

Implementation of the CPD Framework case study

Name of Institution:	University of Kent
Title of Project:	AUA CPD Framework
Date of Project:	January to September 2011

1. The Project Brief

The University of Kent project explored the ways in which the AUA CPD Framework of professional behaviours might support the Professional Development Planning (PDP) and career development of clerical and administrative staff within the Faculty of Humanities as part of their annual appraisal process.

A key aim of the project was to map the nine AUA professional behaviours against current job descriptions and person specifications for all administrative staff in the Faculty of Humanities. The intention was that this would provide the basis on which participants in the pilot would consider and explore their roles and their development. Participants and managers were given a set of tools developed to assist their thinking and preparation for appraisal. The pilot provided evidence to determine whether the AUA CPD framework provided appropriate behavioural context to use for this purpose within our specific institutional context.

2. Project Context

The need for institutional change had been recognised by the most senior levels within the University of Kent. The Vice-Chancellor advised in the August 2011 issue of the University's staff/alumni magazine that "this has been a challenging time when the discussion over the future of HE has hardly been out of the newspapers" and that as part of Kent's preparation for the future there has been "an increased investment in both people and infrastructure" of the University. She stated in June 2011 that she was "confident that here at Kent we are moving in the right direction" and this particular pilot project was one of the many ways that the University is looking to develop its human resources and business systems. The University has been committed to improving the appraisal process for staff but has found it challenging to identify an appropriate approach that would work across the University.

This particular project was championed by the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and the Academic Registrar and endorsed by the Human Resources Department as it supported one of the University's strategic goals of '*operating in an efficient, effective, sustainable and professional manner*' outlined in the Institutional Plan 2009 to 2012, as well as supporting the themes of developing leadership and organisational capabilities, enhancing people management, resourcing and communication, promoting equality and diversity, building efficient effective HR systems and supporting workforce planning outlined in the HR strategy 2011-2012.

The University wished to explore the AUA Professional Behaviours framework as it felt that implementing a CPD framework for administrative staff would assist line managers to

encourage and enable their staff to further develop their skills, knowledge, capabilities and behaviours in a purposeful and appropriate way.

The HR Department is playing a lead role in implementing an ambitious people strategy for the University of Kent. The Department has identified key client partners to work closely with to ensure that change is not imposed simply from the corporate centre of the University, but rather, is responsive to the broader needs within the University.

This is alongside a University administration review undertaken in the 2008-2009 academic year, where changes were introduced to the reporting lines and organisational structures within the larger Academic Divisions for the administration provision in the University's three academic Faculties. The purpose of the changes was to develop the efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency of the University's administration and provide a professional support structure and to enable academic staff to focus on their core responsibilities of research, teaching and enterprise. A key change has been the introduction of a new reporting structure for the School Administration Managers who now report directly to the three Faculty Administration Managers rather than to academic Heads.

Through the Faculty Administration Managers, each of the Faculties is engaged in a variety of strategic initiatives to continue to pull administration together within the Academic Division. The Faculty of Humanities' administration provision is comprised of 46 administrators located in a number of teams across five academic Schools, three Faculty centres and the Dean's office. The Faculty Administration Manager for the Faculty of Humanities is the lead on the creation of administrative role profiles within the Academic Division.

The AUA CPD Framework project partnered key staff from the Faculty of Humanities and HR to explore the AUA CPD Framework for administrative staff as an already existing behavioural framework within the UK HE sector that could potentially be used by other administrative staff groups within the University. The project team is led by the Humanities Faculty Manager and includes the School Administration Manager in the School of English and HR Manager.

3. Project Participants

The AUA CPD Framework was piloted across four academic Schools as part of a larger University-wide project to review staff role profiles within the University. The following academic Schools and Faculty Centres participated in the pilot project:

- School of Architecture
- School of English
- School of European Culture and Languages
- School of History
- Centre for American Studies/Centre for Early Modern and Medieval Studies

Apart from the Project Lead, the Faculty Administration Manager, 26 administrative line managers, administrative and technical staff in these four Schools and Faculty Centres took part in the project and used the project documentation as part of their annual appraisal process. These are indicated in the table below:

School of Architecture	School of English	School of History	School of European Culture and Languages
3	7	6	10

4. Outline of approach taken

The project plan consisted of a number of different phases based around a key activity. These were based around the following activities:

