



Guidelines for Managers on the Probation Review Regulations for Administrative, Technical and Support Staff of Trinity College Dublin

The probation review regulations apply to all new employees in all non-academic areas, and to employees successful in promotion competitions within the University where a change in grade is involved. The guidelines below should be read in conjunction with the Colleges Probation Review Regulations for further clarification. These are available on request or on the Human Resources web-site www.tcd.ie/hr.

Operation of the Probationary Procedure

All new employees and staff who have been promoted in a grade change are required to undergo a probationary period of one year from commencement of duty in that post. The Line Manager is required to complete at least two reviews of performance - an Initial Review and Final Review. The Initial Review should be completed within the first 4 months of employment, the Final Review within 9 months. The structure of the Probationary Procedure is as follows:

1. Initial Meeting (Induction/Objectives Setting Meeting)
2. The First Probation Review
3. Final Probation Review

1. Initial Meeting (Induction/Objectives Setting)

It is the Line Managers responsibility to ensure the staff member is inducted locally and given the relevant information necessary to enable him/her to commence work. Consequently, the Line Manager should arrange an appointment with the staff member during their first week (but ideally on their first day) of employment at the University.

(a) Induction

Ideally within the **first week**, the Line Manager or his/her nominee shall:

- Clarify the duties, responsibilities, and objectives of the staff member in line with the job description;
- Explain how objectives and performance will be monitored and measured and how frequently this will be done;
- Identify and provide relevant training (this may include attendance at internal/external courses or on the job training);
- Agree and set dates for a first review and final review to be completed within the probationary period.

(b) Setting Objectives and Responsibilities at Initial Meeting

The objectives and responsibilities at the initial or induction meeting:-

- Should be specific to the activities of the staff member as detailed in their job description, and should be clearly defined to ensure they are unambiguous.
- Should be clear and measurable. Details should include how the objectives will be measured and what indicators will be used;
- The objectives will be linked to a timescale;
- Should be set to a time frame of work to be realistically achieved and completed during the probation period. Some work may extend beyond the probationary period and in this case, it will be necessary to break the tasks/project down to set realistic objectives;
- The staff member should be provided with the appropriate support/guidance (including training) necessary to help him/her achieve the set objectives.

2. (a) The First Probation Review

The first formal assessment takes place generally within **four months**. The Human Resources will send Probation Review Forms to the Line Manager. These forms can also be downloaded from the Human Resources website – www.tcd.ie/hr. The form will be provided to the staff member by the Line Manager at least one week prior to the first review, and each party must separately complete the form.

2. (b) The First Probation Meeting – Guidelines

Upon receipt of the review forms from Human Resources, the Line Manager should arrange a suitable date with the staff member so that both parties have time to

prepare for the review and to ensure the meeting remains free of interruptions. Sufficient time should be allocated for the meeting and both parties given time to discuss their completed review forms. The tone of the meeting should be positive and encouraging.

Introduction

- Explain the purpose of the meeting and briefly outline what will be covered;
- Discuss the Induction Process to date and how has the employee settled in.

Review

- Discuss the employee's performance to-date against the objectives set at induction;
- Praise good performance/achievements so far;
- Review timekeeping/attendance, including sickness absence;
- Explore problems the employee has encountered with their role;
- Provide guidance/support as appropriate;
- Identify aspects of performance/conduct that need improving;
- Introduce/agree any changes to the objectives set;
- Review/agree training/development needs, if necessary provide constructive feedback on progress.

Conclusion

- If appropriate set/agree a performance improvement plan (see section below on managing unsatisfactory performance) and/or
- Set next review meeting;
- Explain consequence if required level of performance is not achieved;
- Both parties outline their comments on the end of the form (if they so wish);
- Both parties sign the review form, and each party retain a copy for their own records.

The Line Manager should **forward the signed review form to Human Resources within 5 working days of the review meeting**. Completed review forms will be placed on the staff member's personnel file in Human Resources.

