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Teacher appraisal guidelines: to improve, not just to prove

**These guidelines are for use when a school is designing,
implementing or reviewing its teacher appraisal system.**

The purpose of appraisal

For a long time appraisal has been seen by many teachers as, at best, another hoop to jump through and at worst threatening and stressful. It does not have to be like this.

Performance appraisal has two purposes – development and accountability, or to put it another way, formative and summative assessment. It should be about helping teachers to develop their practice and do their personal best. A good developmental, formative, process will provide opportunities to show that standards are being met, allowing the summative judgements to be made too.

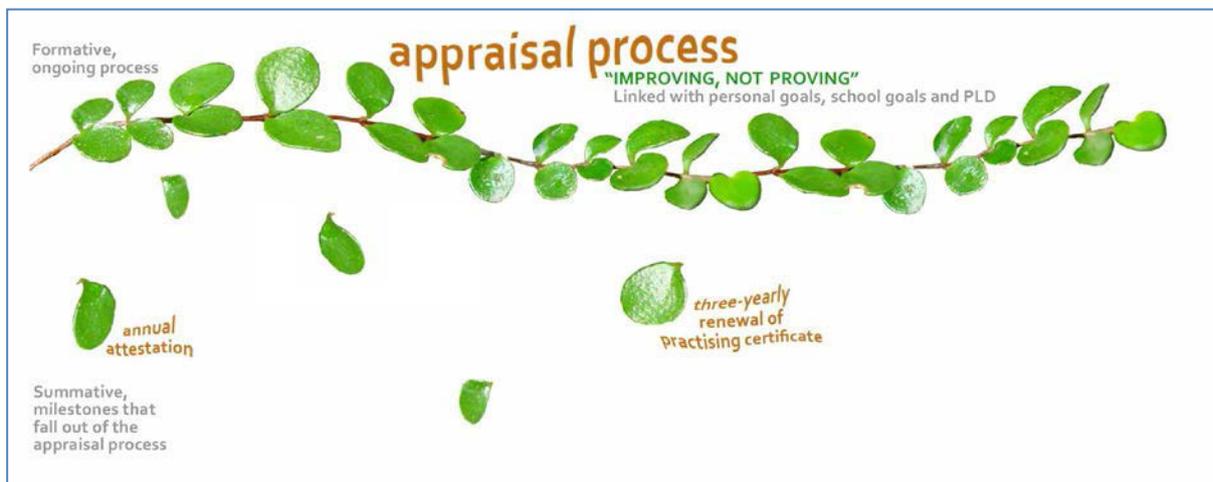
PPTA represents the professional and industrial interests of some 17,500 secondary teachers in state secondary, area, manual training and intermediate schools, as well as tutors in community education institutions, alternative education and activity centres, and principals in secondary and area schools.



Poor appraisal processes which are under-resourced, ill-conceived or overly ambitious, generally fail to achieve either of the above purposes. Another reason the process can fail is that the supporting documents are too complicated or poorly designed.

This guide provides criteria for good appraisal processes generally and examples of documents that can be used to support the process.

Performance appraisal is just one part of a 'performance management' system, which includes professional learning and career pathways, and the document that is used to support it is just one part of performance appraisal. Throughout this guide there are links to resources which provide advice on other parts of these processes.



A good appraisal system should:

- Have professional conversations at its heart. These conversations should be based on evidence and focused on student learning. [Open to learning conversations](#) are a useful model for this.
- Use reasonable and focussed documentation. A ten page document for each teacher each year should be the maximum required for an effective appraisal system.

- Be on-going and built into the regular work and meeting cycle. It should not be simply a once or twice a year meeting. If journals or logs are part of the appraisal documentation, teachers must have time to complete them at the end of professional learning and development sessions.
- Use appraisers who have a good understanding of the work of the person they are appraising. For example, this could be a middle leader who knows the teacher's work best, who then advises the principal.
- Have training and support for the people doing appraisal. It's not reasonable to expect someone to simply be able to do appraisal well because they are a good teacher. Training is needed in conducting observations, what types of evidence to look for, to build familiarity with the criteria or standards and in having difficult conversations.
- Be referenced to standards or criteria. Where the Practising Teacher Criteria and Professional Standards fit in relation to a schools performance appraisal must be made clear. It is important that teachers know which criteria they are being evaluated against and they should be able to develop their own understanding of what these criteria mean, and what the evidence will look like. PPTA's [Appraisal using the standards and criteria](#) explains this.
- Include classroom observations. Planned and intentional classroom observations are crucial. A good process involves a pre-meeting, to decide what to focus on, and a follow up meeting after the observation to discuss it.
- Use data that comes from multiple sources. These *should* include student learning outcomes and *could* include: student achievement information, student feedback, observations, personal reflections, peer feedback... or the multitude of different types of 'evidence' that teachers create every day in their work.
- Be used to plan professional learning and development (PLD) based on teachers' needs. Teachers should have the opportunity to

pursue PLD that allows them to achieve their goals and meet their learning needs. PPTA's [PLD Toolkit](#) explains this further.

