

2.6 Probation Policy

Introduction

These guidelines are intended to support the organisations' probation process. They are designed to provide a clear and simple process to assist managers in managing new staff members and to ensure equality of opportunity for all staff members. A formal probation procedure helps to ensure that:

- The performance, conduct, attendance, timekeeping and training/support needs of all new staff members can be assessed fairly, consistently and equally across the organisation
- Line managers provide new staff members with the appropriate support, guidance, training, encouragement and feedback
- Both line managers and new staff members understand the purpose of the probation

Overview

The length of the probation period shall be 10 months for all new staff members or otherwise as detailed in the individual contract of employment. This shall consist of four stages:

1. Initial drafting of probationary programme

To be discussed and agreed with new staff member during their induction into the organisation. At this stage, the main responsibilities and objectives of the job will be agreed. Conduct and performance throughout probation will be measured against these responsibilities and objectives, in addition to the general performance indicators which apply to all staff.

2. First review after 3 months

Staff member's conduct and performance over the first 3 months is assessed. Where conduct and performance has been satisfactory, this will be reflected in the review report. Where conduct and performance has been unsatisfactory, the staff member will be made aware of the standard required and how to achieve it. All necessary assistance will be provided.

3. Second review after 7 months

Staff member's conduct and performance over the first 7 months is assessed. Where conduct and performance has continued to be satisfactory, this will be reflected in the review. If areas for improvement were outlined at the 3 month review and such improvement has not been satisfactorily achieved, the staff member will be told whether an extension or termination of employment is under consideration. In such cases, the areas requiring improvement and the specific level of improvement required would be formally set out in writing for the staff member. They would also be advised of the supports/assistance to be provided by the line manager and/or the organisation.

4. Final review after 10 months

At the end of the 10 month probationary period, a formal probationary review will take place between the line manager and the new staff member. If conduct and performance has been satisfactory throughout the probationary period, the staff member will be confirmed in their appointment.

If performance or conduct does not meet expectations, the initial 10 month probation period may be extended for a further period of up to 12 months or alternatively, the employment may be terminated. In each case, the reasons for the decision will be outlined in writing. A HR representative and a staff representative may be present at this stage.

Existing members of staff who are promoted, re-graded or transferred within the organisation will not be subject to a probation period unless their initial probation period is not yet completed. In this case, the probation period will be carried over to the new position and the appointment will not be confirmed until the original period has been successfully completed. (Note it is not anticipated that transfer requests will be facilitated during a probationary period).

The length of the probation period shall be outlined in the staff member's contract of employment.

Conducting Probation

Preparation Stage

(a) The line manager shall firstly, clarify the duties and responsibilities of the new staff member, in line with the job description. This should include:

- Policies and procedures that must be followed; e.g. absence reporting
- Key aspects of the role, structure of the area of work and how it fits within the organisation structure
- Skills/competences required/that must be acquired
- Standard of work expected (quality and quantity)
- Deadlines to be met
- Behaviour/conduct (including timekeeping and attendance)
- Working relationships
- Working environment
- Training needs
- Any other issues specific to the role/grade

(b) The main responsibilities and objectives will be agreed with the staff member. The line manager should explain how these responsibilities and objectives will be monitored and measured throughout the probationary period (i.e. at each review). In addition, the line manager should make reference to the fact that general performance indicators will be measured (e.g. attendance and punctuality).

(c) The line manager should identify any training requirements and ensure that relevant training is provided (this may be attendance at internal/external courses, identifying a mentor or providing 'on the job' training).

(d) The line manager and staff member should agree and set dates for each probation review.

Agreeing Responsibilities and Objectives

The responsibilities and objectives will be statements of the main tasks and objectives that are necessary to perform successfully in the role. Responsibilities should be those which are vital for successful performance in the job on an ongoing basis. Objectives should be more definitive and should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound).

- Objectives should be specific to the activities of the new staff member, as detailed in their job description, and should be clearly defined to avoid misinterpretation.
- Objectives should be clear and measurable. Line managers should therefore indicate how the objectives will be measured and what indicators they will use to check whether objectives have been met.

- Objectives set during the probation period should be realistic. Some work may extend beyond the probationary period and in this case, it will be necessary to break the tasks/projects down to set realistic objectives.
- The line manager shall give the staff member the appropriate support/guidance (including training) necessary to help them achieve the set objectives.
- The objectives will be linked to a timescale. The line manager shall arrange review meetings at appropriate points throughout the probation period (i.e. after 3/7/10 months) to reflect the timescale of the objectives set.

Conducting the Review

The probation procedure involves a number of probation reviews to ensure regular two-way communication between the line manager and the staff member, allowing timely action to be taken in the early stages of the appointment.

(a) There shall be a minimum of 3 formal probation reviews during the probation period, one 3 months into the appointment, one after 7 months and the final review taking place after 10 months of the probationary period. Formal reviews should be set up in advance so that both parties have time to prepare for them and to ensure that meetings remain free of interruptions.

(b) Line managers are advised to hold frequent informal meetings with the staff member in order to ensure a good working relationship and feedback on the staff member's progress. The frequency of these meetings should be determined locally according to the needs of the staff member, area, etc. Any difficulties should be addressed as early as possible and depending on the seriousness of the issue, reported to the relevant HR Partner.

(c) As part of the review, line managers should:

- praise good performance/achievements, provide constructive feedback on progress
- review timekeeping/attendance, including sickness absence
- discuss the staff member's performance to-date against the objectives set at induction
- review/agree training/development needs, if necessary
- identify aspects of performance/conduct that need improving
- explore problems the staff member has encountered in their role
- provide guidance/support as appropriate
- introduce/agree any changes to the objectives set
- set next review meeting

It is the line manager's responsibility to ensure that reviews are conducted within the timescale described in this policy and that both the staff member and the relevant HR Officer are supplied with the appropriate documentation as soon as possible thereafter.

