Universität Bremen

Administrative Unit 07
Human Resource Development

Annual Interviews at the University of Bremen

A Discussion Guide

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Foreword

Dear colleagues,

Our university's development and ability to successfully manage future challenges depends on having well-qualified and highly motivated staff members. As you know, the university has invested a lot in the past years to provide ongoing support to faculty members as well as its research, administration, and technical staff.

The University of Bremen introduced the annual interview over ten years ago as a mandatory instrument of human resource development for all employees. The annual interview provides the framework for a comprehensive dialogue between supervisors and employees. This dialogue is intended to act as a catalyst for individual career development at all levels, providing the opportunity to coordinate common goals and expectations. A personal conversation is of central importance when it comes to fostering trust and strengthening cooperation.

We are convinced that appreciation, recognition, and respect in mutual interaction are crucial in order to promote trust and to gain and retain high levels of motivation for both supervisors and employees. Feedback from the past years supports our expectation that annual interviews are important drivers of enhanced cooperation and that these foster identification with our university – always provided, of course, that they are well prepared. I am personally very pleased with the results so far.

This discussion guide on how to conduct the annual interviews serves as a guideline to help you.

We wish you success and enjoyment with your interviews.

Kind regards,
Frauke Meyer
Director of Finance and Administration

Annual Interviews and Successful Leadership

Yearly interviews were instated several years ago for all university employees in research, teaching, administration, and technology – across all organizational areas – and have become a successful leadership instrument The annual, respectful dialogue between supervisors and their staff significantly contributes to a leadership culture that values work relationships.

When done well, an annual interview can:

- enhance cooperation,
- promote appreciative feedback between leaders and their employees,
- help to coordinate new areas of work and tasks,
- support and advance professional development.

The annual interview is not a performance review! It serves to promote an appreciative, solution-oriented, and open dialogue. However, an assessment of work performance and actions of the employees can be provided.

Annual interviews at the University of Bremen are intended to:

- put existing organizational and leadership expertise on a common and coherent conceptual basis to allow targeted further development,
- sustainably build and anchor enhanced social competences (in respect to communication, cooperation and capacity for teamwork, accepting responsibility, and proactive collaboration),
- intensify and revive sharing of experiences and feedback on each party's views and actions,
- share (personal) perspectives and systemically address development opportunities in the university,
- boost exchange using formal structures, networks, and "informal rules" in the university,
- promote and clarify necessary lines of cooperation through binding internal networking on a broad level and across status groups.

Framework for Annual Interviews

- Wherever possible, the annual interviews should be carried out on an annual basis. Participation is mandatory for all employees of the university, including leadership personnel.
- Appointments should be made well in advance to allow sufficient possibilities for preparation. Supervisors are responsible for setting the agenda for the discussion.
- Conversations should be conducted in an undisturbed environment.
- The contents of the conversation and agreements are confidential and can be documented using the conversation notes (see page 10).
- At the beginning of each year, the Director of Finance and Administration will notify leadership personnel about conducting the interviews. Of course, we take into account if another time period is favored.
- At the end of the summer semester, human resource development will request feedback on the status of the interviews. The contents of the annual interviews are, of course, confidential.

Who Holds Interviews with Whom?

In the administrative area, the clearly regulated organizational structures mean this can be answered in a relatively straightforward and comprehensible manner. In the areas of research and education, however, it is not as clear, so the university leadership has settled on several different situational frameworks.

Deans will conduct annual interviews with faculty administration leaders, the members of their own research group (research assistants), and lecturers.

Professors likewise conduct the interviews with the members of their research groups and, if requested to do so by the faculty, with the technicians and assistants working in their defined area of responsibility.

Annual interviews should also be conducted with fixed-term research staff. Particularly when there is less than a year remaining on their contract, professors should discuss academic as well as non-academic career perspectives with them.

If an employment extension at the university is intended, the discussion should provide relevant information about the new contract, so that the supervisor can immediately take the next steps.

Preparatory Events

Human resource development assists supervisors and employees with preparing and implementing annual interviews.

1. **Workshops for supervisors**
   In preparation for yearly interviews, all supervisors participate in an all-day workshop. This workshop aims to strengthen supervisors in this role and support them in creating an appreciative attitude that recognizes other's contributions as well as their own.

2. **Informative events for employees**
   Employees are invited to attend special informative events to prepare them for annual interviews. The focus of these is the questionnaire that serves as a basis and orientation for the annual interview.

Further information as well as registration for these courses can be found on the human resource development website
www.uni-bremen.de/personalentwicklung
(in German only)

Structure of an Annual Interview

Review

- Successes, problems, work, team…

Job responsibilities

- Clearly defined tasks and responsibilities
- For doctoral degree candidates: Doctoral plan, progress in the doctoral project, timetable
- Teaching, research, miscellaneous

Quality of cooperation

- Creative freedom and ability to make decisions, flow of information
- Mutual feedback

Career development

- Fixed-term contracts, support for career advancement within and outside of the university, further training, conferences, …

Suggestions for Preparing the Annual Interviews

The following catalog outlines questions from an employee perspective. At the same time, these questions provide a valuable orientation for leaders.

Not every question will be relevant for everyone. They should therefore not be viewed as a checklist. They merely constitute **suggestions** and are aimed at supporting **employees** in preparing themselves for the interview.

