



Transforming Teacher Appraisal:

**Moving Away From Performance-Related Pay
and Towards Meaningful Professional Growth**



About us and our work

When Teachers Thrive, Children Succeed.

The Teacher Development Trust (TDT), founded by teachers and school leaders in 2012, is a national charity dedicated to helping leaders to build stronger schools through effective professional development.

Through evidence-based approaches and key principles drawn from international research, TDT works at both practice and policy levels to empower educational leaders - providing tools, training, and networking opportunities that enable them to implement and sustain effective professional development cultures in their settings.

By developing and delivering programmes, influencing policy, and conducting research, TDT ensures that teachers receive the highest quality professional development, helping to create environments where both educators and children can experience the most effective learning.

Our values



We are SMART

All of our work is deeply rooted in evidence. We want to know what works and seek out the brightest and the best minds to help shape our programmes, research and advocacy.



We have HEART

Teaching and learning is about people and connection. Even the strongest evidence for improvement will be ineffective if not implemented by expert, empowered teachers at the front of the classroom.



We are HUMBLE

We are always curious, we are always learning. We are led by the evidence, but we also have the humility to keep testing our understanding and adapt.

Acknowledgements

TDT would like to extend our sincere thanks to **Kathryn Morgan** for her dedicated research and in-depth analysis, which have shaped this report and the recommendations for leaders. Her work has provided valuable insights to support schools' teacher appraisal efforts.

Sincere gratitude also goes to **Dr. Neil Gilbride**, whose expertise ensured the research maintained academic rigor while remaining practically applicable. His thoughtful guidance and commitment to bridging theory and practice have greatly enriched this work.

We would also like to thank our colleagues **Andrea Bean** (Research and Evaluation Manager), **Bethan Hindley** (Director of Design and Delivery), **Gareth Conyard** (CEO), and **Anne Cameron** (Director of Partnerships and Impact) for their careful proofreading and editorial support. Their contributions have helped refine and strengthen the clarity and impact of this report.

Finally, we are especially grateful to the **school leaders** who reviewed the report and provided invaluable feedback. Their insights ensured this work is both accessible and practical, supporting the ongoing improvement and professional learning of schools.



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Executive Summary



Overview

This report examines teacher appraisal practices in England, focusing on the balance between accountability and professional development.

With the recent removal of mandatory Performance-Related Pay (PRP), schools now have greater flexibility to implement more developmentally focused appraisal systems.

Drawing on research from education and other professional sectors, this report provides evidence-informed recommendations for school leaders designing appraisal systems that support teacher growth while ensuring accountability.

This report aims to answer the following questions:



What are the essential elements of an effective teacher appraisal system that promotes professional growth and development?



What evidence-based strategies can be employed by leaders to design and implement appraisal systems that enhance teaching quality while minimising unintended negative consequences?



How can appraisal systems balance accountability with developmental objectives without undermining teacher trust and agency?

Key findings

Historically, teacher appraisal in England has evolved from varied practices pre-1980s to high-stakes accountability systems following the 1988 Education Reform Act. Recent policy changes (DfE 2024/25) have removed mandatory PRP links, encouraging a shift toward more developmental appraisal approaches.

Research evidence

Studies from education and beyond consistently show the following:

- ▶ PRP has limited impact on improving student outcomes but can increase teacher stress and workload.
- ▶ Effective appraisal systems use multiple evaluation methods that combine qualitative and quantitative measures rather than single performance metrics.
- ▶ Teacher autonomy in professional development where teachers are involved in shaping the system improves job satisfaction and retention.
- ▶ Overemphasis on compliance undermines teacher agency and professional growth.
- ▶ Leaders and appraisers that are well-trained are essential for teacher growth rather than teacher compliance.

Learning from other sectors

Other sector learning demonstrates the following:

- ▶ Separating developmental feedback from administrative assessment often yields better results.
- ▶ Regular, low-stakes feedback is more effective than annual high-stakes annual reviews.
- ▶ Clear performance standards combined with professional judgment builds trust
- ▶ Supporting professional growth outperforms rigid performance monitoring

Reflection questions for leaders

Based on the research findings, recommendations are presented as reflective questions to help guide leaders' thinking when creating strong appraisal systems.



Ensuring you have included the essential elements of an effective teacher appraisal system that promotes professional growth and development:

- ▶ How am I prioritising developmental feedback to ensure it is clearly separated from high-stakes accountability?
- ▶ How do I plan to use multiple evaluation methods including observations, peer feedback, and self-assessment?
- ▶ How am I ensuring regular, low-stakes feedback, replacing annual high-pressure reviews?
- ▶ What mechanisms am I using to promote teacher autonomy through self-reflection and teacher-led goal-setting?
- ▶ What plans am I putting in place to train appraisers to provide unbiased, constructive feedback?



