**Managing Probation Periods**

The purpose of these notes is to provide good practice guidance to managers in supporting new members of staff through the probation period.

**Introduction**

A well-managed probation period is important for both career development and as a means of assessing an individual’s competency to do the job to which they are appointed. The probation period should be a positive two way process designed to assist the new member of staff in integrating into their new role and the University.

It also enables the University to assess the contribution of a new member of staff, and to ensure that they fulfil the requirements of the post. The probationary period gives both manager and new starter the opportunity to recognise progress and to address any difficulties encountered

Though the principles of probation are the same, there are some differences in the probation process for academic and support staff (including length of the probation period). See separate policies and guidance for more information.

The length of the probation period will vary and will be detailed in the Contract of Employment.

**Responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that new starter as the necessary tools, training, resources and support to undertake a full and active role at the University.

It is also the role of the manager to:

* Conduct regular meetings with new starters throughout the probation period and provide feedback.
* Set clear objectives for the duration of the probation period and beyond.
* Promptly address any issues of performance or behaviour that arise, and make members of staff aware at the earliest opportunity of any factors that may lead to them failing their probation period.

**Good practice for managing probation periods**

**Planning** is essential for an effective probation period. Consider how often you need to meet the new starter, what information should be provided as part of induction (see StaffNet for more information on induction), objectives, training, the assignment of a buddy or mentor, development activities, relevant policies and procedures, as well as scheduling relevant meetings.

**Conduct regular meetings** to discuss the individual’s progress and identify what support that they need. There is no set guidance on how often to meet – this will depend on the individual and the nature of the role. We recommend that as a minimum, managers should hold a meeting at the end of the first week, and the end of the first month. Ideally, it is good practice to meet monthly during the period. Ask the new starter how often it would be beneficial for them to meet. Document your discussions during progress meetings – this will serve as a reminder for both parties as well as provide a record in the event of underperformance at a later stage.

**Set objectives**. Providing formal objectives allows new starters to understand exactly what is expected of them during the probation period, and enables measurement of performance. Complete this with the new starter during their first few days.

Agree a **learning and development plan** that outlines what a member of staff needs in order to carry out the role effectively. This should include standard training, such as general workplace practices, health and safety and equal opportunities, as well as more specific role related training. Engage them in conversation about what training and development they feel they need to be more successful.

**Encourage an open dialogue**. A probation period is more likely to be successful if the new starter has been given plenty of opportunity to ask questions, have regular conversations and raise areas of concern.

**Provide feedback**. Meetings during the probationary period should be used as an opportunity to provide feedback on any areas of improvement. Never leave any issues of underperformance until the formal probation review. Explore any problems at the earliest possible opportunity. These meetings are also an opportunity to provide positive feedback and recognition.

Refer to the **job description**. The job description describes what the job involves, the scope of responsibilities and tasks. This can be a working document for both parties to refer to throughout the probation period.

In the event of performance concerns, agree an **action plan** for improvement. This could include additional formal training, support, and provision of a mentor or working with more experienced colleagues. Review regularly.

**Successful outcomes of probation periods**

Where performance meets the required standards at the end of the probation period, please confirm this to the employee at the final review meeting.

**Underperformance during probation**

If there are any performance or absence issues and/or the new starter is not progressing satisfactorily, raise this with them as soon as possible, making a note of any discussions and actions. HR can provide support and advice.

If, during or at the end of the probation period, the member of staff has not met the required standards of performance, attendance or behaviour, you may consider that it is appropriate to terminate their contract of employment. Discuss this with HR before taking any action.

Alternatively, the probation period may be extended. The extension of a probation period should never be a surprise; regular meetings during the review period should have taken place and the individual should be aware of the underperformance.

However, probation periods should only be extended where the manager believes that additional time (along with additional support or training) will allow the individual to reach the necessary standards. Consult with your HR Partner for more advice.

In the event of an extension to a probation period, a letter should be sent confirming the length of the extension, the date at which the probation will now end, and setting out the improvements that are required, along with the potential implications of continued underperformance.

**Meetings during probation periods**

Prior to the meeting:

* Review the individual’s work prior to the meeting.
* Take feedback from colleagues or other managers as appropriate.
* Review the objectives set at the start of probation.
* Review the job description.

During the meeting:

* Highlight areas that are going well.
* Explain any areas in which the individual is not meeting the required standard.
* Explore possible reasons for failure to meet the required standards.
* Invite the individual to share their thoughts, ask questions or raise concerns.
* Review objectives set.
* Agree next review date and actions / objectives before that meeting.

Keep a copy of the notes and confirm any action points in writing.