

Probation Policy

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Version	Date	Description
1.0	N/A	Inherited policy
1.2	02/05/07	Policy presented to MB – minor amendments requested
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2.0	14/06/07	Policy presented to and approved at HRC
3.0	Jan 2008	Policy updated with style guide, OD, IS control table and equality impact assessment

1.0 Contents

- 1.1 All employees appointed within the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) will be subject to probation and must reach and maintain a satisfactory standard of conduct, performance, timekeeping and attendance during this period.
- 1.2 The probation period is normally six months, subject to the achievement of satisfactory standards. Employees on fixed term appointments of less than 12 months may have shorter periods of probation proportionate to the length of their term, which will be detailed in their contract of employment.
- 1.3 Factors which are relevant during the probationary period include:
 - allowing new employees reasonable time to learn the job
 - identifying and progressing training requirements
 - adequately assessing the employee's performance, conduct and attendance
 - taking into consideration the employee's previous experience and qualifications

1.4 Current employees who achieve promotion through open competition are not required to serve a further period of probation in their new post. If a new employee achieves promotion while still on probation in a lower grade, the appointment will not be confirmed until the original probationary period of service has been successfully completed.

2.0 Purpose of probation

2.1 The main purpose of probation is to provide a period of time whereby a new employee establishes by conduct, performance and attendance, their fitness or otherwise for a permanent appointment in that particular post or grade.

2.2 The formal probation procedure introduces a series of probation interviews to ensure regular two-way communication between the line manager and new employee, allowing timely action to be taken on problems that might arise in the crucial early stages of the appointment.

3.0 Confirmation of appointment

3.1 Confirmation of appointment is dependant upon the satisfactory completion of the probationary period. If a new employee's conduct, performance, timekeeping or attendance during the probationary period is not satisfactory, the appointment may be terminated giving one week's notice throughout any stage of the probationary period.

3.2 An appointment may be terminated at any time during the probationary period in the case of misconduct, and/or if the performance or attendance is unsatisfactory and evident that the required standard will not be reached before the end of the probation period.

4.0 Role of line manager

4.1 The role of the line manager is to ensure that new employees on probation are given instruction, guidance and reasonable assistance in settling into a new job. Their performance must be carefully monitored, shortcomings highlighted and warnings of a need to improve or words of encouragement given as appropriate, with full records maintained.

4.2 Although the probation interviews give structure to the probationary period, the line manager must make it clear to the new employee that two way communication throughout the period is important.

4.3 The line manager is responsible for arranging probation interviews. The line manager should ensure that adequate time is allocated with no interruptions.

5.0 Role of Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / Chief Executive (CEO) (as appropriate)

5.1 The Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate) should ensure that the probationary period within their team is adhered to and new employees receive adequate guidance and training to perform the role to which they have been appointed. Appropriate training will be given to managers who are involved in this process.

6.0 Role of HR

6.1 HR is available to:

- offer help and advice to both new employees and line managers;
- remind both parties when probation interviews are expected;
- be involved at an early stage in cases of unsatisfactory performance.

7.0 Probation procedure

7.1 A formal probation procedure helps to ensure that:

- the performance, conduct, timekeeping and attendance are assessed throughout the probationary period;
- line managers provide new employees with encouragement, guidance and timely training;
- the line manager and new employee know how the employee is progressing throughout the probationary period and the line manager gives proper consideration to the issue of continued employment.

8.0 Procedure

8.1 On appointment, new employees will be notified of the initial period of probation and receive a copy of the procedure as part of their induction programme.

8.2 During the first two weeks, the line manager and new employee will agree the employee's performance plan for the probation period. At this stage, the new employee will only be able to make a limited contribution to the formulation, and will rely on the line manager to identify objectives. If possible, the objectives and competencies should be set for achievement at two months and four months and key objectives discussed. In addition, to setting objectives and competencies the line manager and new employee should agree the personal development to cover the period of probation using section 7, personal development, of the performance plan. This should include any additional training and development needs over and above the standard induction programme.