Ensuring appraisal systems balance accountability with developmental objectives without undermining teacher trust and agency:

- ▶ To what extent am I decoupling appraisal from Performance-Related Pay?
- ▶ How am I standardising expectations while allowing contextual flexibility?
- ▶ How are teachers involved in shaping evaluation criteria and how has this increased transparency?
- ▶ What coaching approaches am I adopting in place of judgmental evaluations?
- ▶ What evidence do I have that I am building a culture of consistent, fair processes to enhance engagement?



Ensuring evidence-based strategies are employed by leaders to design and implement appraisal systems that enhance teaching quality while minimising unintended negative consequences:

- ▶ What evidence demonstrates that I have shifted the focus from compliance to professional development?
- ▶ What specific mechanisms am I implementing to support rather than penalise struggling teachers?
- ▶ What strategies am I using to minimise administrative burden and how have I ensured that processes and documentation are streamlined?
- ▶ How am I ensuring regular evaluation of the appraisal system, and how am I using feedback to refine it?
- ▶ What specific non-monetary incentives am I using to recognise teacher growth, and how are these communicated?

Based on research by Isoré (2009), Figazzolo (2013), Murphy (2013), Wood et al. (2017), Worth & Van den Brande (2020), CIPD (2023), Anderson & Conroy (2024), Marsden & Sezer (2024), and Müller & Cook (2024).

Conclusion and next steps

Research indicates that teacher appraisal is most effective when it:

- ▶ prioritises development over high-stakes accountability
- ▶ employs multiple evaluation methods
- ▶ reduces administrative burden
- ▶ promotes teachers autonomy
- ▶ implemented by well-trained leaders

With the recent policy shift removing mandatory Performance-Related Pay (PRP), school leaders now have an opportunity to design appraisal systems that genuinely support teacher effectiveness while maintaining appropriate professional standards.

While this report provides an initial evidence base, further research is needed to support school leaders in implementing effective appraisal systems. To explore how these recommendations translate into daily school leadership, TDT will conduct qualitative research, including interviews, case studies, and collaborative inquiry with school leaders. By capturing these insights, this research series will provide a valuable perspective on the feasibility, challenges, and real-world impact of the proposed recommendations, ensuring they are both evidence-informed and practical for implementation.

To further support school leaders, TDT will be continuing this work on appraisal. The next steps will be creating practical guidance using both research and case studies to help school leaders streamline appraisal, balance accountability with professional development, and offer effective feedback and evaluation methods that enhance teacher growth and student outcomes.

The Full Report



Introduction

What is teacher appraisal and why does it matter?

Teacher appraisal is a formal process for evaluating a teacher's performance, typically involving classroom observations, feedback discussions, and professional goal setting. In education systems worldwide, appraisal serves a dual function:

- 1. Supporting teachers' professional development – Helping teachers refine their practice through constructive feedback and tailored CPD opportunities.**
- 2. Ensuring accountability – Monitoring teaching quality to meet policy standards and drive school improvement.**

However, balancing these two objectives remains an ongoing challenge. Appraisal processes overly focused on high-stakes accountability can erode teacher trust, reduce motivation, and increase stress (Isoré, 2009; Figazzolo, 2013). By contrast, developmentally focused appraisal systems - those that prioritise coaching, collaboration, and meaningful feedback - can significantly enhance teacher effectiveness (Murphy, 2013).

Purpose and scope of the report

In England, recent policy changes, most notably the recent removal of mandatory Performance-Related Pay (PRP), signal a shift towards a more developmental approach to teacher appraisal (DfE, 2024). The Department for Education's (DfE) most up-to-date guidance emphasises reducing administrative burdens, promoting fair and transparent processes, and ensuring that appraisal fosters teacher growth rather than bureaucratic, compliance-driven performance management. While this is a welcome shift, the challenge now lies in translating these intentions into meaningful practice across schools.

A more unified vision for teacher appraisal could help ensure that all teachers receive a fair and supportive experience, rather than being dependent on individual school policies and leadership approaches.

This report aims to equip school leaders with evidence-informed insights to support the design and implementation of appraisal systems that:

- ▶ Prioritise professional growth and development over rigid accountability.
- ▶ Balance performance evaluation with teacher agency and trust to enhance engagement.
- ▶ Minimise unintended negative consequences, such as increased workload and inequitable outcomes.

This is not a traditional literature review; rather, it is intended as a practical, evidence-informed resource for school leaders. It synthesises key findings from selected research on teacher appraisal in England, as well as insights from performance evaluation models in other professional sectors. By drawing on both educational and non-educational perspectives, this report seeks to address the following questions:

- 1. What are the essential elements of an effective teacher appraisal system that promotes professional growth and development?**
- 2. How can appraisal systems balance accountability with developmental objectives without undermining teacher trust and agency?**
- 3. What evidence-based strategies can be employed by leaders to design and implement appraisal systems that enhance teaching quality while minimising unintended negative consequences?**

Through our synthesis of relevant research, this report provides evidence-informed guidance on designing and implementing a developmental appraisal system that prioritises professional growth, empowering teachers with agency, and fostering high levels of trust within the school culture.



