

Chapter 16: Performance Management and Learning and Development

1. About this Chapter

1.1 This chapter explains:

- the aims and principles of Coach & Focus – our performance management approach
- the arrangements and opportunities for learning and development
- support for professional and education qualifications and other further education
- the availability of careers advice at the House of Commons.

2. Coach & Focus

Introduction to Coach & Focus

2.1 **Coach & Focus provides a structure to support staff and line manager performance and development.** Regular conversations between a line manager and their direct reports will provide clarity about expectations and priorities and will give feedback and recognition which should encourage growth and development. Managers use coaching approaches which make the conversations themselves part of each staff member's development. Coach & Focus also encourages line manager development by providing an opportunity for line managers to receive feedback about their management approach and the impact they have, and to use this feedback as the basis of their own development as a line manager.

Coach & Focus is an enabler of the House of Commons [values](#) and [Everyone has a Voice](#). The [coaching approach](#) has trust at its core – not only is it a better way to develop people, it demonstrates that we trust our staff to come up with ideas and solve challenges. It's courageous in that asking for and giving feedback are both courageous acts – and the ability to have honest and open conversations is fundamental to our changing culture. The approach is inclusive in that it allows for managers to flex and agree focus according to individual needs.

[Resources](#) to support staff and managers are available. Training to support managers in using coaching approaches is available via [Act](#).

Coach and Focus does not have any link to pay progression.

Different Elements of Coach & Focus

2.2 Coach & Focus has three elements:

2.2.1. Quarterly Seasonal Conversations

These are coaching style conversations which result in an agreement about what each employee should be 'focusing' on for the quarter. Focus is defined as the thing(s) that the

employee should be paying attention to, prioritising or ‘focusing on’ as they go about their work. Focus can be about a task or project, a behaviour or value, a target or KPI or about a way of working. Focus can be about the job the person is currently doing or could be more linked to their development. Focus can also be about helping someone improve where their work or behaviour does not meet expected standards for their role. A team can agree a focus for everyone in the team, linked to team or strategic priorities, but each person should also have a focus which is unique to themselves.

Focus should not merely describe the staff member’s job and a person should not have so many focuses that they cannot remember what they are without reference to notes.

From time to time a business team, or the House may ask that each employee has an additional focus relevant to an issue at the time, for instance a strategic priority, our values or for D&I or that everyone has a development related focus at a particular point in the year.

2.2.2 Planned, monthly Check-ins

Check-ins have two purposes. They provide an opportunity to offer support about staff wellbeing – how the staff member is, any pressures or challenges they are facing and any information that the staff member wishes to share with their manager. This may include discussions about working patterns and reasonable adjustments. The second purpose of check-ins is to give planned, structured time to support the staff member with their work. In a check-in, progress with day to day work and focus is discussed, with the staff member receiving feedback about their progress and recognition for successes. At the end of a check-in, agreements will be made about work that needs to be done and approaches to be used. Time must be allowed in the check-in for the staff member to raise any concerns they have and be supported to come up with solutions.

2.2.3 Manager Insight

Manager insight supports line managers by providing a mechanism for them to receive feedback from their teams about their management approach and the impact they have. Feedback will initially be sought via an anonymous survey, with managers then having coaching style support to reflect on their feedback and plan conversations with individuals and their team to further understand the feedback. Where appropriate this will result in agreement about changes to the way the manager supports the team and development for the manager. Manager insight is in no-way intended to provide an evaluation or assessment of the manager, or to have any link with pay progression. Manager insight serves as a tool to assist manager capability and development and to improve support for staff.

Line Manager’s Responsibilities

2.3 Managers are responsible for making sure that the required number of seasonal conversations and planned check-ins happen for each staff member that reports to them. Managers are asked to use a coaching approach in these conversations, involving the staff member as much as possible. Where it is necessary to keep records of conversations held and actions agreed, managers are responsible for making sure that this happens. Conversations and any records kept must be as objective as possible and not include

remarks about the job holder's personal life unless this is relevant to the performance. Feedback should be based on the performance and abilities of the individual and not on any preconceptions about the capabilities of any group to which they belong.

Managers are expected to take part in Manager Insight and the support activities provided for them and to reflect on the feedback they are given.

Senior Manager Responsibilities (formerly counter-signing managers)

2.4 Senior managers are expected to assure themselves that line managers are holding Coach & Focus conversations and that line managers have the support they need to do this well. Support includes that support that the senior manager should provide and signposting to line manager training and resources.

Staff responsibilities

2.5 Staff are required to attend meetings at the request of their line manager and take part in the discussion, sharing their progress, ideas and opinions. Staff are encouraged to take give feedback to their managers through the annual manager insight process and in direct conversations with their line manager where possible.

