### 2.3.4 The following diagram shows examples of SMART measures that can be set for value-based objectives.

After concluding the discussion with the staff member the line manager must finalise the performance review.

#### Rating Requirements:

- For ratings of 4 (Surpasses) or 5 (Exceeds), the line manager must provide a written motivation for the rating.
- For ratings of 1 (Extensive Development Need) or 2 (Some Development Need), the line manager must upload supporting documents that include the feedback provided to the staff member throughout the performance cycle.



## 3. Calibration Process for Performance Ratings

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The institutional calibration process for performance ratings is necessary to ensure consistency, fairness, and objectivity across the university when evaluating staff performance. Calibration allows the university to maintain alignment with its strategic goals while reducing potential

biases that could distort the results. It also ensures that performance ratings are applied fairly in different environments and that staff members are recognised or supported based on standardised criteria.

### 3.1 Calibration Principles

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- **Consistency and Fairness:** The calibration meeting must ensure the consistent application of performance ratings. This process guarantees that staff with similar performance levels are assessed and rewarded the same, irrespective of their environment.
- **Review period:** The review cycle is from **1 January to 31 December** of each year. A staff member who did not complete the full 12-month performance cycle, must remain unrated, unless there is sufficient evidence during the appointment period to rate their performance.
- **Performance ratings:** Ratings must reflect areas where

performance was exceeded, met, or did not meet the agreed-upon objectives and measures.

- **Double-dipping:** To ensure fairness, staff who already received payment or rewards for a specific achievement cannot be recognised (by payment) again for the same work. This does not exclude recognising staff for the way in which they perform their duties.
- **External factors:** Must be considered. Staff members should not be unfairly penalised if unforeseen circumstances like illness or resource constraints affected their ability to meet their objectives.

### 3.2 Calibration Panels

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The calibration process will be done by panels at both departmental and institutional levels. These panels will ensure that ratings are aligned with the university's strategic goals.

#### 3.2.1 Environmental Calibration Panels

Each environment (such as a faculty or responsibility centre) will convene an Environmental Calibration Panel to review the performance ratings for staff within that environment. The number of panels and the levels of calibration may vary depending on the size and complexity of the environment. Smaller environments may have a single panel, while larger environments with multiple sub-units may require several layers of calibration to accommodate the extent of operations.

##### 3.2.1.1 Composition of Environmental Calibration Panels

Calibration panels shall be constituted to guarantee fair, objective, and evidence-based decision-making. Calibration Panel membership must include the following:

- **Chairperson:** A senior leader inside the environment (e.g. Responsibility Centre (RC) Head/ Dean/Chief Director) with primary responsibility for the environment's performance management process.
- **Panel members:** Line managers/supervisors or their representatives from various departments or centres within the environment. These individuals must be familiar with the performance objectives and achievements of the staff under review.
- **Human Resources (HR) Client Partners:** Provide guidance about performance advancement policies/processes, ensure adherence to institutional guidelines and address any procedural or fairness concerns.

- Additional stakeholders: Specific specialists or technical subject matter experts relevant to the performance discussions may be included.

### 3.2.2 Institutional Calibration Panel

The Calibration Panel will convene to review and approve the environmental calibrated ratings after the completion of the environment calibration process. This process guarantees that performance ratings are aligned not only within individual environments but also across the entire institution. This will reflect a university-wide standard of excellence, and fairness.

### 3.2.3 Composition of Institutional Calibration Panel

- Chairperson: A senior executive, such as the Rector and Vice-Chancellor or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel. This person oversees the performance advancement process at the highest level of the institution and ensures alignment with the university's strategic goals.

- Panel members:
  - » Senior Executives or Deans: Representatives from the leadership of the various faculties or responsibility centres (e.g. Deputy Vice-Chancellor's (DVC)/ Chief Operations Officer (COO)/Deans/Directors of Schools/Chief Directors/Registrar/Senior Directors), who are responsible for ensuring that their environment's performance ratings align with institutional standards.
  - » HR Directors from respective HR domains will provide a comprehensive overview of performance data, ensuring adherence to the university's performance management principles.
  - » Institutional Stakeholders: Senior representatives from key institutional portfolios, like finance, strategy, or governance, who bring an institutional perspective to the calibration process.
  - » Additional representatives: Other senior leaders may be included to ensure a broad, representative perspective on performance across diverse functions.