A brief history of teacher appraisal in England

Enhancing student achievement and ensuring high-quality education have long been central goals of schools (Elliott, 2015). To achieve these, teacher appraisal has become a widely used tool for evaluating teacher quality. However, concerns persist among educators about its methods, impact on morale and workload, and links to salaries. To develop an effective appraisal process and maximise its potential for fostering teacher growth, it is essential to review the history of teacher appraisals and understand how current practices have evolved.

In England, the formal implementation of teacher appraisal began in the mid-20th century, but practices varied until the 1980s when concerns over educational standards led to more consistent evaluations (Mortimore & Mortimore, 1991). At this point, the landscape began shifting dramatically, as mounting concerns over educational standards prompted a move toward centralisation. This included the introduction of the National Curriculum through the 1988 Education Reform Act, which encompassed closer monitoring of teachers' work, fundamentally altering what was being appraised to include fidelity to government approaches. At the same time, New Public Management principles crept into education, bringing private sector practices of performance metrics and benchmarking. The overall result was less autonomy for teachers and schools and more emphasis on responding to centrally determined policies and targets.

The early 1990s attempted to strike a balance between teacher development and accountability through the 1991 appraisal regulations. However, the creation of Ofsted and the introduction of school league tables in 1992 caused a shift towards inspection-driven accountability, transforming teacher evaluation from a developmental process to one tied to external performance measures (Baxter & Clarke, 2013).

Between 1997 and 2010, the Labour government implemented several educational reforms, linking teacher appraisals to workforce including a new system of management allowances. This included the introduction of the Upper Pay Scale (UPS), an initiative to reward high-performing teachers. In addition, there was the introduction of the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) role which provided opportunities for experienced teachers to receive enhanced salaries. These were all part of a broader strategy to raise educational standards and improve school performance through increased flexibility and accountability while supporting staff development across schools (Hargreaves et al, 2007). However, many teachers viewed these changes as financially unviable and as a challenge to their professional integrity, particularly when linked to student performance, which created disparities for those teaching in disadvantaged settings (Hargreaves et al, 2007). The introduction of academies, initially to a small number of schools before 2010 but accelerating thereafter, granted some schools greater autonomy over staff terms and conditions, although most chose to align with maintained schools' pay and conditions in practice (Goodman & Burton, 2012). These initiatives were part of a broader strategy to raise educational standards and improve school performance through increased flexibility and accountability.

By 2012, and now under a Conservative government, the focus had shifted towards internal accountability, with teacher appraisals requiring explicit links to school improvement plans, classroom observations, and student progress data (DfE, 2012). As part of this shift, the Teachers' Standards were introduced to provide a framework for evaluating performance, the 2013 Education Order then formalised the connection between appraisal outcomes and pay progression, eliminating automatic advancement based on years of service. Without the automatic link between the appraisal system and career progression, teachers could identify and apply for positions as they saw fit, including progression from the main scale to the upper pay spine.

Following, in 2014 Performance-Related Pay (PRP) was introduced which altered teacher advancement by requiring demonstrable sustained high performance for pay progression, through student outcomes, lesson observations, and contributions to school improvement, replacing the previous automatic system. This had inconsistent effects on teacher motivation and student outcomes, reinforcing concerns raised by unions and researchers (Marsden & Sezer, 2024). Despite this intensified focus on accountability, continuous professional development (CPD) remained notably secondary in the Teachers' Standards, which established competency criteria but did not mandate professional growth in evaluations (DfE, 2012). The simultaneous restructuring of progression to the Upper Pay Spine granted schools discretion in setting performance criteria, creating inconsistencies in how career advancement decisions were made by leaders and further shifting the balance away from development toward compliance-based assessment.

The introduction of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) marked a significant shift in teacher appraisal, reducing local authority control while creating new centralised power structures within trusts (Greany & Higham, 2018). Decentralised teacher appraisal gave schools flexibility but led to inconsistencies in evaluation criteria, with some prioritising pupil test scores while others focused on peer review and professional development (Murphy, 2013). The shift to MATs further fragmented appraisal practices, reflecting a broader policy trend towards greater accountability through performance metrics while reducing reliance on national frameworks (Greany & Higham, 2018).

Over the decades, teaching unions have raised their concerns around teacher appraisal, particularly in relation to PRP. They have argued that PRP undermines supportive appraisal by discouraging teachers from being open about their development needs. Indeed, research from the OECD (2012, 2024) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2021) consistently found no clear link between PRP and improved student outcomes. Additional criticisms include increased workload, negative effects on retention, and discriminatory outcomes. For instance, the NEU's 2021 survey found that 47% of teachers and 54% of appraisers experienced increased workload due to PRP, and 82% of respondents considered leaving the profession over pay-related issues. PRP was also found to disproportionately affect Black, Asian, and part-time teachers (NEU, 2024).