Confidentiality

2.6 There is no mandated paperwork in Coach & Focus. Managers are trusted to agree with each of their direct reports, the level and form of reporting and notetaking that is helpful to both. All employees are expected to maintain the security of any written records kept from seasonal conversations and check-ins, using the Parliamentary Marking Scheme. Records should not be shared with anyone other than the employee and their line manager, unless either both people agree, they are needed for an internal investigation or if either party wishes to share the notes with their Trade Union representative or the ICGS.

3. Learning and Development in the House of Commons

Introduction

3.1 This section outlines learning and development within the House. It is designed to help you understand:

- the role and commitment of the House in ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn and develop in current and for future roles
- your role in identifying, participating in and evaluating learning opportunities
- managers' role in ensuring skills and knowledge are continuously developed to provide services both now and, in the future,
- the wide range of learning and development opportunities available and how you can obtain further information about them.

3.2 The Commons Executive Board (the "Board") recognises that to support the House of Commons strategy and the achievement of the business objectives, a skilled and motivated

workforce is required that is capable of providing excellent service; and that all staff should have the opportunity to realise their full potential regardless of job role, pay band or other irrelevance.

3.3 This means the House is committed to:

- providing learning opportunities so that everyone has the skills, knowledge and capability in their current role to support the business objectives
- providing opportunities and encouraging individuals to learn additional skills so that they can become more flexible and move around the organisation
- supporting professional development so that individuals can work towards roles with different or increased responsibilities.

3.4 The Board and Line Managers support continuous learning and development through the House performance management system. See section 2 above for more information about the performance management system.

Your learning

3.5 Learning and development is supported through a variety of activities and methods such as on-the-job experience, e-learning, shadowing, coaching and mentoring, research, secondment opportunities and participating in a project, as well as attending formal courses and workshops.

Identifying your learning and development needs

3.6 All new joiners to the House of Commons and PDS are required to complete an Induction Programme, ideally within the first 3 months and must be completed before the end of their probation period.

[Induction Programme](#)

During your induction, there are mandatory courses and e-learning modules which you must attend/complete. Details of these can be found on [Act](#), the parliamentary learning system. Your manager will help you plan this and discuss with you any job specific areas that require development.

3.7 On completion of your probationary period, learning objectives should be agreed with your manager then reviewed regularly throughout the year as part of your regular Coach & Focus discussions, especially when you undertake a new task, job or objective. Your development need not be restricted to ensuring capability in your present role; it may also provide development for possible career opportunities in the future.

3.8 Before any learning and development activity takes place, it is essential to spend time beforehand, discussing your learning objectives with your Line Manager. Your discussion should cover the following:

- what is the purpose of the learning (new skill/below standard performance/future role etc.)?
- what is in it for you, the learner? your team? the House?
- what is the desired outcome?
- how and when will the effectiveness of the learning be measured/evaluated? For example, will it be through improved performance or better knowledge?

3.9 For information about the wide range of learning options that are available check the [Learning & Development](#) intranet pages or search for subjects on our learning management system, [Act](#).

The role of the Learning & Organisation Development team

3.10 The Learning & Organisation Development team are responsible for analysing core learning needs with teams and from the Corporate Business Plan. The team works with a list of providers to design and deliver a programme of learning activities, where these learning needs are best met internally.

Accessing learning and development

3.11 A calendar of learning events can be found on [Act](#). You can search for courses and workshops and reserve a place which your line manager will approve. You can also enroll onto e-learning

Recording learning and development

3.12 All staff have an account with our learning management system, Act, which contains their learning record. This provides details of the courses attended and e-learning completed. There is also the option to add other learning activity to this record.

Guidance on using Act can be found [here](#).

3.13 Development activities should be discussed regularly with your Line Manager.

Evaluating learning and development

3.14 Reviewing and evaluating learning takes place at various stages: immediately after learning and again later when the learner has had an opportunity to use the new or improved skills/knowledge in their job. It is essential that evaluation takes place for a number of reasons, including:

- to ensure the investment in learning, training and development supports the House and/or the team in achieving their business objectives
- to demonstrate to what extent the development has helped the learner in their present role and/or prepared them for a future one
- to ratify that the learning activity has met the learner's immediate needs and expectations and there were no barriers to learning

- to assist those who have organised the event in making any necessary changes or improvements.

3.15 Evaluation of learning and development should be discussed as part of your regular progress discussions with your Line Manager.

3.16 The L&OD team collate feedback forms from courses and will follow up any comments by participants which raise concerns. The team will also send out questionnaires or set up focus groups as appropriate to evaluate particular programmes.

4. Support for Professional and Educational Qualifications

4.1 The House is committed to ensuring that all staff have appropriate opportunities to achieve professional and educational qualifications during their employment. If you are interested in pursuing a qualification, you should discuss it with your Line Manager as part of your Coach & Focus conversations.

4.2 When thinking about undertaking this type of long-term development, you and your Line Manager should consider:

- how you will manage the additional commitments alongside your workload
- any funding and support which may be available
- any benefits to your team and the House as a result of your successfully completing the qualification.