The questions are divided into three subject areas plus two additional areas:

1. Activities and tasks
2. Quality of cooperation
3. Career advancement

In addition, the guide offers further suggestions for addressing the following topics:

4. Remote work
5. Mental health

Questions about work and responsibilities

- How do you look back on the past year? What were your tasks and work priorities?
- How well are you able to cope with your work (quantitatively, qualitatively)?
- What parts of your work do you like best? Where do you see your strengths?
- What is causing you difficulties, bothering you, or burdening you?
- Are you happy with the results of your work? What actions could increase satisfaction?
- What changes are taking place in your area or are expected in the near future (e.g. structural changes, new areas of responsibility, projects)?

Questions about quality and cooperation

- Is there a climate of cooperation and mutual support?
- Do you treat each other with openness and respect? How can you contribute to promote working as a team in the future?
- To what degree do you have each other's backs and support each other's decisions?
- How independently are you allowed to work? How do you assess your scope for shaping events?
- To what extent are you integrated in decision making in your area of work? Do you feel sufficiently informed?

Questions concerning career development

- How do you view your opportunities for professional development? What are your future career prospects?
- Are there any changes you wish to request (e.g. participation in projects, working time regulations)?
- Which further training courses are useful for personal development and for better task completion?
- How can your supervisor support you? (Formulate expectations)

Questions and, if applicable, areas of responsibility to be addressed for academic staff

- Do you think the organizational and other parameters support your academic career ambitions? What could possibly be changed for the better?
- Does your involvement in teaching contribute to your academic development?
- How satisfied are you with your career development to date?
- What additional support would you like to have? How could your supervisor help you establish contacts important for your career?
- How do you perceive your opportunities for academic and non-academic personal development?

Questions for fixed-term employees with a remaining term of less than one year

- What are the career prospects at the university or elsewhere? Is it possible and desirable to stay at the University of Bremen?
- Which non-university career paths are interesting?
- What additional support would you like to have?

Questions about remote work

- How do you rate your productivity when working remotely compared to working in the office?
- Are there certain tasks or activities in which you prefer remote work or find it less effective?
- How do you rate communication and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors during remote work? Do you have any suggestions on how to improve team communication or collaboration for remote work?
- What tools and technologies best support you in working remotely? Is anything missing here? Are there any technical or organizational hurdles that make your remote work more difficult?
- How do you rate the visibility and recognition of your work that you do remotely?

Mental health questions

- Questions about mental health in the annual interview should be formulated sensitively and asked in a respectful and trusting manner.
- How do you feel about your work and daily tasks? Are there times when you feel overwhelmed or stressed? How can we help you manage these?
- Do you feel that you have a good work-life balance or are there areas where you need support?
- Do you feel that you can take enough breaks and dedicate these for rest?
- Do you know what support the university provides in the field of mental health?

Side Note: Leading with Appreciation

> *I'll make time for you. I'm interested in how you're doing!*

Basic attitudes form the foundation

Appreciation cannot be imposed from "above." Rather, the greatest determining factor for attentive annual performance reviews is that everyone concerned, regardless of role or function, is prepared to reflect their actions and strive for cooperation with one another. Stating your own personal interests and expectations in a clear and concise manner while showing understanding for the role and expectations of the other party does not mean agreeing to everything. An atmosphere that is frank and considerate opens up the possibility to constructively discuss differences and thereby mutually arrive at ways to resolve them.

The manner in which we communicate with one another has an important impact on our motivation and productivity.

All of us, supervisors and employees alike, need sufficient recognition and appreciation in order to work successfully.

Considerate communication is a suitable method to promote personality development and enhance personal communication skills. It allows a variety of options for action. Appreciation can be expressed in various ways, e.g. by **showing a serious interest** in employees, their tasks, performance, and perceptions. An **attentive and questioning attitude** supports the course of the conversation and conveys openness.

Actively listening and asking questions as well as repeating back key statements supports a successful understanding. In this way, misunderstandings can be cleared up and avoided.

Connecting to the interview partner's **strengths** increases motivation and supports a successful discussion process (resource orientation).

Transparently communicating important information (such as participation in work area development) promotes trust and encourages better cooperation.

Conversation Notes and Agreement Form

Conversation notes **Date:** _____

The following topics were addressed in the annual interview

Agreements

During the annual interview, the following agreements were made		
What was agreed?	**Due by (date)?**	**Who is responsible: supervisor or employee?**

_____ _____

Signature of the supervisor Signature of the employee

One copy for each participant

Checklist for Supervisors

→ Preparation

- ◯ Set an appointment (usually 2 weeks in advance; annually in the first quarter)
- ◯ Schedule conversation duration of approximately one hour
- ◯ Find a suitable room that ensures a conversation free of interruptions
- ◯ Send an invitation to the employee
- ◯ Allow sufficient time to prepare for the interview (set your own goals, etc.)
- ◯ Prepare / provide forms to document what was discussed
- ◯ Reflect on topics of conversation
- ◯ Have a list of questions ready

→ Implementation

- ◯ Is the room free of distractions? (Cell phones turned off, phone rerouted, “Do not disturb” sign, etc.)
- ◯ Are drinks provided?
- ◯ Do both sides have their notes for the prepared topics of conversation ready?
- ◯ Is the documentation of the last conversation available?
- ◯ Is the conversation notes / agreement form ready?

→ Follow Up

- ◯ Was the content of the conversation documented?
- ◯ Were the discussed measures implemented?
- ◯ Were additional persons contacted as agreed?

Contact

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