

Performance improvement plan (PIP) template for the UK

There is no statutory PIP in the UK - what the law rewards is a genuinely fair process, and the Acas Code of Practice sets its shape: investigate, inform, meet, allow a companion, and offer an appeal. A good PIP evidences that fairness for performance: objectives that are specific and measurable, support the employer actually delivers, reviews at fixed checkpoints, and the possible outcomes - pass, extend, or escalate to the capability procedure - stated honestly from day one. From 1 January 2027 the unfair-dismissal qualifying period drops to 6 months, so documented fair process matters far earlier in every employment than it used to.

What a fair PIP needs to cover

A PIP fails in one of two ways: as a rubber stamp on a decision already made (tribunals see through it, and so does the employee), or as a vague pep talk with no measures, no support and no end. A fair one needs five things: an honest, evidenced statement of the gap; objectives someone could actually verify; the support and training the employer commits to - a PIP places obligations on both sides; fixed review checkpoints with notes; and the outcomes stated plainly, including the uncomfortable one. Wrap it in the Acas Code basics - inform in advance, meet properly, allow a companion, offer an appeal - and you have a process that is both kinder and safer.

The template

Copy everything from here to section 9 into a document or your HR system, then replace each [bracketed placeholder]. Sections 3 and 4 repeat per objective - most PIPs need two to four.

1. Details and background

Employee: [name, role]. Manager: [name]. HR contact: [name]. Plan start: [date]. Plan length: [8 weeks], with reviews at [2, 4 and 8] weeks. Before this plan started: the concerns were investigated and discussed with the employee at an informal stage on [date(s)], the employee's own explanation was considered [summarise - e.g. workload, training gaps, personal circumstances, health], and this plan was explained at a meeting on [date] to which the employee could bring a colleague or trade union representative.

2. The gap, stated plainly

The standard expected of this role: [what good looks like, by reference to the job description / objectives / examples from peers in similar roles]. The current shortfall, with evidence: [specific, dated examples - missed deadlines, error rates, complaint details - not generalisations like "poor attitude"]. This plan exists to close that gap with support, not to punish it.

3. Objectives (repeat per objective)

Objective [1]: [specific and measurable - e.g. "process X applications per week with an error rate below Y%", "deliver [project milestone] by [date] to [defined standard]"]. How it will be measured: [the data source or reviewer, agreed up front]. To be achieved by: [checkpoint / end of plan]. An objective the employee cannot influence, or that no one could verify, does not belong on this plan.

4. Support we will provide (repeat per objective)

For objective [1], [Company name] commits to: [training course / paired working with [name] / weekly coaching session with manager / removal of conflicting duties / access to [tool]]. Owner and date for each: [who, by when]. If any support is not delivered on time, the affected objective's deadline moves with it.

5. Review checkpoints

Reviews at [2, 4 and 8] weeks: a scheduled meeting between employee and manager, with [HR present at the final review]. Each review records, against every objective: progress with evidence; whether the promised support happened; any obstacles raised; and anything that should adjust the plan. The employee receives a written summary within [3] working days and may add their own comments to the record. The employee may bring a colleague or trade union representative to formal reviews.

6. Possible outcomes - stated honestly

At the end of the plan there are three outcomes, and it would be wrong to hide any of them: (a) Pass - objectives met; the plan closes, and that is recorded; (b) Extend - real but incomplete progress; the plan extends by [2-4 weeks] with the same support; (c) Escalate - objectives not met without good reason; the matter moves to the formal capability procedure, which could ultimately lead to dismissal with notice. Escalation is a separate formal process with its own meeting, right to be accompanied, and right of appeal.

7. Circumstances that pause or change the plan

If ill health, disability, excessive workload or events outside the employee's control are affecting performance, tell [manager / HR] at any point - not just at reviews. Where a disability may be relevant, [Company name] will consider reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 before continuing, and where stress is a factor a stress risk assessment will be completed. Sickness absence pauses the plan clock.

8. Appeal

The employee may appeal the decision to start this plan, any review conclusion, or the final outcome, in writing to [senior manager not previously involved] within [5] working days. Appeals are heard promptly and the outcome confirmed in writing.

9. Sign-off

Agreed (as to the plan's contents and meetings, not necessarily agreement with the concerns):
Employee [name, date] - the employee may sign "received, not agreed" and attach comments. Manager: [name, date]. Copy held by [HR]. This plan and all review notes are retained on the employee's file [for X months / in line with the retention policy].

How to adapt it

Honest guidance on the choices the brackets leave open:

- Decide what you're actually doing before you start. If the honest goal is improvement, this template works. If a decision has effectively been made, a PIP used as theatre is the worst of both worlds - unfair to the person and transparent to a tribunal. Take advice instead.
- Make the support real. Section 4 is what separates a fair plan from a countdown. If you can't name the training, the coaching slot, or the duties you'll remove, you're not ready to open the plan. The deadline-moves-with-support rule keeps you honest.
- Length: match the objectives. 8 weeks with 2/4/8 checkpoints suits most roles; complex or long-cycle work may need 12. A 2-week PIP for a role with monthly outputs is a paper exercise and reads as one.
- January 2027 changes the maths. From 1 January 2027 the unfair-dismissal qualifying period drops to 6 months, so "they're new, we don't need process" stops being true very early in employment. Build the habit now - our guide to the six-month rule covers what it changes in practice.
- Follow the Acas Code even where it isn't strictly mandatory. The Code formally governs disciplinary and grievance procedures, and tribunals can adjust awards for unreasonable failures to follow it - running your PIP to its standard (inform, meet, accompany, appeal) is cheap insurance and better management. This template is a starting point, not legal advice: for dismissal-stage decisions, involve a professional.
- Look upstream first. A surprising number of PIPs are really feedback failures - the person is hearing the standard for the first time in section 2. Regular documented 1:1s and honest return-to-work conversations catch most performance drift long before a plan is needed.

Running the plan day to day

The clause that fails first is 5 - reviews slip, notes never get written, and six months later nobody can evidence what was agreed. In CoDash the performance module keeps 1:1s scheduled and documented, objectives tracked against dates, and every review noted with a timestamped trail - which is exactly the record a fair process depends on. See performance.

A free template from CoDash - codash.co.uk/templates. Edit it to match how your company actually works, and take advice on anything unusual.