

Examples of poor, good and best practice responses in Underperformance Conversations

Below is a clear, practical set of poor, good, and best-practice ways you could respond in an under-performance conversation, aligned with the Performance Management Policy and the University of Warwick Values and Behaviours.

Each example assumes the team member has missed key deadlines over the last six weeks.

Poor Practice Response

Example

“You keep missing deadlines and it’s becoming a real problem. You need to get yourself sorted. Everyone else manages fine, so you should too.”

Why This Is Poor Practice

- **Does not follow the Performance Management Policy**
No reference to clear evidence, expectations, support, or improvement steps.
- **Contradicts several Values and Behaviours**
 - Does not *disagree in a respectful way* (Thriving on difference).
 - No *listening, learning or clear communication* (Creating connections).
 - No *supporting others to create positive change* (Going forward and further).
- **Judgemental and vague**
Uses unhelpful generalisations (“everyone else...”), no specific examples.
- **Offers no support or development**
- **Likely to cause defensiveness**
Shames rather than engages.

Good Practice Response

Example

“I’ve noticed that three key deadlines have been missed recently: the report on 12 January, the briefing on 28 January, and the update due last Friday. This has impacted the project timeline.

I want to understand what’s contributing to this and explore what support you need to get back on track. Can you talk me through what’s been happening?”

Why This Is Good Practice

- **Policy-aligned**
Uses factual evidence and begins the supportive conversation required before moving to formal steps.
- **Connects to Values and Behaviours appropriately**
 - *Communicating clearly without jargon* (Creating connections)
 - *Thinking about things from the other person's point of view* (Thriving on difference)
 - *Taking responsibility for what we say and do* (Thinking freely)
- **Supportive tone**
Shows intention to understand before acting.
- **Encourages reflection and shared problem-solving**
Aligns with adult learning principles—invites the staff member to explain, not just be told.
- **Makes space for coaching and support**

Best Practice Response

Example

“I want to talk with you about your recent deadlines, because supporting you to succeed is important. There were three key dates that were missed: 12 January, 28 January, and last Friday. These delays have affected the team’s workflow and our planning.

Before we discuss next steps, I’d really value your perspective. What’s been getting in the way?

Once we understand the causes, we can work together on a clear improvement plan in line with the Performance Management Policy. That might involve reviewing workload, identifying any skills gaps, pairing you with a colleague to learn from, or creating opportunities to practise new approaches on upcoming tasks.

We’ll agree specific expectations, set realistic timelines, and check in regularly to help you make progress. I’m committed to supporting you, and I appreciate you being open with me as we work through this.”

Why This Is Best Practice

- **Fully aligned with the Performance Management Policy**
 - Uses evidence
 - Sets a collaborative tone
 - Prepares for a clear improvement plan
 - Highlights expectations, support, and regular review
- **Strong use of Values and Behaviours throughout**
 - *Working together to make good things happen* (Creating connections)



- *Supporting each other to create positive change* (Going forward and further)
 - *Looking for different perspectives to solve problems* (Thriving on difference)
 - *Nurturing new ideas* about how work can be approached (Thinking freely)
 - *Inspiring, supporting and giving people space* (Sharing opportunities)
- **Encourages ownership and confidence**
Supports the staff member's autonomy—aligned with adult learning principles.
- **Clear, compassionate, and forward-looking**
Sets the conditions for improved performance *and* improved relationships.