Despite successive reforms, teacher appraisal remains a contested policy area, reflecting enduring debates over accountability, professional autonomy, and workload. OECD (2024) notes that similar appraisal models to England, in other education systems, have moved towards more holistic teacher assessments, integrating self-evaluation and peer review. With this, the most recent Department for Education (DfE) guidance (2024/25) has removed the mandatory link between teacher appraisal and PRP, addressing the concerns outlined above. While schools may choose to retain PRP, they are encouraged to adopt a more developmental approach, reducing bureaucracy and placing a stronger emphasis on teacher growth rather than punitive accountability measures.

The 2024 guidance reaffirms teacher appraisal as fundamentally supportive, prioritising professional development and reflective practice through meaningful feedback, while advocating for objective setting linked to school improvement without rigid performance metrics (DfE, 2024). This revised approach calls for flexible, school-led appraisal policies tailored to local contexts and priorities, alongside a commitment to reducing administrative workload, collectively reinforcing concerns previously raised by unions and researchers about the need for a more balanced evaluation system.

Looking ahead, a more research-informed approach to appraisal could help ensure that evaluation systems genuinely support teacher effectiveness, foster professional trust, and ultimately enhance student outcomes.

The challenge moving forward is ensuring that evaluation processes balance professional autonomy with accountability, without reducing teaching to a compliance-driven task.

Literature Review

This literature review draws insights from two key areas. Firstly, it examines the research on teacher appraisal systems, then looks beyond education to gather insights from other sectors and contexts. This cross-sector analysis reveals valuable lessons about building cultures of continuous improvement while maintaining professional standards.

Appraisal literature in the education sector

As outlined previously, teacher appraisal has been the subject of research and debate, particularly regarding its effectiveness, fairness, and impact on teacher motivation and retention. Over the years, different appraisal models have emerged, ranging from high-stakes, data-driven performance evaluations to more developmental, teacher-led approaches. While some systems prioritise accountability and measurable outcomes, others emphasise professional growth and teacher autonomy.

This literature review examines a selection of empirical and theoretical studies that explore teacher appraisal from multiple perspectives, including its practical implementation, policy implications, and consequences for the teaching profession. These studies were chosen based on their relevance, methodological rigour, and accessibility, ensuring that school leaders and policymakers can engage with the findings directly. [Appendix A](#) sets out the detailed criteria for selecting the papers for this literature review.

Recommendations, reliability and rating justification for each paper below are outlined in [Appendix B](#).



Appraisal Process, Merit Pay and Performance: Evidence From a Longitudinal Survey of School Teachers in England and Wales

(Marsden and Sezer, 2024)



Focus

This study examines the impact of PRP and teacher appraisal on motivation, workload, and student outcomes in England and Wales.



Methodology

A longitudinal survey of teachers was conducted to assess how PRP and appraisal influence teacher effectiveness over time.



Key findings

- ▶ PRP has limited impact on improving student outcomes.
- ▶ PRP increases teacher workload and stress, often leading to reduced job satisfaction.
- ▶ Teacher appraisal can be effective when it is developmental rather than punitive.



Relevance for school leaders

This study provides critical insights into the challenges of PRP, helping school leaders consider alternative strategies to motivate and retain teachers.



Recommendations:

- ▶ Avoid rigid PRP structures, as they increase stress and do not significantly impact student outcomes.
- ▶ Focus on supportive appraisal models that enhance teacher motivation.

'Teacher appraisal can be effective when it is developmental rather than punitive.'



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<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bjir.12869>

Teacher Evaluation: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review

(Isoré, 2009)

'The most effective systems are those that balance accountability with teacher development.'



Focus

A comparative analysis of how teacher evaluation is implemented across OECD countries, examining its effectiveness and fairness.



Methodology

The study draws on OECD data to compare different appraisal frameworks and identify best practices.



Key findings

- ▶ Most OECD countries use a mix of evaluation methods (self-assessment, classroom observation, student surveys).
- ▶ Many systems struggle with ensuring fairness and accuracy, particularly where student test scores are used for teacher evaluation.
- ▶ The most effective systems are those that balance accountability with teacher development.



Relevance for school leaders

This study provides a global perspective on teacher appraisal, allowing school leaders to learn from international best practices.



Recommendations:

- ▶ Use multiple measures (peer review, classroom observations, self-assessment) rather than relying on a single performance metric.
- ▶ Ensure teacher development is prioritised alongside accountability.



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https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/teacher-evaluation-current-practices-in-oecd-countries-and-a-literature-review_223283631428.html

The Use and Misuse of Teacher Appraisal: An Overview of Cases in the Developed World

(Figazzolo, 2013)



Focus

This study critiques how teacher appraisal is used in different countries, particularly the risks of over-reliance on performance metrics.



Methodology

Analysis of OECD teacher appraisal data and feedback from teacher unions.



Key findings

- ▶ In many countries, teacher appraisal is misused for accountability rather than genuine teacher development.
- ▶ High-stakes appraisal can negatively impact teacher morale and lead to increased stress.
- ▶ Systems that involve teacher participation in shaping appraisal are more trusted and effective.