- a. Defining the project brief and parameters
This included revision of the original plan submitted to the AUA to increase the clarity of what the project was trying to achieve and to consider the scale of the project. This provided a clear outline of the project expectations which we were able to communicate to the wider institution and to all stakeholders (i.e. what does the project want to achieve, as this helped the team agree what to focus on and how to judge effectiveness of this). This also included a consideration of and statement about the link to institution and departmental strategy; where does the project fit?
- b. Agreeing project team and how the team would work. This included organising regular project team meetings and assigning tasks in addition to identifying how and when the project consultant might be involved
- c. Defining the project plan, timelines and target dates. This included a number of varied activities. A key activity early on was to get the institutional sponsor to agree and sign off the revised project plan and another was agreeing to defer appraisals to the summer vacation to enable the project team to facilitate the project and develop the project documentation, and consult with all the stakeholders to ensure the project and the project planning was acceptable.
- d. Implementing the project plan. This consisted of a number of key activities linked to the milestones. These included:
 - Identification of a “target group” which will be a selection of staff/schools within the Faculty of Humanities, who would take part in the pilot
 - Consultation about the intended changes to the PDP and Appraisal process and the nature of the documentation to be used followed by a briefing document which was circulated
 - The development of the new customised professional development framework incorporating the AUA professional Behaviours and associated guidance notes
 - Arranging training/and briefing sessions for the staff and their managers
 - Supporting the staff in use of the new framework and documentation during the pilot and observing the use of the materials
 - Providing an update to the AUA and the wider AUA audience at the annual conference in the form of a poster, on the progress of the project. This was also used within the University for display in Schools, Faculty and HR
- e. Gathering evaluative data and feedback in the first cycle of use in the pilot. This was through a series of focus groups and interviews followed up with a survey.
- f. Compilation of evaluative reports at the end of the pilot. These included recommendations for the University about the continuing use of the framework and this Case Study for the AUA on the effectiveness and impact of incorporating the Professional Behaviours into the University framework.

5. Materials used

The project team used the existing AUA Professional Behaviours framework and the associated resources and tools and adapted these materials to create a customised Professional Development Framework. The team also designed a self-assessment form, FAQs, a letter to staff and guidance materials for the University of Kent administration staff.

Adopting a customised approach to the AUA framework allowed us to make the documentation more meaningful and relevant to the project participants and provided a more practical application of the framework as the documentation was based on both the institutional and Faculty context.

To tailor the framework the project team collected and reviewed all the job descriptions and person specifications of the staff participating in the project to identify key behaviours, skills and attributes for each level. After this review had been completed; the project team collectively agreed whether the behaviours, skills and attributes for each level of staff were not only appropriate but also matched the University's expectations.

Using this approach a relevant Professional Development Framework for the University of Kent was developed which illustrated the incremental build-up of professional behaviours from one grade to the next. These professional behaviours were embedded into each of the University's main administrative grades, 3 to 8+ through the development of generic role descriptors which identified the essential behaviours that must be demonstrated within different staff levels as part of the framework. This framework formed the key documentation for used in the annual appraisal process. It was agreed in early discussions that in the team that participants would be provided with the complete framework showing all the grades and not just the grades that they were working at and the one above. This was given out to all staff taking part in the pilot together with the self-evaluation form, FAQ's, accompanied with the self-assessment form, letter to staff and guidance notes.

6. Observations, learning points

A number of learning points for the team emerged as the process involved and some of these were acted upon during the project but others were only identified through a reflection on the wider activity towards the end of the pilot. These included:

- a. A well-defined project brief and defined outcomes established at the beginning of the project is essential as everything builds from this. Meeting to regularly update and revisit these was invaluable in keeping the team focused and on track. This often included identifying achievements, learning points as well as the project benefits, deliverables and outcomes. The project plan also enabled the team to establish and adhere to a series of timelines/set tasks.
- b. Identification of key risks, constraints, assumptions and stakeholders at the beginning and reviewing this regularly enabled the project team to monitor the impact and progress, particularly with regard to specific sensitivities and influential individuals.
- c. Keeping communication open and providing the forums in which this could happen was essential. This was in the form of regular project team meetings, briefings for the participant group and other key stakeholders, meetings and updates with the AUA consultant and regular reports to the project sponsor.
- d. Building a strong project team enabled work and tasks to be shared, provided a productive learning environment for individuals within the team to share concerns and difficulties as well as celebrate successes.
- e. Gaining early support from Human Resources, key colleagues in the Faculty and University was key in moving the project forward. This included meetings with the Dean and Academic Registrar to brief them on the project and keep them updated on progress which was undertaken by the Faculty Administration Manager. This

dissemination was also rolled out to the HR department and the project sponsor was kept in regular touch with the project team's activities and contributed to the development of the project documentation and design of the focus group questions. Another key group was the Humanities Administration Managers who were kept fully briefed on the project and its activities so that they could update their teams. A briefing sheet was also put together outlining key information for staff and the benefits to participating in the project. In addition, the team also agreed to update the Academic Division Management Team on the project and share the documentation with this group. This also helped to raise awareness of the project across key colleagues in the Academic Division. The team has also identified the importance of briefing, disseminating the materials and obtaining engagement and support from School Managers and the Heads of Schools and will actively include this in the future roll out of the project.