- Be based on school policies which establish how teachers will be supported to meet the requirements and criteria of appraisal.
- Teachers' goals or inquiries should be informed by and have reference to school goals. The best goals are set by agreement between the appraiser and the appraisee

Moving online?

If a school is moving to a digital version of appraisal documents it should:

- Give training in how to use it – recognising the different levels of skill and confidence staff will have.
- Give more time during the year it is introduced to practise.
- Allow teachers to customise or use 'hybrid' paper/digital systems if it achieves the same goal.
- Keep in mind the developmental goal of appraisal. Be wary of flashy systems that provide great looking data but don't necessarily link well with teacher practice and student learning.
- Consider the portability of the information. Will be able to move with a teacher through their career?

Consider who can access the information? How much control does the teacher have over access?

Three models of teacher appraisal documents

There are different ways that schools may design their performance appraisal systems that may display these elements and achieve both purposes of appraisal. The paper work matters, but it is not the paper-work that is 'appraisal'. Evidence used in appraisal conversations and to make judgements will come from many places, not simply these documents.

Some schools are using portfolios of PLD and teacher reflections instead of or alongside this type of document. These can be great for encouraging good, broad discussions and letting teachers focus on what is meaningful to them. However, teachers should be given time, training and support when using them

Remember that each teacher's appraisal documents, portfolios and evidence belong primarily to them. They are part of a teacher's professional responsibilities. When ERO does their audit of a school's process for making practising certificate decisions, it does not expect to see all of the source documentation for each teacher. The school system should include a summary document which is kept centrally and made available to ERO, but working documents such as notes from appraisal conversations, observations, etc should be confidential to appraiser and appraisee.

Practising Teacher Criteria based appraisal

The school may make the Practising Teacher Criteria (PTC) central to performance appraisal and evaluation. They may use a document to complete over one year, or over the three years between renewal of teachers' practising certificates. Schools will need to consider:

- Which criteria to focus on. PPTA recommends focussing in greater detail on some (for example four) criteria in each year. Some criteria may require less evidence and discussion than others, while some might be much more important and challenging. For example, a school or teacher might choose to focus one year primarily on criteria that involve student well-being and community connectedness.
- If few criteria are covered in depth each year (aiming for 3 yearly renewal of practising certificates), how are judgements made for annual attestation?
- How to foster teachers' engagement with the PTC as meaningful descriptions of good practice and not just boxes to be ticked.
- That the gathering of evidence for the PTC needs to 'fall out of good practice'. There should be no need to be doubling up on creation of evidence.

- The reflective questions that are published with the criteria shouldn't lead to insistence on keeping artificial reflective journals. Reflection takes place in many different times and places and is a naturally occurring process in a good appraisal system.
- How to give teachers the opportunity to set their own goals or do their own inquiry as well as gather evidence towards the criteria.

Inquiry process based appraisal

The school may make a teacher inquiry central to appraisal. This will also need to have reference to the PTC and/or the professional standards at some point, but this might not be central to the process. Schools will need to consider:

- That the questions/goals of the inquiry cycle should be worthwhile and meaningful to the individual setting them, but may have reference to overall school goals.
- How many inquiries? One inquiry at any one time for a teacher is enough. To do an inquiry process well the goals should be narrow and deep rather than broad and shallow, and all the steps of the inquiry process (see *NZ Curriculum 2007*) need to be followed.
- How teachers can use their departments or cross-curricular inquiry groups to work on an inquiry topic together.
- How to include in appraisal an inquiry that is ongoing. The cyclical nature of inquiry means that it will not necessarily fall into one academic/appraisal year, but appraisal should focus on the process of the inquiry rather than the outcomes at any particular stage so this should not be a problem in a developmental appraisal system.

Goal setting based appraisal

The school may choose to take an approach in which each teacher's own professional learning and development goals are central to appraisal. Schools will need to consider:

- That the personal goals should either connect in some way with school/department goals, or the teacher may set a personal goal and another goal that links with the school's goals.
- How teachers are trained to set relevant, high level goals. There are many ways in which goals might not be useful – too broad, unobtainable, too simplistic. [SMART goals](#) may be a useful approach.
- How groups of teachers with similar goals can support each other and provide useful input to each other's work. How can the school facilitate this?
- How to encompass a goal setting cycle that runs from term two and ends in term one the following year – to enable time to reflect on learning and not have to rush to complete at the end of the school year.

Criteria for good appraisal

[Eileen Piggot-Irvine](#) identifies the following criteria:

- Educative
- High trust
- Well resourced
- Based on objective data
- Based on mutual respect
- Clear guidelines
- In-depth and on-going
- Independent of disciplinary processes

This final point is crucial. Appraisal may highlight areas of concern that could lead on to the competence process, but these **must** be separate and different.