'High-stakes appraisal can negatively impact teacher morale and lead to increased stress.'



Relevance for school leaders

School leaders should ensure appraisal supports teacher growth, rather than just serving accountability pressures.



Recommendations:

- ▶ Use multiple measures (peer review, classroom observations, self-assessment) rather than relying on a single performance metric.
- ▶ Ensure teacher development is prioritised alongside accountability.



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<https://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/TeacherAppraisal.pdf>

Testing Teachers: What Works Best for Teacher Evaluations and Appraisals

(Murphy, 2013)



Focus

This study evaluates different teacher appraisal models and their effectiveness in improving teaching quality.



Methodology

A review of empirical studies and policy evaluations

'A balanced approach combining peer review, classroom observation, and professional reflection leads to better teaching outcomes.'



Key findings

- ▶ Appraisal systems that rely solely on student test scores tend to be unfair and unreliable.
- ▶ A balanced approach combining peer review, classroom observation, and professional reflection leads to better teaching outcomes.
- ▶ Effective evaluation systems focus on supporting teachers, rather than punishing them.



Relevance for school leaders

It provides a framework for school leaders to implement evidence-informed teacher appraisal systems that improve educational outcomes.



Recommendation:

- ▶ Combine quantitative and qualitative assessment methods (e.g., peer review and student feedback) to provide a fairer and more reliable teacher evaluation.



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<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MURPHYTEACHER EVALUATION-FINAL.pdf>

Teacher Autonomy: How Does It Relate to Job Satisfaction and Retention?

(Worth and Van den Brande, 2020)



Focus

Examines the relationship between teacher autonomy, job satisfaction, and retention in England's state sector. Although it doesn't directly assess teacher appraisal, it highlights the importance of teacher-led goal setting.



Methodology

Large-scale survey-based study analysing autonomy levels and retention rates among teachers.



Key findings

- ▶ Teachers with greater autonomy over their professional development goals report higher job satisfaction.
- ▶ Workload manageability improves when teachers have more control over their daily tasks.
- ▶ Lower autonomy correlates with higher turnover rates.



Relevance for school leaders

Although this study does not directly assess teacher appraisal, it does highlight the importance of teacher-led goal setting, suggesting that autonomy within an appraisal process could improve retention and job satisfaction.



Recommendation:

- ▶ Increase teacher autonomy in the appraisal process. Schools with greater autonomy experience higher teacher retention and job satisfaction

'Lower autonomy correlates with higher turnover rates.'



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<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-autonomy-how-does-it-relate-to-job-satisfaction-and-retention/>

Revisiting the Notion of Teacher Professionalism

(Müller and Cook, 2024)



Focus

This working paper investigates how accountability measures have reshaped professionalism and agency.



Methodology

Policy and discourse analysis of education reforms.



Key findings

- ▶ Accountability reforms have redefined teacher professionalism, often limiting teacher autonomy.
- ▶ Excessive focus on performance metrics can undermine teacher agency.
- ▶ Professional growth should be embedded in appraisal to foster teacher development.

'Excessive focus on performance metrics can undermine teacher agency.'



Relevance for school leaders

Encourages school leaders to balance accountability with professional trust, ensuring appraisal enhances teacher agency.



Recommendation:

- ▶ Balance accountability with professional growth. Appraisal should focus on teacher agency rather than rigid performance metrics.



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https://chartered.college/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Professionalism-report_2-May.pdf

The Role of Professional Judgement in Teacher Evaluation

(Anderson & Conroy, 2024)

'Leaders play a key role in ensuring evaluations are meaningful rather than just bureaucratic.'



Focus

Explores the importance of professional judgement in teacher appraisal.



Methodology

Qualitative interviews with school leaders and policymakers.



Key findings

- ▶ Systems that allow professional judgement in evaluations build teacher trust.
- ▶ Rigid, data-driven approaches can undermine teacher effectiveness.
- ▶ Leaders play a key role in ensuring evaluations are meaningful rather than just bureaucratic.



Relevance for school leaders

Encourages greater use of professional discretion in appraisal, building a culture of trust rather than just compliance.



Recommendation:

- ▶ Trust professional judgement in evaluations. Over-reliance on standardised performance data undermines meaningful teacher appraisal



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<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/322671/>

Cross-sector literature on performance appraisal

Performance appraisal is widely used across professional sectors, with varying levels of success. While education has unique challenges - such as the public accountability of schools and the complexity of evaluating teaching quality - other fields provide valuable insights into effective appraisal design.

This section explores three studies that examine performance management in non-education sectors, focusing on how different appraisal models affect employee motivation, performance, and fairness. These studies were selected based on the following criteria:

Comparability to education: The appraisal models share core elements with teacher evaluation (e.g., goal setting, feedback mechanisms, and professional development).

