

Identifying and agreeing work priorities

Why is it important to identify and agree our work priorities?

We are better able to manage our wellbeing, set goals and work towards them when we have clear priorities. There are several reasons why it can be good to take time to identify your work priorities including:

We tend to prioritise in relation to the length of task, the urgency, the importance, the procedure and the reward – and in high stress environments, we tend to choose shorter tasks and those with more immediate rewards (Middleton et al., 2019), which risks a lack of focus on our longer-term goals.

To protect our health and wellbeing it is helpful to break down tasks into discrete components and clear prioritisation for the day’s activities can help people to stay in work and be productive. A misunderstanding of priorities between staff and managers, or staff and the public, can lead to difficulties. Clear work priorities that are agreed between a manager and work group can help everyone to work effectively.

Some strategies that people have found helpful:

- Mind mapping roles and responsibilities, tasks, and goals so you can see the full picture.
- Reviewing your job description or promotion criteria to reconnect with your role priorities.
- Identify your top three priorities for the day – work through in turn. Don’t get distracted!
- Use a bullet journal.

With your team or staff member you could try the Eisenhower matrix below to differentiate between urgent and important tasks.

The Eisenhower Matrix Urgent vs Important quadrant:

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Do these first – important tasks that need to be done on the same day	Schedule these – they are important but not-so urgent. Schedule so you don’t lose sight of them
Not important	Delegate these - if you can	Don’t do these – take them off your to-do list

Take time to consider:

- Which approach works best for different members of your team?
- Have you shared and agreed your work priorities with your line manager and your team?

Some people find it difficult to approach their manager and ask for a meeting to review their priorities. If this is the case for your team members, you could email them to ask for a quick meeting to review current work priorities so that you can ensure that everyone is working on the right things. Be prepared for the discussion with an overview of all of the things that need doing, highlighting the priorities.