



GUIDE TO DIALOGUE WITH RESEARCHERS AT INITIAL CAREER STAGES

Introduction

A good staff development dialogue (SDD) must be well-prepared. Before the dialogue, it is recommended that you read the 'Guide to SDDs'. The dialogue guide is intended as a guide only, and the questions are for inspiration, meaning that not all questions necessarily have to be answered, and that the employee as well as the manager are free to ask questions not included in the guide. The idea is to create a fluent dialogue with both the manager and the employee asking questions which come to them naturally. However, as a minimum, the dialogue should cover the three main themes in the dialogue guide. These three 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 tasks and competency and career development

Each main theme includes up to seven questions for inspiration. The dialogue should start by establishing a mutual understanding of expectations and desired outcome. At the end of the dialogue, the agreements are summarised and entered into the agreement form.

An SDD is a mutual development dialogue focusing on the future. An SDD is not a replacement for ongoing dialogue and feedback between manager and employee. Nor is it an occasion to discuss problems with the manager or the employee focusing on accumulated points of criticism. Such issues are addressed through separate dialogues.

Introducing the SDD: Expectations of the dialogue

The dialogue starts with the manager and the employee presenting and agreeing on which themes to prioritise. This will increase the chance of a satisfactory outcome, and the following is a suggested plan:

- 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 in relation to the outcome and any special themes he/she would like to discuss.
Together, the manager and the employee prioritise the themes and time 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 on work experiences, challenges and tasks since the last SDD helps to provide a common understanding of what works and what might have to be done differently in the coming year. The employee and the manager are also encouraged to give each other feedback on how well they have succeeded in terms of performing tasks and managing tasks, respectively. See the 'Guide to SDDs' for guidance on how to give constructive feedback. The dialogue may be based on these topics and questions:

- a. Agreements resulting from last year's SDD – how have they been followed up on, what has the effect been?
- b. What professional/academic and collaborative tasks and challenges have you had in the past year?
- c. How have you and your job developed as a result of these tasks and challenges?
- d. The manager's feedback to the employee on results, goal achievements, performance of tasks and development points.
Can be angled to focus on what you want more/less of.
- e. The employee's feedback to the manager on the manager's leadership and development points
Can be angled to focus on what you want more/less of.



Main theme 2: Well-being and job satisfaction

Well-being is a central theme in any SDD, and it is important in order for employees to be able to perform their work satisfactorily, and to develop and achieve their goals. Focusing on specific work experiences may be a good starting point and help to establish a common picture of aspects that may promote well-being. If the employee wants to discuss specific personal or other matters relevant to the employee's work, it may be a good idea to mention this here. The dialogue may be based on these questions:

- a. What motivates and inspires you most at work at the moment?
- b. Are you happy with your current tasks? For example, the distribution between teaching, supervision, research, communication, applications and publications
- c. Do you feel able to maintain a reasonable work/life balance?
- d. How well do you work with your colleagues and other close partners?
- e. What do you think about the workplace culture and tone of communication? Is there anything we need to be aware of?
- f. What is your experience of the level of gender equality and diversity in the unit? Is there anything we need to be aware of?
- g. What can I do more or less in my management to support your task performance and well-being?



Main theme 3: Future tasks and competency and career development

A researcher at an early career stage will often be considering various career options. Discussions with his or her supervisor/immediate superior may therefore have a crucial impact on future career choices.

Consequently, you should consider how the dialogue can support the researcher's own career clarification and opportunities for development, and what tasks would be a relevant challenge for the researcher.

You should also talk about what AU has to offer junior researchers at the relevant stage. The dialogue may be based on these topics and questions:

- a. What fields of work and career opportunities, both within and outside the university, do you find interesting, and why?
- b. Do you have a clear sense of the experience, knowledge and qualifications required for different career opportunities?
- c. Have any of your peers pursued career opportunities within or outside the university? What can they tell you about job content and competency requirements? Has this inspired you and given you food for thought with regard to your own career opportunities?
- d. Do you think that you would benefit from having a mentor, or do you already have a mentor? If not, how can I help?
- e. What tasks/activities/responsibilities (within the unit) can support your career goals? (e.g. communication, independent teaching and research tasks, project management and follow-up, data management, organising conferences or journal clubs, international networks, use of specific techniques or methods, e.g. digital methods in research, etc.)
- f. What competencies do you need to develop further, and what is your next step to strengthen your academic development and move closer to your career goals in the coming year?

Conclusion and agreement

At the end of the dialogue, the manager and the 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, and the manager approves the form (see the IT guide).