Evidence-Based findings: The studies rely on empirical data rather than opinion or theoretical speculation.

Relevance to policy and practice: The insights apply to school leaders, particularly in relation to accountability, feedback quality, and appraisal fairness.

By examining these studies, we hope to gain a broader understanding of how effective appraisal systems balance accountability with professional growth - a challenge also faced in teacher appraisal.



Could Do Better? Assessing What Works in Performance Management

(Gifford, 2016)

'Bias in appraisals is a key concern — manager training helps mitigate unfair ratings.'



Focus

This CIPD research report evaluates performance management systems, specifically focusing on goal setting and performance appraisals, using rapid evidence assessments (REAs). It explores the efficacy of these mechanisms in improving performance while addressing their limitations, biases, and implementation challenges.



Key findings

► Goal-setting and motivation:

- Challenging but specific goals improve performance in routine tasks.
- In complex roles (e.g., teaching), flexible, behaviour-based goals work better than rigid targets.

► Performance appraisals:

- Combining administrative and developmental appraisals reduces effectiveness - they should be separated.
- Feedback quality determines success - poorly delivered feedback demotivates employees.
- Bias in appraisals is a key concern - manager training helps mitigate unfair ratings.



Relevance to teacher appraisal

- Supports using multiple performance indicators rather than rigid test-based accountability
- Highlights the importance of fair and transparent feedback, aligning with concerns about teacher motivation and PRP.
- Suggests that developmental feedback (not just accountability) is key, which is a major issue in schools.



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https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/could-do-better_2016-assessing-what-works-in-performance-management_tcm18-16874.pdf

Feedback Frequency: The Key to Good Appraisal

(Wood et al, 2017)



Focus

This CIPD Applied Research Conference paper examines how feedback frequency and appraisal structure affect performance.



Key findings

► **Frequent, informal feedback enhances appraisal effectiveness**

- Employees who receive regular feedback feel more in control of their performance.
- Irregular or high-stakes appraisals create stress and reduce appraisal credibility.

► **Performance standards must be clear**

- When employees understand clear performance expectations, they react more positively to appraisals.
- Unclear performance criteria lead to employee dissatisfaction and weaker engagement with feedback.

‘When employees understand clear performance expectations, they react more positively to appraisals’



Relevance to teacher appraisal

- Supports the shift towards continuous feedback over high-stakes, once-a-year evaluations.
- Highlights the problem of unclear expectations, which mirrors teachers’ concerns about inconsistent appraisal criteria across schools.
- Suggests frequent, low-pressure feedback improves effectiveness - potentially valuable for school leaders reforming appraisal policies



Download / view original study

https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/comms/get-involved/events/feedback-frequency_2017-the-key-to-good-appraisal_tcm18-39495.pdf

The Importance of People Management: Analysis of its Impact on Employees

(CIPD, 2023)



Focus

This CIPD report examines how line managers affect employee motivation, well-being, and performance. It is based on the CIPD/YouGov UK Working Lives survey (2022).



Key findings

► Manager quality drives employee engagement

- Good managers boost performance and job satisfaction; poor managers increase stress and disengagement.
- Employees with supportive line managers perform better—even in high-pressure, accountability-driven environments.

► Professional growth matters more than compliance

- Workplaces that prioritise professional development over compliance see higher retention rates.
- Rigid performance monitoring undermines engagement, a concern echoed in teacher appraisal debates.



Relevance to teacher appraisal

- Highlights the need for skilled school leaders to conduct fair, supportive appraisals.
- Aligns with concerns that PRP and rigid accountability increase teacher stress.
- Suggests appraisal should prioritise teacher development rather than compliance.



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<https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/importance-of-people-management/>

'Employees with supportive line managers perform better — even in high-pressure, accountability-driven environments.'

Appendix C identifies each of these papers, comparing their insights and how they align with the teacher appraisal literature.

Research review limitations

While the selected sources provide valuable insights, they do not fully encompass the range of perspectives, experiences, and operational challenges that schools face when implementing appraisal systems. It is important to recognise the limitations of scope:

► **This is not an exhaustive review:**

The research selected offers highly relevant findings but does not cover every possible perspective. Further practitioner insights from school leaders will be essential to tailor approaches to specific school contexts.

► **There is limited research on reducing administrative burden:**

The need to streamline teacher appraisal is widely acknowledged in the DfE (2024) guidance, yet there is little direct research on how best to achieve this in practice. While studies highlight the risks of excessive bureaucracy, there is a lack of empirical evidence on effective streamlining strategies.

► **It does not focus on the role of school leaders in shaping appraisal:**

Research offers general principles for effective appraisal, but school leadership, staffing structures, and policy environment all influence how these principles are applied in practice.

Furthermore, it is important to note that while research offers general principles for effective appraisal, the success of implementation depends on the local school context. Factors such as staffing structures, school size, leadership priorities, and wider accountability pressures influence how appraisal systems function in practice.



