

# More than a paper chase

**Tina Orr-Munro looks at what can be done to make sure that the Performance Development Review (PDR) process becomes an effective career tool rather than a time-wasting exercise in gathering paperwork**

Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) are powerful tools that monitor and shape an officer's performance throughout his or her career. Now, the system itself has come under the microscope following research commissioned by the Police Federation of England and Wales.

The PDR scheme is linked to the Integrated Competency Framework (ICF) including National Occupational Standards (NOS). But while PDRs oversee an individual's performance, the Federation has been appraising the PDR system itself and this has highlighted a number of issues over how the system operates in

English and Welsh forces.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the Performance and Development Review system recommended by the Home Office in 2003. Through a combination of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, the research provides a snapshot of how PDR systems are working across eight forces in England and Wales.

The results show that forces generally comply with the PDR system and HR departments are supportive of the move towards centralised, structured performance appraisals. However, the system has failed to attract vital support from police officers.

The overriding issue is the amount of time it takes to fill out as well as the evidence that is needed to support the objectives. Sergeants and constables in particular felt the competency-based performance criteria used in PDR is overly bureaucratic.

The research also raised concerns about the objectives, activities and behaviours set as part of the PDR, as they are too inflexible to capture the complete scope and nature of policing.

John Giblin, Federation Promotion and Training Sub-Committee Secretary, says the research's findings are a concern as it is becoming increasingly important that the PDR process is conducted properly.

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“The effective and efficient use of PDR's is central to learning and development specifically, and workforce modernisation more widely. PDR is becoming a more central and important part of the management of police officers.

“The most common criticism of the PDR is that it continues to be seen by many officers as too bureaucratic and that the collection of evidence by the



individual officer detracts from their operational duties. Forces are measuring too much of the wrong things. This means there is a lack of focus and low trust and confidence in PDR amongst officers,” he says.

Jeff Bolter, a former police constable and Federation representative with 36 years on the frontline, recently retired from the Met. He refused to provide evidence for his PDR, as the roles he carried out in the force could not be used as evidence to support his PDR because of their confidential nature. This meant he could only ever be awarded a ‘competent’ in his PDR. He agrees with many of the findings from the Federation’s research, especially if forces such as the Met choose to undertake PDRs at the same time.

“PDRs are a bureaucratic nightmare and a real waste of time. It is a massive paper exercise that diverts officers from the job they are meant to do. The supervisors have to do them all at once so it becomes just a production line and a backside covering exercise which is of little value to anyone.

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“I know of one officer who spent his three rest days trying to compile evidence for his PDR. As some of the evidence is confidential, he couldn’t do this at home so had to spend what was meant to be his weekend off in work,” says Mr Bolter.

He believes some of the problems could be alleviated by spreading the PDRs throughout the year. He says that in the Met the problem stems from the fact that PDRs are conducted in March with an interim review in September, although this isn’t the case for all forces.

“Every March there is a supervisory flap about PDRs as they are meant to be completed by the end of the



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month, but this is probably the worst time to be doing this.

“Many forces’ annual leave period ends in March and many people have holiday to use up, so supervisors often can’t get hold of them. Plus it is the time when officers are studying their OSPRE Part I’s. The last thing they want to do is waste time gathering evidence for their PDR.

“It would make far more sense if the PDR took place on the anniversary of the officer joining so that the workload of supervisors is spread over the year. This would enable meaningful quality appraisals to be conducted.”

Mr Bolter also agrees that

management seem detached from the process and vital information often does not filter down to the frontline.

“There seems to be no understanding about how PDRs and even the Integrated Competency Framework (ICF) impact on divisional CID and – in particular – frontline officers.

“Changes to the ICF are often not communicated to the people on the ground, but this can affect their promotion chances. I found out there was an ICF version nine by sheer chance. This is important information that officers need to know.”

John Giblin insists there must be an improvement in the take up and understanding of PDRs as an important part of performance management, with best practice being identified and disseminated.

“It is imperative that there is more standardisation, consistency, simplicity and less bureaucracy. Above all it must be meaningful and beneficial for operational 24/7 police officers at the sharp end of the organisation.”