



# DIALOGUE GUIDE FOR ACADEMIC STAFF WITH MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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## Introduction

A good staff development dialogue (SDD) must be well-prepared. Before the dialogue, both the manager and the employee should read the 'Guide to Staff Development Dialogues'. The dialogue guide is consultative, and the questions are intended as a source of inspiration, i.e. they do not necessarily all have to be answered, and other questions may certainly be asked, by both the manager and the employee. The aim is to create a fluent dialogue with both the manager and the employee asking the questions which come to them naturally. However, the dialogue should, as a minimum, address the three main themes around which the dialogue is structured.

The three main themes are:

1. What has happened since the last SDD? – A good starting point for talking about the future
2. Well-being and job satisfaction
3. Future results, assignments and competency development

Each theme comprises up to seven related questions. In addition, the dialogue starts with a reconciliation of expectations and outcome between manager and employee. At the end of the dialogue, the agreements are summarised and entered into the agreement form.

In this way, the SDD is a mutual development dialogue with a forward-looking focus. The SDD does not replace the ongoing daily dialogue and feedback between managers and employees. Nor is the SDD an occasion to exclusively discuss problems where the manager or the employee focuses on accumulated criticisms. Such issues must be handled in separate dialogues, if necessary with the involvement of the union representative and AU HR.

## Introducing the SDD: Expectations of the dialogue

*The dialogue starts with the manager and employee presenting and agreeing on which themes to prioritise. This increases the likelihood of a satisfactory outcome. The following procedure is recommended:*

- a. The manager outlines the dialogue framework, i.e. its duration, content and any priorities or special focus areas as well as the expected outcome of the dialogue.
- b. The employee adds his/her expectations with respect to outcome and any special topics he/she would like to discuss.
- c. Together, the topics are prioritised and time is allocated to the individual themes.



## Main theme 1: What has happened since the last SDD? – A good starting point for talking about the future

*A dialogue about the work experiences and challenges over the past year can provide a shared understanding of what works and what may need to be done differently in the year ahead. Here, the intention is also for the manager and employee to give each other feedback on how successful they have been – in performing their tasks and in undertaking their managerial functions. See the ‘Guide to Staff Development Dialogues’ for guidance on how to give constructive feedback. The dialogue may be based on the following topics and questions:*

- a. Agreements resulting from last year’s SDD dialogue – how have they been followed up on, and what has the effect been?
- b. Which managerial challenges have you encountered in the past year, and which specific tasks have challenged you most?
- c. How have you and your job developed as a result of these tasks and challenges?
- d. What is the status of gender equality and diversity at your department/school/unit/?  
See AU’s strategic goal for more diversity in research environments.  
Click here to read the [Action plan for gender equality at Aarhus University 2020-2022](#).
- e. What have you done over the past year to create and/or maintain diversity in the department/unit? And what is your goal for the coming year?
- f. How successful have you been in combining your managerial functions with continuing to pursue your own research/education etc.?
- g. The manager’s feedback to the employee on results, achievement of goals and leadership skills.  
*Can be angled to focus on what you want more or less of.*
- h. The employee’s feedback to the manager on the manager’s leadership skills and development points.  
*Can be angled to focus on what you want more or less of.*



## Main theme 2: Well-being and job satisfaction

*Well-being is a central theme in any SDD dialogue and is important for employees to be able to perform their work satisfactorily, develop and achieve their goals. It can be a good idea to base the dialogue on specific work situations to get a shared idea of how to enhance well-being. If there are any special personal or other factors that have a bearing on the work which the employee wants to discuss, it may be a good idea to mention it here. The dialogue may be based on these questions:*

- a. What motivates and inspires you at work?
- b. Do you like your management responsibilities and your current tasks?
- c. How is your cooperation with your colleagues and other close partners?
- d. What do you think about the workplace culture and tone of communication? Is there anything we need to be aware of?
- e. How can my leadership be improved to support you as a manager?
- f. How is your cooperation with other units at AU? Do you have any suggestions for improvements?



### **Main theme 3: Future tasks and competency development**

*When interviewing academic staff with management responsibility, it is important that the dialogue covers the classic VIP disciplines and that it focuses on the employee's specific development as a manager. The dialogue may be based on these questions:*

- a. What results and tasks are important to your function as a manager and your work in the unit in the coming year?  
The manager can then outline the most important strategic goals for the unit together with the employee's expected results and performance of tasks in the coming year.
- b. What are your research goals for the coming year?
- c. What are your goals and plans as regards external funding and publication in the coming year?
- d. What are your goals for your teaching, supervision and other activities?
- e. What are your goals with regard to maintaining and developing your academic level over the next year (courses, conferences, project work etc.)?
- f. Which competencies and frameworks are important for you as a manager to be able to handle future challenges and success criteria?
- g. What are your expectations and wishes in relation to your career and other development perspectives over the next 3-5 years?

### **Conclusion and agreement**

At the end of the dialogue, the manager and employee agree on what to write in the agreement form, who will follow up on it and when. The employee then completes the agreement form in AUHRA, after which his or her manager approves the form (see IT guide).