



Development conversations

Managers Quick guide

A quick guide to facilitating an effective development conversation.

We aspire to be a University where, together and supported by each other, we use our judgement and behave with accountability to solve our own problems, we nurture our own growth, assess our own risks, make our own decisions and take personal and collective responsibility; in so doing we collectively maintain a highly successful University.

In our pursuit of development, understanding boundaries and creating inclusive approaches, this guidance has been created as a prompt for holding development conversations. We encourage these conversations to help identify individuals' aspirations, build trust and confidence, set clear expectations and accountability that reflect our values at Essex.

Before the conversation

These conversations can last from 30 mins – 1 hour or more, so ensure you have set enough time for the conversation and give you and your colleague sufficient time to prepare. Think about whether you will have this conversation in person or online and how you might approach confidentiality and safe space for your colleague.

Prior to the meeting you may decide to share some questions for them to think about so that you can get more valuable input:

- What parts of your role do you enjoy the most?
- What are your strengths?
- What skills would you like to develop?
- What are career options have you considered which would best use your strengths?
- How do your development and new skills support your team and delivery of strategy?
- What do you see as your next steps?

In addition to these questions you and your colleague can look through the resources available within the [Explore and Plot section of Develop at Essex](#). Here you can find out what the University has to offer and the [Plot your Career Development Pathway](#) tool that can help them think about their development plan.

Having a development conversation

The conversation can begin with a broad overview, and your colleague may have a lot of information to get through with the questions outlined above. It is important you work together to create clear objectives that you can develop, check progress, and achieve.

You don't need to have agreed firm development objectives and a plan by the end of the conversation but you should agree next steps, which will lead towards the creation and implementation of that plan. You may need to follow up the conversation in subsequent 1:1s to track progress.

To help you structure this conversation we have outlined the **GROW model** below:

Goal

First, you and your colleague need to look at the behaviour or development areas that you want to address and structure it as a goal that they want to achieve.

Make sure that this is a **SMART goal** – it needs to be **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound**.

It's useful to ask questions like:

- What goal do you want to achieve?
- What would you like to happen with....?
- What outcome would be ideal?
- What do you want to change?
- Why would you like to achieve this goal?
- What are the benefits?
- How will you know you have achieved this goal?
- How does this fit within your aspirations?
- How does this benefit the team?

Reality

Next, ask your colleague to describe their current reality, this is important to fully understand their starting point. It is common for us to try and solve problems without fully considering what we need to achieve the goal. As you learn about their current reality, you may find the solution start to emerge.

Useful questions include:

- What is happening now (what, who, when, and how often)? What is the effect or result of this?
- Have you already taken any steps toward your goal?
- Why is this important?
- Does this goal conflict with any other goals or objectives?
- What are the barriers?
- Where are you now in relation to your goal?
- What is working, what is not?
- What have you learnt so far?

Options

After you have explored their current reality, it is time to determine what is possible which means exploring the possible options to reach the goal. You can help your colleague brainstorm ideas and as many good options as possible. It is important you then discuss these options and help them decide on the best ones.

At this stage you may offer your suggestions but it is important they offer their ideas first and dominate the talking. Your duty is to guide them through this process. They will be more committed and find it more valuable if they are able to fully express their ideas.

Typical questions to explore here are:

- What are your options?
- What do you need to do next?
- What's your first step?
- Who might be able to help?
- What happens if you achieved it? What happens if you did nothing?
- What can you do now?

- In an ideal world, what would you like to happen?
- What's realistic?
- What else?

Will (*way forward*)

After examining the reality and exploring options, you and your colleague will now have a good idea of how you can achieve their goal. The final step is to look at commitment and decide on specific actions. This process should enable you to establish their will and motivation.

Useful questions to ask here include:

- What will you do now? When?
- On a scale out of 10, how likely are you to do this? What would make it a 10?
- What will keep you motivated?
- Tell me how you will achieve this?
- What barriers do you see?
- What support do you need?
- How will you know you have been successful?

By the end of the conversation you should have some SMART goals and action plan that you both have agreed and can track progress. You can use the [Plot your Career Development Pathway](#) tool to help with this.

After the conversation

You and your colleague should now have a SMART goal with action plans. It is important now that you follow up and decide how you will check progress.

As part of our approach to Performance and Development review, it is encouraged that you have ongoing development conversations.

You can follow up with colleagues in your regular 1:1s to see how they are getting on and whether they need further support. Together you can develop an action plan for their goals:

Some things you can consider:

- Have they clearly identified development opportunities both within and beyond their current role to help them achieve their aspirations?
- How can networking help? Can you support them in building this network?
- How can you hold them accountable to their goals?
- Ensure you build enough time for your colleague to focus on their development.
- Can they get further support from training, coaching, mentoring?
- You can continue to think about opportunities that will benefit their goals. Take a look at our Development offer.

Tips on having a successful development conversation

- **Active Listening** – the conversation should be dominated by your colleague listening. Your role is to listen, understand and support! Show that you are listening through your posture, small verbal comments, and facial expressions.
- **Manage expectations throughout** – share your approach and make it clear what is realistic and what support is available.
- **Growth Mind-set** – keep the focus in the positives and what can be done, over what is limited.
- **Create a supportive safe space** so that your colleague can be open with their views and aspirations. Put the other person at their ease by offering positive support and build trust through an open, honest and considerate approach.
- **Open questions** and probing can really get them to think about their situation and open up to further examine themselves.
- **Use a moderate, calm and confident tone of voice and open body posture.** Focus on the individual, pay attention and show an interest.
- **Defer judgement** - allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions, don't interrupt with counter arguments challenges
- **Summarise and confirm actions** – leave enough time to summarise and confirm next steps.
- **Reflect back** what you think they are saying, identify key themes and feed them back ('what I think I'm hearing is...' 'Sounds like you are saying...' 'Is this what you mean?')
- **Consider the benefits** – how does their development benefit the team and strategy.
- **Offer ideas** – once they have shared their views, think about what you can offer from your perspective that you believe will benefit them.
- **Follow-up actions** – whether it is email, another 1:1 or a coffee, following up can help with motivation and tracking progress.

The key to holding a successful meeting is not only to ask the right questions, but to actively listen, making a conscious effort to not only hear the words being said, but the complete message that is being communicated. Take a look at our [development conversation graphic](#) to find out more what to consider when having a development conversation.

For more support on the GROW model and development conversations you can work through our [Coaching Essentials for Managers](#) Moodle resource.

To learn more about coaching and get some practice in you can also attend our [workshops](#) to get some practice!