Giving Feedback as an Appraiser Tutor

Giving feedback to trainee appraisers about their performance in the mini–appraisal sessions is central to the tutoring role on our appraiser courses.

Course participants are assessed in the three roles of appraiser, observer and appraisee on the courses. But the feedback given focuses primarily on the participant’s performance as an appraiser, and their performance in this role is usually central to the decision about whether or not to recommend them to their Health Board as an appraiser.

In order to give useful feedback regarding an appraiser’s performance, tutors require a clear understanding of, and ability to identify, appraiser behaviours which encourage a meaningful and productive engagement with the appraisal process on the part of the appraisee. This in turn requires an understanding of what a meaningful and productive appraisal looks like.

## Characteristics of a High-Quality Appraisal

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| **The Appraisal meeting** | **Appraiser Behaviours** |
| Is well structured | Agenda agreed near the beginning of the meeting.Areas for discussion are flagged up. The appraiser manages the meeting effectively, summarising regularly and signposts the beginning and end of sections of the appraisal. |
| Is a safe/supportive experience | Clarity about the boundaries of confidentiality near the beginning of the meeting.The appraiser develops rapport with the appraiser through the use of reflective and empathic interventions.The appraiser works co-operatively with the appraisee and checks that they are happy to proceed with his/her suggestions. |
| Allows space for the appraisee to talk about and reflect on their work as a doctor | Focuses the discussion without inappropriate interruption and without blocking the appraisee. Interventions are meaningful and designed to encourage further reflection, deeper understanding and learning.Is able to tolerate and constructively use silence within the appraisal. |
| Where appropriate, offers the opportunity for appraisees to address emotional issues arising from their work | The appraiser is attuned to the emotional content of the material the appraisee is talking about, both explicitly and implicitly.Is able to make non-collusive, empathic interventions which encourage the appraisee to express their feelings.Is able to accept the expression of emotion (eg anger, sadness, grief) and responds appropriately. |
| Challenges the appraisee to think more deeply about their work and in particular to think about anything they could do which might have a positive impact on patient care | Asks appropriately probing open questions.Asks the appraisee to think about what they could do to develop and improve their work.Helps the appraisee to formulate an action plan to address or implement any developments or improvements identified. |
| Encourages the appraisee to develop a meaningful PDP for the year ahead which is SMART:**S**pecific**M**easurable**A**chievable**R**ealistic**T**ime bound | Helps the appraisee to identify their learning needs. Challenges the appraisee to look at their learning in a balanced manner in terms of their personal interests, their needs as a professional practitioner and the needs of the wider department or service within which they work. Encourages the appraisee to think about how to evidence changes in their practise that result from their participation in personal development and quality improvement activities. |
| Offers the opportunity for the appraisee to meaningfully explore issues around their status regarding probity | Is alert for issues of probity (ethical issues) which are implicit or explicit in the material the appraisee both brings to the appraisal and expresses or infers during the meeting.Asks exploratory open questions about any probity issues.Encourages the appraisee to reflect and to challenge themselves to identify any potential probity issues. |

In the light of this, the tutor needs to be able to identify positive and negative appraiser behaviours and to offer clear feedback about when these behaviours were observed in the meeting(s). If a different approach to that used by the appraiser is recommended then a rationale for the alternative approach should be offered.

Clear feedback involves identifying what was observed. For example:

*“I noticed that at the beginning of the meeting you checked whether the agenda previously agreed was still OK. You said…”*

Actually quoting what the appraisers said can be helpful:

*“Can I just check with you that the agenda we discussed last week is still OK for you? Is there anything you would like to add?”*

Reinforcing and supporting positive behaviours by the appraiser:

*“I thought this was helpful because it gave the appraisee the chance to add something else to the agenda at the 11th hour and this was done in a way that meant you would be forewarned and therefore able to take this into account in structuring the meeting.”*

Or; identifying less positive behaviours and offering alternatives:

*“I noticed that at the beginning of the meeting you didn’t check whether the agenda previously agreed was still OK. I think it might have been useful to do this, for example you could have said”*

*“Can I just check with you that the agenda we discussed last week is still OK for you? Is there anything you would like to add?”*

*“This would have given the appraisee the chance to flag up the issue Y which they did in fact bring up later in the meeting.”*

Sometimes it may be appropriate to ask the appraiser to come up with their own alternatives:

*“How could you have handled the beginning of the appraisal differently? What could you have said?”*

## Further examples of positive examples of tutor feedback

All tutor feedback is context specific, and the appropriateness and effectiveness of the feedback can really only be judged in relation to the appraisal the tutor is giving feedback about. However, below are some examples of the kinds of statements which might be appropriate:

### About the beginning of the meeting:

*“I liked the way you tried to put the appraisee at their ease at the beginning of the meeting by asking ‘How’s your day going?’ ”*

*However, use this judiciously because if the answer is ‘Well actually I’ve been having a dreadful day…..’ you may open up a difficult discussion prematurely in the meeting from your point of view, as an appraiser. You have to use your own judgement because if the appraisee comes to the meeting having had a dreadful day, allowing them to discuss their day for a few minutes may then help them settle into the appraisal. How else could you establish rapport at the start of the meeting?*

*“I thought the way you handled the discussion about confidentiality at the beginning was very skilful. I particularly liked the fact that you asked the appraiser ‘What is your understanding about the confidentiality of this appraisal?’ This opened up a dialogue that allowed you to explore your slightly different ideas about this and achieve a shared understanding of the confidentiality of the meeting.”*

*“I thought your statement about confidentiality was leading. It would have been helpful to have asked the appraisee ‘Is this also your understanding? Do you have any questions about this?’ ”*

### About the questioning style used:

*“I wondered about how helpful some of the questions you asked were to the process, for example ‘Who was the duty doctor that day?’ and ‘Whose fault was that?’ It felt like you were a detective trying to find out who did it. I wondered what the thinking was behind those questions?”*

Appraiser replies…. followed by:

*“Ok, can you think of a different question you could have asked to encourage the appraisee to reflect on the fact that this Complaint arose from a system failure?”*

## General points to consider

As stated above, the validity and appropriateness of the tutor feedback is entirely context specific. For example, focussing on giving extensive positive feedback about the body language of the appraiser would be inappropriate if there were some other areas of the meeting which the appraiser managed particularly well or particularly poorly.

Good feedback is not just about the accuracy of micro feedback regarding individual episodes, but it is also about the balance of the macro feedback and what the tutor chooses to target. Generally, feedback receivers can only cope with two or three key pieces of feedback at a time, and if they are given more, the feedback giver risks diluting the key messages they wish to give.

The feedback you give must cover the areas identified by the appraiser. Often people receiving feedback will be very self-critical, focussing on negative aspects of their performance and ignoring positive aspects. It is important the feedback you give is balanced but also does address the issues raised, avoiding collusion, and - where appropriate - addresses areas not identified and offers suggestions for change.

Ideally people need several opportunities to implement feedback and to get further feedback if they are to change their behaviour. Feedback giving and behavioural change are iterative processes.