

A BRIEF GUIDE TO SETTING SMART OBJECTIVES

This guide has been written to support reviewers in writing SMART objectives within the SRDS framework. These guidelines cover the following.

1. **Why set objectives**
2. **How to set objectives**
3. **Setting SMART objectives**
4. **Setting SMART objectives within the SRDS process**
5. **Hints and tips**
6. **Further support**

1. **Why set objectives?**

Objectives are one of the key components to the University's staff review and development scheme (SRDS). They clarify expectations between the reviewer / line manager and the reviewee for the coming year and provide the basis for the following year's assessment. Setting objectives is not an easy process but once set they provide a useful benchmark from which you can identify development needs, and monitor and support performance over a period of time. Clear objectives are also a useful management tool, helping managers to identify what is being done, by whom and when.

2. **How to set objectives?**

Information you will need

Within the SRDS process you will need the following information in order to set objectives:

- **The individual's job summary/ job description / About the Job**
This gives an outline of what is expected of someone in a specific role (regardless of who that person is!). The language used in the summary provides you with an idea of the level expected of someone in that role e.g. to co-ordinate or to manage, to supervise or to do, to evaluate use or to support use etc. You will also be expected to take into account the individual's circumstances e.g. length of experience/ time in post and working arrangements.
- **University, faculty departmental and/or team objectives**
The departmental and/or team's objectives identify the main areas that the individual's objectives should cover, and consideration should be given to how these objectives contribute to the achievement of faculty and University objectives, even if indirectly. It's worth noting at this point that staff would normally be set between three and six objectives within the SRDS process.
- **The individual's SRDS form**
Reviewees are encouraged to identify their own objectives as part of the self-reflection process in section C of the form. Where reviewees have completed this part of the form, the information contained in this section gives you a

good starting point from which to either develop or re-negotiate the objectives identified so far.

3. Setting SMART objectives

SMART is a useful acronym which describes the different elements that are required in useful objectives. SMART stands for:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-framed

Step one

There are a number of different ways in which SMART objectives can be set, one method is to start by identifying what you want the individual to do or achieve that reflects both the departmental or team objectives.

For example:

You may be a Senior Lecturer and your department is looking at ways to improve the student experience as one of its objectives or priorities (this may be linked to results from the student satisfaction survey or feedback from other sources). You are responsible for reviewing two lecturers and it would therefore be appropriate to look at their role in this departmental priority. What does the Department need them to achieve? Is it an increase in student satisfaction in a certain area (e.g. learning resources)? Is it reducing the number of students who don't progress on to the second year of studies? Etc.

You may be a manager in a Professional Services department and your department is also looking at ways to improve the student experience as one of its objectives or priorities. What does the department need the staff you manage to achieve? Is it the introduction of new processes/procedures in order to improve the service given to either students directly or academic departments? Is it maintaining a certain (high) level of service to students/staff over a period of time?

When setting SMART objectives wherever you are within the organisation and whatever your role, as a reviewer you will need to have as much clarity as possible about what you want or need your reviewee to achieve.

Using the space below write down what your departmental/team objectives or priorities are for the coming year. (If you don't know what they are then you will need to find out!).

Using the space below write down your thoughts about what the department needs the staff you are reviewing to achieve in relation to one of the departmental/team objectives identified above.

Step two

Having identified what needs to be achieved and having written this as a statement (in the box above) you then apply the SMART criteria to it.

For example:

Specific:

For the lecturer: Increase student satisfaction levels in the learning resources provided by the department.

What kind of increase are you looking for – a small % increase or a large one? What learning resources are you referring to?

For the administrator: Reduce the amount of time it takes to respond to academic departmental requests for information.

What reduction are you aiming for? What do you mean by respond to? Do you really mean all academic departmental requests for information or a particular area?

Measurable:

For both examples – what measures are you going to use? Clarification is needed for both. How will you know when the objective has been achieved?

So for the lecturer the objective may now look something like the example below:

Increase student satisfaction levels in the 201X student satisfaction survey by 25% in the learning resources provided for x course.

For the administrator the objective may have changed slightly to look as follows:

Ensure all academic departmental requests for information on x are dealt with within 3 working days by October 201X.

Achievable:

This is where you need to consider the context, abilities etc of the individual that you are expecting to do this work. Is it something that they would be able to do? It may be that the individual would need support in the form of resources, training/development etc in order to achieve the objective set (you would note these down in sections C & D of the SRDS form). It might be that the time frame that you place on the objective (which is currently missing from one of the examples) makes it less achievable so check this as well.

Relevant:

Double check that the statement you are now crafting reflects both what is needed by the department and fits in with the expectations of the individual as described in their job summary/ job description.

Time-frame:

Is there a time frame in place? By when will you be expecting this work to have been done? When will it be measured and will the information be available then?

Using a separate piece of paper – look at the statement(s) that you have written in step one and apply the SMART criteria to them.

The approach described in steps one and two means that you will go back to your original statement several times and will end up re-writing it possibly more than once. Only stop re-writing the objective once you and the reviewee are happy that you both understand what is written and what it means.

4. Setting SMART objectives within the SRDS process

Objective setting within the SRDS process should be a joint event. Reviewees are encouraged to submit their own objectives for consideration in the review and as reviewer you may find that your role is simply to use the SMART acronym to clarify your understanding of what the individual is expecting to do. If your reviewee does not submit any objectives then use the review meeting to start discussing your thoughts on what their objectives should be. In practice you may not come up with SMART objectives during the review meeting itself, but will need to work on them over a period of time and continue to discuss and potentially negotiate what goes in and what doesn't!

5. Hints and tips

- Focus on what you need the individual to achieve - avoid writing objectives which describe what someone is going to do.
- Keep objectives under review throughout the year.
- Objectives should reflect the level and range of responsibilities that an individual has.
- Objectives should be challenging and aim to achieve positive outcomes – avoid setting too difficult or too easy objectives, both can be demotivating.
- A useful objective is one which describes to you, the reviewee and anyone else who might read the objective what is expected of them.

6. Further support

There are a number of books available from the library on writing and setting objectives. These can be accessed via the STAR catalogue.

The SRDS skills for reviewers course includes a session on objective setting. For information about what this course covers please visit the following webpage <http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/sld/developyourself/srds>