



Working Together

Probationary Period Guidelines

June 2009

Probationary Period Guidelines

1. Purpose of Probationary Period

The purpose of a probationary period is to provide a framework for identifying and sorting out any early difficulties which may occur in the performance of the job and to provide for early termination of employment if such difficulties are not resolvable during this period. The probationary process is also used to set expectations and help motivate and integrate the new staff member. As employee rights change with length of service, it is imperative that this procedure is adhered to.

2. The Probationary Period

Probation is normally for a six month period, unless specified otherwise in the contract of employment. It applies to permanent, temporary and supply staff members.

During the probationary period, the line manager who has responsibility for employee relations is responsible for ensuring that the following process and steps take place:

- The new employee receives a full induction and confirms they have received it
- Any appropriate training takes place at the earliest opportunity
- Management expectations and performance targets are made explicit and are understood by the new employee

Review Meetings

- Regular review meetings must take place, and the appropriate paperwork completed within timescales. The HR Department will send the appropriate senior manager details of outstanding reviews if applicable.
- During review meetings constructive feedback is given to the employee highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement using suitable examples

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- The employee is encouraged to identify areas of difficulty. Ways of resolving these should be clearly defined and agreed
- Appropriate solutions to problems or difficulties are discussed and the line manager provides guidance, direction or instruction as appropriate
- An honest assessment about the support that the line manager or others in the College can provide is stated to avoid building up unrealistic expectations
- A first probationary review takes place at the end of the first week of employment, or as agreed for supply and evening class lecturers
- A second probationary review takes place mid way through the probationary period (normally at three months employment)
- A final probationary review takes place shortly before the end of the probationary period (normally six months). It is paramount that reviews are completed on time and fully reflective of actual performance
- In exceptional circumstances, the probationary period may be extended for up to four months (for example, because of the employee's sickness or other absence)

3. Probationary Reviews

The Induction Meeting

The induction meeting should take place at the end of the first week of employment. It is a meeting between the line manager, who must have relevant employee relations responsibilities, and the employee. Clear targets for the next three months should be set. The employee should be encouraged to contribute views and ideas. The line manager will complete the Probationary Review Documentation and send it to the HR Department. The Line Manager should ensure that all items on the Induction checklist are complete as this may impact the new staff member's ability to continue working with the College.

The interim review meeting

The interim review meeting should take place, normally, at the end of the first three months of employment. It is a meeting between the line manager and the employee to cover work performance to date, review progress, targets and expectations and set clear targets for the next three months. The employee should be encouraged to contribute views and ideas. The line manager will complete the Probationary Review Documentation and send it to the HR Department. The Line Manager should liaise with the HR Department if there are any concerns with the new staff member as and when they arise.

The final review meeting

The final review meeting must take place before the end of the probationary period (normally six months). It is a meeting between the line manager and the employee.

The meeting will cover work performance over the full six months period, will take account of the three month review and any progress or problems following the last review. The manager will confirm the outcome of the probationary review – whether the employment is confirmed or not. The line manager will complete the Probationary Review Documentation and send it to the HR Department.

Only in very exceptional circumstances will the probationary period be extended for a further period of up to four months. Such extension cannot be for the purpose of dealing with poor performance. It is only acceptable where unavoidable circumstances have occurred. For example, where the employee's approved absence during the preceding months has prevented her/him from achieving the standards of work performance required.

4. Other

- The College's Disciplinary Procedure will not apply during the probationary period. However, the line manager is expected to use the procedure as guidance for dealing with poor performance and issue warnings if necessary with timescales adapted as appropriate.