Recommendations for school leaders: Implementing a developmental appraisal process

The following recommendations are all derived from rigorous, research-based insights from the selected sources on appraisal in education and other professional sectors - see [Appendix D](#) for an outline of the sources informing these recommendations and the strength of evidence of each one. They are intended to directly address the three overarching questions guiding this report:

- 1. What are the essential elements of an effective teacher appraisal system that promotes professional growth and development?**
- 2. How can appraisal systems balance accountability with developmental objectives without undermining teacher trust and agency?**
- 3. What evidence-based strategies can be employed to design and implement appraisal systems that enhance teaching quality while minimising unintended negative consequences?**

These questions reflect the core concerns raised by school leaders and educators regarding teacher appraisal - ensuring effectiveness, maintaining fairness and trust, and reducing adverse effects on teacher well-being and retention. The recommendations presented here respond directly to these questions and align with the selected sources to provide a research-informed foundation for appraisal design.



What are the essential elements of an effective teacher appraisal system that promotes professional growth and development?

- ▶ **Prioritise developmental feedback**
Separate supportive appraisals from high-stakes accountability
- ▶ **Promote teacher autonomy**
Self-reflection and teacher-led goal-setting improve motivation and retention
- ▶ **Use multiple evaluation methods**
Combine classroom observations, peer feedback, self-assessment, and student feedback
- ▶ **Train appraisers in high-quality feedback**
Unbiased, constructive feedback supports teacher growth
- ▶ **Ensure frequent, low-stakes feedback**
Regular, informal feedback improves performance more than annual high-stakes appraisals



How can appraisal systems balance accountability with developmental objectives without undermining teacher trust and agency?

► **Decouple appraisal from PRP**

PRP can increase stress and workload without improving outcomes

► **Standardise expectations but allow flexibility**

Schools need clear criteria while adapting appraisal to their context

► **Ensure transparency in the appraisal process**

Teachers must understand and shape evaluation criteria

► **Adopt a coaching model**

Coaching conversations instead of judgmental evaluations build trust

► **Build a culture of trust**

Consistent, fair processes lead to higher teacher engagement



What evidence-based strategies can be employed to design and implement appraisal systems that enhance teaching quality while minimising unintended negative consequences?

► **Shift focus from compliance to professional development**

Use appraisals to support CPD, not just performance tracking

► **Support struggling teachers rather than penalising them**

Use appraisal to identify needs and provide support

► **Minimise administrative burden**

Streamline documentation to keep the process manageable

► **Regularly evaluate and refine appraisal systems**

Teacher and leader feedback loops ensure continuous improvement

► **Recognise teacher growth**

Use non-monetary incentives (e.g., leadership roles, peer recognition) to celebrate achievements

Conclusion

This report has examined the evolving role of teacher appraisal in England, considering its historical context, policy shifts, and the tension between accountability and professional development. It has drawn upon research from education and other professional sectors to explore how appraisal systems can be designed to support teacher growth, enhance job satisfaction, and improve student outcomes while minimising unnecessary administrative burdens.

A synthesis of the research, both within and outside of education, draws conclusions for school leaders to consider as they enter this time of change around teacher appraisal:

1. Teacher appraisal should prioritise development over high-stakes accountability.

Research shows that overly rigid, performance-driven appraisal models can demotivate teachers and increase stress (Marsden & Sezer, 2024; Figazzolo, 2013). Developmental models, focusing on coaching, feedback, and CPD, are more effective in improving teaching quality and retention.

2. Multiple evaluation methods are essential

Effective appraisal systems combine qualitative and quantitative measures, including classroom observations, peer feedback, self-assessment, and professional reflection (Murphy, 2013; Isoré, 2009). Systems that rely solely on test scores or rigid metrics risk undermining teacher trust.

3. Reducing the administrative burden is crucial

The DfE (2024) guidance highlights the need to streamline appraisal processes to reduce workload. However, research on achieving this effectively is limited, suggesting the need for qualitative engagement with school leaders to develop practical, context-specific solutions.

4. Teacher autonomy related to professional development is linked to higher retention and engagement

Schools that involve teachers in shaping appraisal and allow flexibility in goal-setting experience higher job satisfaction and lower attrition rates (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020; Müller & Cook, 2024).

5. Effective leadership is key to meaningful appraisal

Appraisal processes are only as strong as those implementing them. Research suggests that well-trained school leaders and appraisers who provide clear, constructive, and fair feedback are essential for appraisal to function as a tool for growth rather than compliance (Anderson & Conroy, 2024; CIPD, 2023).

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Appendices



Appendix A

Criteria for selecting papers in the literature review

1. Relevance to teacher appraisal

Each paper addresses teacher evaluation, appraisal processes, and their impact on teaching quality, accountability, and professional development.

2. Empirical and theoretical contributions

The review includes both empirical studies and theoretical analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher appraisal systems.

