



## **Guidelines for Managers on the Probation Review Regulations for All Professional and Support Staff of Trinity College Dublin**

The probation review regulations apply to all new employees, and to all employees who change grade within the University. There are two policies, one for academic staff and one for all other staff. This guideline document is not intended for academic staff. The guidelines below should be read in conjunction with the University's Probation Review Policy for Professional, Research, Administrative, Library, Technical and Support Staff for further clarification. This is available on the Human Resources website <http://www.tcd.ie/hr/our-services/probations-promotion/probation/>.

All new employees and staff who have had 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 – a First Probation Review and a Final Probation Review. The First Review should be completed within the first 4 months of employment, the Final Review at 8 months in employment. The structure of the Probationary Procedure is as follows:

1. Initial Meeting (Induction/Objectives Setting Meeting) – First Week
2. The First Probation Review – Fourth Month
3. Final Probation Review – Eighth Month

### **1.0 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, as part of that induction, the Line Manager should arrange an appointment with the staff member during their first week of employment at the University to agree their role objectives.



**a. Induction**

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

- i. Clarify the duties, responsibilities, and objectives of the staff member in line with the job description;
- ii. Explain how objectives and performance will be monitored and measured and how frequently this will be done;
- iii. Identify and provide relevant training (this may include attendance at internal/external courses or on the job training);
- iv. 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:-

- i. 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;
- ii. Should be clear and measurable. Details should include how the objectives will be measured and what indicators will be used;
- iii. The objectives will be linked to a timescale, and 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;
- iv. The staff member should be provided with the appropriate support/guidance (including training) necessary to help him/her achieve the set objectives.



## 2.0 The First Probation Review

### a. Process

The first formal assessment will take place at four months. Human Resources will notify the Line Manager of the requirement for a probation review four weeks in advance of the due date for the completion of the probation. This will give a link to the webpage for the form: <http://www.tcd.ie/hr/our-services/probations-promotion/probation/>. Later this year we will be launching an online form. The steps are outlined below:

- i. Notification – 4 weeks in advance of due date - HR will notify you as Line Manager of the need to set up the review
- ii. Line Manager review the documentation and consults with any second line manager
- iii. Line Manager sets up the Review meeting with the staff member
- iv. Line Manager(s) fill in the Probation Review Form insofar as it can be completed in advance of the meeting
- v. Line Manager gives the form to the staff member (recommended one week in advance of the meeting)
- vi. Holds the Probation Review meeting with the staff member
- vii. Both parties should complete the comments, and sign the form
- viii. The Line Manager submits the form to HR
- ix. Please note that any incomplete probations will be escalated through the line management structure of the University.

### b. The First Probation Meeting – Guidelines

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 the completed review form. The tone of the meeting should be positive and encouraging.

**i. Introduction**

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

**ii. 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.

**iii. Conclusion**

- Both parties sign the review form, and each party retain a copy for their own records.
- The Line Manager sends to HR.

**iv. Further Review and Unsatisfactory Performance**

- 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). It may be appropriate to do this following the meeting if it is felt that a period of reflection is needed. If doing this please ensure you set a timeline at the meeting for the return.



**c. Decision Making on Review**

As Line Manager(s), you will be jointly making one of the following decisions:

- i. The Probation Review should be recorded as **satisfactory**;
- ii. The performance **does not meet expectations** and a Performance Improvement Plan will be put in place; Line Managers/Principal Investigators may seek advice and support from their Faculty/Division Human Resources Partner if needed. Additional reviews should be put in place.
- iii. The staff member has **not passed** their probation and their contract should be terminated.
- iv. The probation period is to be **extended** (see policy);

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.

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 record in Human Resources.

### 3.0 Final Probation Review

The final review should take place within nine months of the probationary period start date. The same process as above will apply. Please follow guidelines as set out above.

Please note that the options available at the final review meeting are:

**i. Confirmation of appointment**

This means that the staff member will be confirmed in their **current contract** (e.g. if a fixed term). 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 the personnel record.

**ii. 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.

**iii. Extension of the probation** - please see notes above in section 2.

### 4.0 Managing 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 on the webpage 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.



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.

## **5.0 The Process of escalation.**

The University has noted that probation is an area of high importance for all staff. All staff must be probated adequately. To assist the University in achieving this goal, we have set up a formal notification and escalation process which has been automated. A series of reminders are sent to the line manager, the Head of School or Department and the Dean or Head of Division. Please see the document on the webpage outlining the notification process and the relevant timelines.