8.3 Should the situation arise where a new line manager and their new employee are both within their probationary period, the new line manager will not assume responsibility for their new employee's probation until they have successfully completed their own period of probation. Where this situation does arise, the Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate) will assume responsibility during the period of the new line manager's probation.

9.0 First probation meeting

9.1 Towards the end of the second month of employment HR will email the necessary documentation to the line manager and new employee to instigate the process for the first probation meeting to:

- discuss performance to date against the key activities, work objectives and competencies identified by the line manager. Any aspects of performance, conduct, attendance or timekeeping which need improvement must be discussed and the appropriate advice and assistance given to help the new employee improve.
- good performance must also be noted and praise given for achievements to date
- agree any changes to the objectives and competencies on the Performance Plan
- discuss the adequacy of induction/training provided to date
- explore problems the new employee might have encountered and any changes the manager and colleagues might consider to assist in this respect
- agree further training needs
- review timekeeping and attendance, including sickness absence

9.2 Full preparation by both parties for the meeting is essential to ensure that the process involves two-way communication.

9.3 Following the meeting, the performance plan, including any changes to personal development, should be revised. The interim probation review form for the first period is to be completed. The Plan and the Review form will be signed by the Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate) and sent to HR. The new employee and line manager should retain copies.

9.4 Serious concerns regarding performance or attendance must be discussed and the new employee informed of the consequences if an improvement is not made. Clarity of the nature of the shortcoming(s) is essential and improvement required, with timescales within which improvement can be expected. Timescales should follow the stages of the probation period, with an improvement expected by the following probationary period meeting.

9.5 The line manager will continue performance monitoring, ensuring that any additional training, supervision or guidance, as agreed at the first meeting, is given. The line manager must ensure that evidence of good and poor performance is noted and issues discussed with the new employee at appropriate times.

10.0 Final probation interview

- 10.1 After five months of employment HR will email the necessary documentation to the line manager and new employee to instigate the process for the final probation meeting. The meeting format will follow the guidelines provided in section 9.
- 10.2 Having concluded the meeting, the line manager will complete the final probation review and make a recommendation to their Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO as appropriate).
- 10.3 If performance, conduct, timekeeping and attendance have been satisfactory and meet the requirements of the job, the line manager will recommend the appointment to be confirmed.

11.0 Extending the probationary period

- 11.1 In some cases, the probationary period may need to be extended because the new employee's performance, conduct, timekeeping or attendance has not been satisfactory and it is considered that a further period of probation may enable him or her to reach a satisfactory level. The reasons for the extension will be discussed with the individual; any necessary assistance will be agreed and provided where possible. A further performance plan, including any revisions to the personal development plan, should be agreed. The line manager must discuss the possibility of extending the probationary period with HR to ensure that justification warrants such action and due process is being followed.
- 11.2 The extension will be confirmed in writing with a clear statement of the period of the extension and the procedures to be followed.
- 11.3 An extension will last up to a further period of three months until the ninth month of employment and will be reviewed (as a minimum) on a four weekly basis using the performance review form. If after this period the new employee's performance, conduct, timekeeping, or attendance has still not reached a satisfactory level, and in exceptional circumstances, the probationary period can be extended for a further and final period of up to two months up until the 11 month of employment. This further two month extension period can only be granted after full discussion between HR, the line manager and Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate), where it has been agreed that there is a significant justification for doing so. Employment may be terminated following the initial extension (up until nine months) or after the further and final extension (11 months) where performance has not reached satisfactory levels.
- 11.4 Where performance, conduct, timekeeping or attendance is unsatisfactory in a particular post, it might exceptionally be possible to offer a new employee an alternative post at the same grade on an extended probation subject to the maximum 11 month probationary period. This will only be possible if a suitable vacant post is available in HEFCW.