3. Comparative and international perspectives

Some studies compare

4. National approaches (e.g., OECD studies), offering insights into global best practices and challenges.

5. Impact on policy and practice

The papers discuss how appraisal influences teacher effectiveness, job satisfaction, and retention, ensuring the findings are practically relevant for school leaders and policymakers.

6. Open access availability

To ensure accessibility, all selected studies are open access, allowing school leaders, policymakers, and researchers to verify findings and explore further insights.

This selection ensures a balanced, research-informed perspective that aligns with the practical needs of school leaders while maintaining academic rigour.



Appendix B

Recommendations table with reliability assessment

Paper	Key Recommendations	Reliability	Reason for Rating
Marsden & Sezer (2024)	Avoid rigid Performance-Related Pay (PRP) structures, as they increase stress and do not significantly impact student outcomes. Focus on supportive appraisal models that enhance teacher motivation.	HIGH	Based on a longitudinal survey of teachers (2014–2018), providing strong empirical evidence from England & Wales.
Isoré (2009)	Use multiple measures (peer review, classroom observations, self-assessment) rather than relying on a single performance metric. Ensure teacher development is prioritised alongside accountability.	HIGH	Draws on OECD comparative data from multiple countries, making findings widely applicable.
Figazzolo (2013)	Limit high-stakes accountability pressures in teacher appraisal. Ensure appraisal is collaborative rather than punitive, allowing teachers to shape the process.	MED	Strong argument, but limited empirical data—mostly based on policy analysis and union feedback.
Murphy (2013)	Combine quantitative and qualitative assessment methods (e.g., peer review and student feedback) to provide a fairer and more reliable teacher evaluation.	HIGH	Based on a systematic review of empirical studies, ensuring reliability.
Worth & Van den Brande (2020)	Increase teacher autonomy in the appraisal process. Schools with greater autonomy experience higher teacher retention and job satisfaction.	HIGH	Large-scale national survey of teachers in England, making it highly reliable for policy application.
Müller & Cook (2024)	Balance accountability with professional growth. Appraisal should focus on teacher agency rather than rigid performance metrics.	MED	Policy and discourse analysis—valuable but not empirical research. Needs further validation.
Anderson & Conroy (2024)	Trust professional judgement in evaluations. Over-reliance on standardised performance data undermines meaningful teacher appraisal.	MED HIGH	Based on qualitative interviews with school leaders, offering practical insights but requiring wider validation.

Appendix C

Literature around appraisal from other sectors —
key insights and alignment with teacher appraisal literature.

Key Insight	Gifford (2016)	Wood et al. (2017)	CIPD (2023)	Alignment with Teacher Appraisal Literature
Separate development from accountability	✓	✓	✓	Marsden & Sezer (2024): Found PRP does not improve student outcomes and increases teacher stress. Isoré (2009): Argues for a collaborative appraisal model that blends peer review, self-assessment, and formative feedback.
Frequent feedback improves performance	✗	✓	✓	Murphy (2013): Supports continuous, formative feedback over high-stakes annual appraisals. Worth & Van den Brande (2020): Emphasise teacher autonomy, which aligns with regular, non-judgemental feedback.
Clear performance expectations increase fairness	✓	✓	✓	Figazzolo (2013): Highlights the risk of inconsistent appraisal systems creating unfair comparisons across schools. Anderson & Conroy (2024): Argue for trusting professional judgment over rigid performance data.
Developmental appraisal increases motivation	✓	✗	✓	Müller & Cook (2024): Advocate for teacher-led professional growth over rigid accountability metrics. Marsden & Sezer (2024): Show PRP does not enhance teacher motivation.
Manager skill determines appraisal success	✗	✗	✓	Anderson & Conroy (2024): Emphasise the importance of appraiser expertise in ensuring fair evaluations. Isoré (2009): Also stresses the need for well-trained appraisers in fair teacher assessments.

Appendix D

Summary table - Sources informing recommendations and strength of evidence

Recommendation	Marsden & Sezer (2024)	Isoré (2009)	Figazzolo (2013)	Murphy (2013)	Worth & Van den Brande (2020)	Müller & Cook (2024)	Anderson & Conroy (2024)	Gifford (2016)	Wood et al. (2017)	CIPD (2023)	Strength of Recommendation
Prioritise developmental feedback over accountability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Use multiple, holistic evaluation methods	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Ensure frequent, low-stakes feedback	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Promote teacher autonomy through self-reflection and goal-setting	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	MED
Train appraisers to provide high-quality feedback	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	MED HIGH
Decouple appraisal from PRP	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	HIGH
Standardise expectations but allow flexibility	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	MED HIGH
Ensure transparency in the appraisal process	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Adopt a coaching model instead of judgmental evaluation	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	MED
Build a culture of trust through consistency and fairness	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Shift focus from compliance-driven appraisal to professional development	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	HIGH
Support struggling teachers rather than penalising them	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	HIGH
Minimise administrative burden	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	MED
Regularly evaluate and refine appraisal systems	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	HIGH
Recognise and celebrate teacher growth	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	MED HIGH



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