Written documentation is crucial to the probation as it will provide very helpful information for the forthcoming PMDS process when the probation period is completed successfully. Equally, it will indicate clearly the reasons why an appointment is not to be confirmed in the case of unsuccessful probation.

During the final review, discussions should be held between the staff member and the line manager about setting objectives and an individual development plan to be reviewed at the first PMDS meeting.

Confirmation of appointment

If the staff member's performance, conduct, timekeeping and attendance have been satisfactory throughout and fully meet the organisations' expected standards for the relevant grade/post, the line manager shall complete the probation form appropriately and recommend that the appointment should be confirmed. The form should be forwarded to the relevant HR Officer.

Staff members will be advised in writing (by the relevant HR Officer) of the successful completion of their probation period.

Dealing with unsatisfactory performance

Line managers should seek advice from their HR Partner whenever a staff member's performance/conduct gives cause for concern. If appropriate, a member of the HR Department may be present at formal hearing reviews.

Where problems with meeting the appropriate standard(s) are highlighted and/or needs for relevant training identified, appropriate opportunity/support shall be provided to improve performance. The line manager shall meet formally with the staff member to:

- discuss any problems identified
- explain what aspect of the work is not considered satisfactory
- explain which objectives/standards are not met and the shortfall between standards and timescales expected of the staff member and those achieved
- what remedial guidance and training will be provided
- give clear early warnings of what may happen if required standards are not met
- give unambiguous indication of any necessary improvements
- agree a course of remedial action and timescales
- record the outcome of the meeting in writing and give a copy to the staff member

Extending the probation period

Exceptionally, the organisation reserves the right to extend the probation period for the following reasons: (a) the new staff member has not performed to the expected standards but there is evidence that the performance is likely to improve given the extra time or (b) due to the new staff member's sickness or other period of absence, it has not been possible to adequately assess the staff member's performance.

Where the probation is extended, the following must be discussed between the line manager and staff member:

- reasons for the extension
- length of the extension period
- assistance/training that will be given during the period of extension
- areas for improvement and indication of how these will be monitored and measured
- appointment will be terminated at the end of extension period if staff member fails to meet standards of performance expected for their grade/post

Any extension of the probation period will not exceed six months (or 12 months in total for more than one extension). The relevant HR Partner should be consulted in relation to any extension of a probationary period.

During the last month of the extended period, the line manager and his/her staff member will meet formally to review progress. If progress and performance are satisfactory at the end of the extended period, the line manager will recommend that the appointment should be confirmed and will complete the probation form as appropriate, and forward to relevant HR Officer. The staff member will be advised in writing (by the relevant HR Officer) of the successful completion of their probation period.

If progress is still considered unsatisfactory, the line manager will inform the staff member and make a recommendation that the appointment be terminated or extended for a final six month period. Again, advice should be sought from the HR Partner.

Where a probationary period has been extended as a result of unsatisfactory conduct or performance, the first increment will be deferred until a satisfactory level of conduct/performance is achieved. However, where a probationary period has been extended for reasons other than unsatisfactory conduct or performance (for example if a staff member were on maternity leave), increments may not be deferred.

In cases where performance/conduct falls substantially below the standard expected, management reserve the right to terminate the appointment within the intended probationary, subject to giving appropriate notice. Any termination of appointment will take place following consultation with the Head of HR.

Terminating the appointment

Where a staff member fails to achieve the expected standards of performance for their grade/post, this shall result in the appointment being terminated, subject to notice or where appropriate, pay in lieu of notice.

Following the final review meeting (including any period of extension) between the line manager, the staff member, the senior manager and/or senior representative of the HR Department, a final report shall be compiled, with a recommendation that the appointment should be terminated. At this stage, reasons for such a decision must be clearly explained to the staff member and they will have the right to be represented at the meeting and the right to respond.

A decision to dismiss would not normally be expected unless problems had been identified at an earlier stage and appropriate formal corrective action taken at that time. Staff members will be advised in writing that the appointment shall be terminated and informed of their last date of service.

Performance Monitoring of Temporary Staff

All staff, regardless of length of contract, should have their performance monitored. It states the following on all temporary contracts:

“During the period of your probation, your performance will be subject to review by your manager(s) to determine whether you:

- (i) have performed in a satisfactory manner
- (ii) have been satisfactory in general conduct, and
- (iii) have had a satisfactory attendance record
- (iv) If performance, conduct or attendance does not meet expectations, the initial period of probation may be extended for a further period of up to twelve months or, alternatively, your employment may be terminated.”

Standards, objectives and duties/responsibilities should be clearly outlined to the new temporary employee and date for a review(s) agreed. The number of review meetings which should take place will depend on the length of the contract, for example:

- 3 month contract: meet at the start of the contract and then at the end of the contract to review performance
- 6 month contract: meet at the start, after 3 months and at end of the contract
- 12 month contract: follow the same timeframes as for Probation Reviews (i.e. at the start, 3 months, 7 months and 10 months)

Review meetings should follow the same format as for Probation Reviews and the completed Performance Review Form should be returned to the relevant HR Officer.

Performance issues should be dealt with in the same manner as during the Probation Review period. Should performance not be satisfactory at the end of/during, the review period, a decision may be taken to terminate the contract or not to renew the contract of employment.

Version	Revision Date	Summary of Changes	Policy Owner
1.0		n/a	HR