- f. The AUA project consultant provided expertise and objective points of view.
- g. Importance of training and support for those who are using the new approach and not making assumptions that they will be able to understand and adapt to the new way of working. This is particularly the case when a new philosophical approach and conceptual understanding drives and underpins the new approach. To support this any new documentation must be clear, unambiguous and professional-looking.
- h. The use of focus groups was a productive and comfortable way of gathering comprehensive feedback on the pilot

7. Evaluation

The key learning points from this pilot will help us to determine what adaptation need to be made to use the framework within our wider institutional context and across the broader spectrum of Professional Service Departments. This will need to address the current differences in approaches and practices and the underpinning variations in their conceptual understanding of professional development and appraisal.

The feedback was collected through focus groups and all the staff who participated in the pilot were invited to take part. An online survey was sent to staff who were unable to take part in the focus groups as it was felt to be important to seek feedback from all the participants to ensure that the learning from these members of staff is acted upon.

The participant feedback from the first pilot phase of the project was unreservedly positive and tremendously encouraging. All participants said that they would like to see this pilot appraisal system introduced fully across the Faculty of Humanities and that they would be disappointed if this was not the case. Two key messages were strongly articulated by the pilot participants and these were that i. the participants very much welcomed the shift of focus in the appraisal from the tasks they are expected to do within their role to one that was about their development and, ii. that the focus on their **strengths** and not their weaknesses was hugely empowering and encouraging but did not mean that the discussion did not highlight areas that they needed to work on and develop.

The first question that we asked the participants was to tell us **what the framework enabled them to do?** Comments included the following:

- Helped widen areas for discussion and addressing skill and development areas more than previously.
- Allowed to think of career progression, next career step and future development.
- Inspired thinking.
- Formed a framework for discussion at appraisal.
- Gave staff something to work from and think about and as a starting point to focus thoughts.
- Prompted team discussions about individuals' strengths and weaknesses roles.
- Liked having a national framework from a credible and recognised professional body. Good to know that university administration is a professional career.

- Helped look at performance in more depth.
- As a manager helped identify areas to bring up in appraisal and show staff the way to progression by pointing to areas in higher grades.
- Enabled staff to look at performance in terms of grading so that they knew what was expected of them by the University at their current grade and what was expected at the next grade if they wanted to progress. It enabled them to assess their performance in relation to the areas within their grade. (all participants apart from SAMs said this).
- As a manager good to see if someone not performing within grade.
- Could see what areas they were doing well in and an indication of how to progress to another grade.
- Helped staff to see CPD in a different way and not just in terms of training courses.
- Allowed to think of career progression, next career step and future development.

The second questions asked participants if they felt that the framework helped them **assess and reflect on your CPD needs?** The responses included the following:

- Helped to trigger an idea e.g. forming networks with staff in other Schools, creating forums and sharing best practice.
- Felt CPD was not supported across the university and that this framework may help promote this more.
- Helped formulate CPD in terms of knowledge acquisition.
- Thought of how to improve strengths – thought it was good to focus on strengths.
- Helped to identify area of development and what to do to develop.
- Made me think of an area of improvement and how to address it. For example I thought of improving listening skills through the behaviours of working with people, which is a current strength. Don't think would have thought of this without the framework.
- Encouraged me to take part in development activities.
- Starting course with the OU and would not have thought of doing this without the appraisal.

The third questions asked **how the framework impacted upon the appraisal process** and the responses included the following:

- Framework formed the basis of the appraisal process – went through the framework and asked staff to look at their achievements within the areas of development, think of new areas of development and an action plan in terms of the team's objectives.
- Enhanced process – used to be very task based and appraisals would say 'I did this, I did that', but now can look at how tasks are done and it allows the appraiser to give praise in areas that wouldn't have done previously.
- Made appraisal person driven as opposed to task driven.
- Looks at performance in a much more holistic way.