- 11.5 Where the new employee does not meet the standard required for their post and grade, they might wish to be considered for a post at a lower grade at the appropriate salary for that grade, if a suitable vacant post is available. In either event a further period of probation will be specified subject to the maximum 11 month probationary period.
- 11.6 If performance, conduct, timekeeping or attendance is unsatisfactory the line manager will recommend, using the performance review form, that employment should be terminated. The Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate), line manager and HR will be involved in any probation meeting, which might result in a recommendation to terminate employment. The new employee will be given at least five working days written notice of such a meeting. The new employee has the right to be accompanied at all stages by a work colleague or Works Council representative.
- 11.7 The employee will be given clear reasons why they have not met the required standard of the post. The Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate) and line manager will have considered all the possible options, e.g. an extension to the probation period, further training, a move of job, before making a recommendation to the Director of F&CS (or Head of Resources with delegated authority) to terminate the employment.
- 11.8 It should be noted that at each stage of the probationary review, the form provides the employee with an opportunity to make comments as to whether they agreed or disagreed with the outcome of the probation review.

12.0 Termination of employment during the probation period

If it is clear that the new employee will not be able to reach the required standard before the end of the probationary period, the appointment may be terminated at any stage during the probationary period. It is unlikely that this course of action would be considered (unless there are serious concerns) before the new employee had been in post for two months. The new employee will have the opportunity to be accompanied at any meeting to discuss termination by a work colleague or Works Council representative as in 11.6. If the appointment is to be terminated, the employee will be given the appropriate notice in accordance with their contract.

13.0 Timescale

- 13.1 The timescale outlined above is based on a probation period of six months; if the probation period is extended for a longer period, HR will agree an appropriate timescale with the Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate).
- 13.2 All documentation must be finalised and with HR normally within 10 working days of the meeting. HR will then notify the in writing to the employee, the outcome of any final probation review which will normally be within three working days of receiving the documentation.

13.3 Any concerns with achieving the timescale for documentation should be discussed with HR and revised timescales agreed as necessary.

14.0 Ill health and personal problems

14.1 Where ill health may be a factor in unsatisfactory progress or attendance, advice may be sought from occupational health for a medical examination.

Where personal problems may be contributing to unsatisfactory progress or attendance, HEFCW may assist the new employee in obtaining appropriate support and/or advice in order to enable the new employee to reach the standard of performance and/or attendance required.

14.2 A confidential 24 hour, seven days a week, employee advisory resource is also available to all staff and line managers who may wish to discuss work or personal concerns.

15.0 Pension benefits

15.1 During the period of probation, new employees will be eligible to join the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme, subject to medical confirmation.

16.0 Training

16.1 Line managers will be given appropriate training, support and guidance to enable them to carry out the HEFCW's probation policy effectively.

17.0 Probation documentation

17.1 Probation reviews - reports on the employee's probation meetings will be agreed and signed by the postholder, line manager, Head of Team / Director of Strategic Development / Director of Finance & Corporate Services / CEO (as appropriate following the line management structure) and kept on the new employee's personal file. The new employee and line manager should keep copies at all stages, original copies must be sent to HR. Probation reports will be kept on the employee's personnel file.

18.0 Links to pay

18.1 New employees joining between 1 August and 31 January will have a performance review and overall assessment awarded at the end of March of that year, based on their probationary performance. A copy of the last probation report must be returned to HR with a signed performance review form attached; only the overall assessment needs to be completed on the review form.

18.2 New employees joining between 1 February and 31 July will not have a performance review in the year of joining as an overall assessment will be awarded at the end of March the following year. Probation review documentation at month three and six (and extensions as necessary) will be completed in place of the MoPD Form and referenced as such on the MoPD form.

- 18.3 Where the probation period is extended as defined in paragraph 11.0, the employee's salary increase will be affected as detailed in the pay & grading policy.
- 18.4 Please refer to the pay & grading policy for further information on salary progression, individual positioning and progression within the salary scales.