4.3 Funding for professional and educational qualifications is considered on a year-by-year basis. For funding to be available for further years, there must be sufficient budget available and evaluation of your progress on the previous year must have taken place. If funding is not available, you may need to find a less expensive alternative, or your studies may have to be delayed until funding is available.

4.4 All permanent and fixed-term employees can apply to participate in professional and educational development. With fixed-term employees, the length of contract will be taken into account when determining whether or not the House can support this. All staff (permanent or fixed-term) seeking support must have successfully completed their probationary period. Requests for support made before the employee has completed their probationary period will only be considered if agreed at the point of employment.

Professional qualifications

Funding and support

4.5 The following factors are taken into consideration when making a decision on funding and support:

- links to objectives identified in corporate/team business plans
- links to your performance and development requirements (as shown through the individual performance management system)

- input from Head of Profession where applicable or relevant senior manager
- learning and development priorities
- existing commitments against L&D budgets
- satisfactory attendance, performance and conduct

4.6 Funding for professional qualification programmes will normally be granted as follows:

- 100% where the course is basic or foundation and provides an expected level of competence for the role, for example, Certificate in Human Resource Practice (CHRP) for an HR administrator or AAT for a Finance Officer
- 100% if the qualification is an essential element for the role and necessary for business performance, for example, Graduate Diploma in Purchasing & Supply for a Procurement Manager or CiLiP for a Library Executive
- 90% - 40% if the qualification is not essential, but would improve performance in a measurable way, for example, Diet and Nutritional Diploma for a Sous Chef; or if the House has already given you financial support to achieve a prior profession qualification.
- 80% if the qualification is related to long-term career development rather than a direct link with the current role, for example, MBA.

4.7 Funding for equipment and books should be agreed with the team budget holder through your Line Manager and will normally be granted as follows:

- 100% funding where the team purchases then retains equipment and books after the course.
- 50% reimbursement when the member of staff purchases the equipment and books and retains them afterwards, up to a limit of £100 per course.

4.8 For reimbursement of travel expenses, see [chapter 10](#).

4.9 Funding for exams will normally be granted as follows:

- 100% for all exams if not included in course costs
- 0% for any re-sits. These must normally be paid for by the employee.

Study leave

4.10 Paid study leave will normally be granted as follows, but must be agreed with the Line Manager:

- foundation course: five days per academic year including exam days
- intermediate and advanced qualification: 10 days per academic year including exam days. Certain professional qualifications such as accountancy may require additional time because of the intensity of the subject. This will be agreed between the Line Manager and Head of Profession.
- Open University degrees: 10 days per academic year including attending summer schools and exam days but excluding time off to attend evening classes.

4.11 You should give your Line Manager as much notice as possible when booking study leave.

4.12 You have the right to request unpaid time off from work for training and study for accredited, recognised training or for specific unaccredited business skills.

5. Other Further Education

5.1 The House of Commons encourages you to continue your education and may be able to offer financial support for courses that are not directly relevant to your current role, but they must be relevant to the needs of the business overall. All applications for financial assistance should be made to your Line Manager who approves the course. Your Line Manager will then pass your application onto the team budget holder for consideration. The following criteria for approval of your application by your Line Manager will be applied:

- attendance will mainly be in your own time
- you will be able to describe the benefits you will gain from the course
- you will be able to describe how the course will benefit your current and future work
- the course should lead to a recognised educational certificate or diploma
- the course should be available under the public education system. In exceptional circumstances, a course at a private college or correspondence course may qualify for assistance.

Course funding for further education

5.2 If your application is approved, assistance is considered within the following limits:

- 80% funding of any amount not paid by your local education authority (LEA).

Resource funding

5.3 For approved courses, the House may be able to help with a contribution towards the cost of fees, books and travelling:

- 50% of the total costs of books up to £100 per course
- for reimbursement of travel expenses see [chapter 10](#)
- study leave may be approved at the discretion of the Line Manager - up to 10 days including exam days per academic year.

5.4 In general, you may receive financial assistance for up to two further education courses during your career. Any funding will be considered in light of previous funding.

6. Careers Advice, Coaching Service and Mentoring Scheme

6.1 The House of Commons provides advice about developing your career through:

- your Line Manager

- Learning & Development Consultants
- an internal careers coach or an internal qualified or coach

Coaches and Career Coaches

6.2 A number of staff have undergone a professional qualification in coaching. If you require a coach for your personal development, you should contact the L&D team who will send you details of available coaches.

6.3 Normally, the coaching relationship will last between three and six months and you will agree with your coach how often you meet and what topics you wish to discuss. These meetings are on a 1 – 1 basis and any discussions are confidential.

6.4 Other staff across the House have been trained as career coaches and can offer information and advice on working in other teams or other roles.

6.5 The range of advice available is tailored to individual needs and includes skills' review, completing an internal application form and interview practice. You can book an appointment directly via e-mail to careercoaching@parliament.uk. Please ensure that time off to attend is agreed with your Line Manager.

[Return to the Staff Handbook](#)