## 3.3 Calibration Process Flow

### ENVIRONMENTAL CALIBRATION

- Each environment conducts its own calibration process.
- Identify and address any discrepancies in performance ratings within the environment.
- Submit a finalised set of performance ratings to the Institutional Calibration Panel.



### INSTITUTIONAL CALIBRATION

- The Institutional Calibration Panel reviews performance rating submissions from all environments.
- Check for consistency across the university.
- Address outliers (e.g., unusually high/low ratings) and ensure fairness in the ratings.
- Finalise the performance ratings across the university.



### SIGN-OFF AND APPROVAL

- The Institutional Calibration Panel approves the finalised ratings.
- The approved ratings are used for performance advancements and reward decisions.

## 3.4 Institutional Performance Data

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HR will produce relevant reports that will inform the calibration discussions and consistency checks of the environmental and institutional panels.

The presented data will provide insights and ensure transparency throughout the process.

## 3.5 Final Approval

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The Institutional Calibration Panel will approve the final ratings for each environment upon completion of the institutional calibration process, following the resolution of outliers or variances. The ratings will then be used as the basis for performance advancement rewards, and

development planning for the next performance cycle. The final approved ratings are communicated to the line manager who in turn communicates same to the staff member.

# 4. Requesting an Appeal of a Performance Rating

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Staff members may request an appeal after conclusion of the calibration process.

All appeals will:

- Be conducted fairly, without bias or favouritism. The staff member's concerns will be heard and considered on merit.
- Be promptly resolved, ensuring that staff members receive timely feedback about their performance and any potential rating adjustments.

- Be conducted in accordance with the university's performance advancement policies and frameworks, ensuring that ratings are applied consistently in all environments.
- Information shared during the appeal process will be treated confidentially and will only be shared with those directly involved in the process.

## 4.1. Grounds for appeal by Staff Members

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Staff members can request an appeal if they disagree with the final rating or believe there that any procedural irregularities occurred.

### 4.1.1 Disagreement with the final rating

A staff member may appeal if they believe that their final performance rating is inconsistent with their documented performance (PWP), the rating assigned by their line manager or the calibrated rating.

### 4.1.2 Procedural Irregularities

A staff member may appeal if they believe that there may have been procedural irregularities, which may include:

- Failure to conduct performance feedback discussions as required or appropriate.
- Insufficient or missing documentation.
- Perceived unfairness or biased assessment by the line manager based on documented evidence.

## 4.2 Appeals to the Environment and Institutional Calibration Panels

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A staff member may appeal to the Environmental Calibration Panel, before escalating the appeal to the Institutional Calibration Panel.

### 4.2.1 Appeal to the Environmental Calibration Panel

The staff member must submit a written request to the Environmental Calibration Panel within five (5) working days of receiving the final performance rating and must include the HR Client Partner in this communication.

- The submission must include:
  - » Specific grounds for review (disagreement with rating or procedural issues).
  - » Supporting evidence (e.g. PWP, feedback records, discrepancies).
  - » Desired outcome (e.g. rating reconsideration or procedural acknowledgment).
- The panel will:
  - » Review rating consistency within the environment.
  - » Check for procedural irregularities.
  - » Ensure alignment with the university's performance policies and frameworks.
- This may involve:
  - » Consideration of the submitted documents or a meeting will be held with the staff member if necessary.
  - » Consultation with HR to ensure process consistency.
- The panel will communicate its decision, in writing, to the staff member and the line manager within 15 working days of receiving the appeal.

### 4.2.2 Appeal to the Institutional Calibration Panel

If the staff member is still dissatisfied, they may submit a final written appeal to the Institutional Calibration Panel within 5 working days of receiving the Environmental Calibration Panel's decision.

- The panel will review:
  - » The original rating and review process.
  - » The Environmental Calibration Panel's decision.
  - » Any new evidence.
- This will involve:
  - » A meeting with the staff member and line manager/ most senior environmental head who is accountable for the performance advancement process for the environment.
  - » Consultation with HR to ensure process consistency.
- A final decision will be communicated to the staff member and the line manager within 30 working days of receiving the final appeal.
- No further appeals are allowed.