# **Setting Objectives**

## **What is an objective?**

The process of setting and agreeing objectives during the probationary period is important to ensure that expectations are clear, fair and consistent. The new employee should understand what is expected of them and the behaviours required, as well as how this will be measured. Managers should be aware of the employee’s personal circumstances and training needs, and consider these when setting achievable objectives.

It is necessary to differentiate between goals and objectives.

* Goals refer to aspirations, purpose and vision. They may be long-term and may involve others’ actions, which are outside the individual’s direct sphere of influence or control.
* Objectives are potential attainments of the individual that can be realistically achieved by them by following a certain number of steps. These should be SMART.

Objectives should focus on identifiable outcomes – what will achievement of the objective look like? They may relate to key performance indicators (KPIs) or Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

## **Where should the objectives come from?**

In probation, the principal objectives, including behavioural standards, will normally be based on the core duties of the Job Description used to define the post for appointment purposes. Additional objectives, based on changing needs or personal (e.g. research or developmental) objectives may be agreed with the employee.

UCLs’ Core Behaviours Framework should also be referred to in supporting an individual’s personal and professional development. If the employee is in professional services the [UCL Ways of Working](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ways-of-working) for professional services Steps to Development (hyperlink) should be used to discuss objectives and development.

Consideration of how equality and diversity matters can be promoted within the role should also be embedded within the objectives.

## **SMART**

Probationary objectives should be based on the SMART acronym:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S** | **M** | **A** | **R** | **T** |
| Specific | Measureable | Achievable (and agreed) | Relevant | Time specific |
| What exactlyneeds to bedone, with, orfor whom? | Is it measurableand can theemployee andmanagermeasure it? | Can it be achieved in the timeframe set,with the resourcesavailable?Is there support(managerially/politically) for itto be done? | Will this objective leadto the end goal, i.e. confirmation ofa goodrecruitmentdecision? | When will thisbeaccomplished/completed? |

There is no single correct way to write a SMART objective, but it is helpful to think through some of the following tips:

**Specific:** Be concrete. Use ‘action’ verbs.

**Measureable:** May be numeric or descriptive of quantity, quality or cost. How will you demonstrate that the objective has been met?

**Achievable:** The objective should be appropriately limited in scope and within the employee's control and sphere of influence (it is better to split big objectives into sub-objectives for clarity, especially if there are different deadlines, targets or measures).

**Relevant:** Measure outputs or results, not activities.

**Time specific:** Identify target dates, including interim milestones and plans to monitor progress in line with the formal probationary meeting schedule.

The objectives should relate to the employee’s core duties, as the purpose of this exercise is to be confident that the employee is capable of doing the job they have been recruited to do. The SMART approach is a method for validating an objective – it is not an objective itself! If the employee is in professional services the [UCL Ways of Working](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ways-of-working) for professional services should be referred to in discussing objectives around how tasks should be approached and delivered from a behavioural perspective.

Examples of a SMART objective could include:

* To check and process purchase orders, supplier invoices, expenses and interdepartmental transfers (IDTs) using MyFinance on a weekly basis. Ensure accuracy of invoices against orders raised and chase queries in a timely manner to facilitate 30 day supplier payment deadlines.
* To design and deliver quarterly training courses on the European Computer Driving License (ECDL), commencing in 6 months’ time. The course should comprise of 7 modules and must be accredited and approved by the British Computer Society.
* To write and submit a proposal for a grant bid on X topic, aligned to the Faculty’s strategic plans for delivery against UCL’s Grand Challenge on Global Health by 30 September.

Objectives should be kept under review. Where circumstances change (e.g. revised departmental priorities) you should revisit the objective to see if it is still relevant and achievable within the timescales. If it is not, it should be updated, removed or replaced, as appropriate.