If performance is not to the required standard additional probationary review meetings may be required at various intervals during the probationary period.

3. (a) Final Probation Review

The final review should take place within nine months of the probationary period.

3. (b) The Final Review Meeting

Please follow guidelines as set out at 2(b) above for conducting the final review meeting, and further include discussion on the outcome/s of the previous probationary review/s with any other issues that may have arisen in the meantime. Again, at the end of the meeting, the Review Form must be completed and signed by both parties who will retain a copy for their own records.

The Final Probation Review form will include a record of any actions agreed and one of three following recommendations:

- Confirmation of appointment
- Termination of appointment
- Extension of probation

Confirmation of appointment – The Line Manager has the responsibility of confirming the appointment and will write to the staff member formally at the end of the probationary year noting the outcome of their probation and confirming their appointment to the University. The Line Manager must send one copy of the letter to Human Resources for personal records.

Termination of appointment – The Line Manager should first contact Human Resources to seek further advice at this stage. The Line Manager will write to the staff member formally noting the outcome of the probation and provide formal notice of termination of employment.

Extension of the probation - In exceptional cases, College reserves the right to extend the probation period where it has not been possible to adequately assess the employee's performance, for such reasons as:

- Sick Leave;
- Protective leave i.e. Maternity leave, Parental leave, Carer's leave, Adoptive leave.

Where the probation period is extended, the following should 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;

The Line Manager will write to the staff member:

- noting the reasons for the extension;
- offering appropriate help and support, if necessary;
- stating the possible outcomes at the end of the extended probation (i.e. confirmation of employment or termination of contract).

Any extension of the probation period will not exceed the greater of six months, or the duration of the absence. During the last month of the extended period, the Line Manager and the staff member will have the final review. The same guidelines as outlined above for conducting the review meeting will apply [see 2(b)]. The completed form will include a record of any actions agreed and one of two possible recommendations:

- The appointment should be confirmed;
- OR
- The appointment should be terminated.

All review forms and letters should be copied to Human Resources to be placed on the employees personnel file.

Dealing with unsatisfactory performance

The Line Manager should discuss any development needs or performance difficulties that have been identified at the review meeting. The Line Manager should draw up a Performance Improvement Plan for the employee using the template in Appendix 1 as a guide and issue it to the employee.

The Line Manager should keep the following in mind when completing the Performance Improvement Plan:

- Identify** Clearly **identify** the specific areas of **performance** (job responsibility, particular skill or competency) that are considered unsatisfactory. It is important to be specific **using examples**.
- Specify** Should **specify** the nature of the improvement required. Outline **targets/objectives** that would assist /improve performance.
- Measure** Explain how performance targets will be **measured**. This can be in a form of reports, management observation, customer feedback, or any other type of job related outputs.
- Time** Set up a **realistic** timeframe to monitor the performance (depending on the criteria involved this may vary between 4 to 12 weeks and is at the Line Manager's discretion).
- Explain** It is important that the Line Manager sets the targets, timeframe, follow up, etc. with the employee.
- It is also essential the Line Manager **explains the consequences** if the targets are not achieved i.e. the employee may risk having his/her contract of employment terminated.
- Support** **Offer and provide** all available **support and resources** that may help with improving performance. The Line Manager is required to explore availability of any professional development opportunities.
- Review** It is important that the Line Manager agrees and sets the date of the next follow up meeting.

The Performance Improvement Plan should be completed and signed by the Line Manager and employee. **One copy should be sent to Human Resources for record purposes.**

It may be appropriate to hold further review meetings at various intervals during the probationary period, in which case, the same guidelines as outlined above will apply (See 2(b)).

The Line Manager may seek advice from Human Resources whenever an employee's performance/conduct gives cause for concern. If appropriate, a representative from Human Resources may be present to facilitate at formal reviews.

APPENDIX 1 - Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)