
Executive Summary

In December 2006, the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to evaluate how the Performance and Development Review (PDR) system recommended by the Home Office guidance circular issued in 2003 is being implemented. This research aimed to provide a snapshot of how PDR systems developed from the Home Office model are working in practice at eight police forces across England and Wales.

A mixed methodology was adopted, combining interviews, focus groups and an attitudinal questionnaire. The participant sample consisted of 19 Inspectors, 41 Sergeants, 74 Constables and 11 HR staff. Similar overall findings emerged across the case study forces.

- Nominal compliance with PDR is generally very good, and HR representatives are typically enthusiastic about the move to centralised, structured performance appraisals.
- While most of the case study forces followed the Home Office recommendations they do not operate identical systems. They have customised or adapted the PDR to their local requirements and indeed continue to do so.
- Nonetheless, the new systems have failed to attract buy-in from police officers due to a lack of effective marketing and an apparent disengagement with PDR processes from the top of the organisation.
- There is little recollection from the participants of having been involved in or consulted about the introduction of PDR. Constables in particular hold fairly negative views about the training and guidance materials provided.
- Where introduced locally, the availability of PDR helplines or advisors is welcome. On the whole, the new computerised, evidence-based and appraisee-centred PDR systems are thought to be preferable to their paper-based predecessors.

- The system as yet does not appear to be well streamlined with other HR- or line-based activities such as training, promotion and performance management.
- While set objectives, activities and behaviours can provide a useful generic and validated framework for similar roles and positions, these lack flexibility to capture the whole nature and scope of policework.
- The overlap between the different elements of PDR creates confusion. Sergeants and Constables in particular feel that the competency-based performance criteria used in PDR are overly bureaucratic.
- Not surprisingly, some officers are finding the evidence gathering and recording process difficult and time consuming. This is particularly the case when the completion of the PDR is left to the end of the year instead of being regularly updated throughout the year.
- PDR is commonly viewed by officers as a further step towards a target-based 'performance culture' in which their capacity to use discretion, engage with and educate the public is increasingly restricted.
- The training and development aspect of PDR is dependent upon a realistic analysis of training needs and availability of courses, otherwise it can promote false expectations by encouraging appraisees to record training requests which are then denied due to time, budget or resource constraints.
- The practices used by forces in the number and description of performance ratings and the attribution of overall performance marks varied. Despite this a middle rating seemed to be commonly awarded as standard with no real incentive to award a higher or lower rating given that these would require additional supporting evidence.
- While many of the officers interviewed were not opposed to the idea of performance related pay in theory, they were of the opinion that the PDR, as currently operated, was insufficiently robust to be used for this purpose.
- Notwithstanding these criticisms, there are indications that the PDR system can work well and generate support from its users when line managers engage fully with the process and are closely involved in officers' personal and professional development.
- The research further highlights a range of good practice points elicited from the different case studies regarding the implementation, operation and application of PDR, which forces might benefit from applying more widely.