The fourth and fifth questions asked whether the participants experienced **any difficulties or problems in using the framework?** and **what would need to change in the future?** There was a unanimous view that the participants found the self-assessment form difficult to use and would like this to be simplified, with fewer questions. A few participants also found it difficult to fit their job into the framework and a question was asked why the grades 6 and 7 were merged. It was explained that within the higher grades a lot of the same behaviours are used and it is difficult to differentiate between these two grades. It was confirmed that staff are not necessarily expected to have all of these areas – it will depend on roles. Some of the staff also did not like the use of the word 'client' in the framework and found the amount of paperwork daunting. The focus groups found that there was some repetition in the

framework and suggested that some of the areas could be merged e.g. they thought that most of the areas in 'managing self' should be expected in all the grades.

The final question posted to the three focus groups was **would you support a wider use and promotion of the framework?** There was unanimous support but some recommendations for a future use of the framework were suggested:

- Many members of staff at Kent have not had good appraisal experiences resulting in some resistance to appraisals, this will need to be addressed in any future expansion of the use of the framework (several participants said this)
- Training for appraisers and appraisees needs to be increased
- Case studies from staff who have benefited from the system this year might be useful in supporting further adoption and promotion of the approach.
- It would be helpful if appraisees had sight of the output document so that they knew what it looked like and what its purpose was
- It was important not to lose sight of objectives and achievements in terms of tasks done in the appraisal process and not just look at development
- Definitely keep all grades available for all staff to see
- Fear that giving staff lots of paperwork may seem an additional workload burden - some staff embrace development and some don't, so will need to tailor the way the new system is presented to these different groups of staff.
- The Self Evaluation Form needed to be a lot clearer with fewer sections. Information about the intention of the framework must be made freely available to all staff, especially for those who don't like appraisal.
- The quality of pre-appraisal and post-appraisal conversations has a direct impact on the outcome of the appraisal and this should be supported through the training.

It is clear that there is an opportunity to extend the pilot by further adapting the framework and embedding it into the University-wide appraisal system. This will enable us to test its adaptability across different areas of the University. The project team were very encouraged by the participants' endorsement of the AUA Professional Development Framework and the professional behaviours.

In moving forward the key learning points from the first pilot phase will help us to determine what adaptation needs to be made to use the framework within our wider institutional context and across the broad spectrum of Professional Service Departments. This will need to address the current differences in approaches and practices and the underpinning variations in their conceptual understanding of professional development and appraisal.

The Faculty of Humanities will continue to lead this in order to allow us to build on our understanding of both the content and the processes involved but the project will expand to include one or two academic Schools in the Faculties of Sciences and Social Sciences, the Faculties Support Offices and some central service departments.

8. Conclusion

This project was designed to embed the University of Kent's Professional Development Framework (based upon the AUA's CPD Framework) into the annual appraisal process in the Faculty of Humanities. This was a joint partnership between the Faculty and the Human Resources Department at the University of Kent and very much aligned with the University's strategic objectives.

The overwhelming positive endorsement and support from the project participants shows that the staff firmly believe that the use of the framework greatly enhanced our annual appraisal process and provided added value to the staff. The project team feels strongly that this introduced a more meaningful appraisal process for the Faculty which achieved higher

levels of engagement from the staff and one which was supported by both appraisees and appraisers.

We are very encouraged and will build on the facts that staff liked using a nationally recognised framework and being part of a recognised profession and recognise the subsequent positive potential impact that the AUA's framework has on the future membership/image of the AUA. It also recognised the potential impact on the professionalisation of administrative support within the Academic Division.

9. Future

The success of the pilot provides an opportunity to reconsider how this might be done and to ensure that such an approach encompasses professional development as well as providing feedback on performance. This will more appropriately shift the focus from a discussion of the achievement of tasks and activities to a rather more holistic approach to development.

The project team have agreed to roll out the second phase of the project and embed the Professional Development Framework (based upon the AUA's CPD Framework) into the annual appraisal process available to a wider group of administrative staff. This will be achieved in joint partnership between the Faculties, Academic Division and the Human Resources Department at the University of Kent and very much aligns with the University's strategic objectives.

The existing project documentation, briefing materials and training programme will be revised in light of the feedback and recommendations from the pilot's focus group and feedback questionnaires to further enhance the appraisal documentation.

We particularly would like to ensure that the framework is adapted to include examples of behaviours for technical members of staff as this group of staff were not part of the original pilot participants but became involved at the latter stages of the pilot. This may be possible by linking with HeATED, the UK's Higher Education & Technicians' Education and Development organisation.

After focusing on a single Faculty within the pilot, the roll out of the project to a larger pilot grouping across a wide spectrum of Professional Service Departments should provide us with further evidence of the suitability of the framework to be adaptable to use as a cross-institutional initiative.