Aston University

PROBATIONARY PROCEDURE FOR SUPPORT STAFF

Introduction

For the purposes of this procedure Support Staff is defined as all staff of the University ***excluding*** lecturers, senior lecturers, readers and professors.

All Support Staff joining the University on a permanent basis will normally be subject to a probationary period. The purpose of the probationary period is to allow the University to review the performance of a new member of staff and ensure that any skills gap or training needs are identified and addressed. The probationary period also allows the individual to become familiar with the culture of the University and the working environment. Existing staff that move posts within the University will not be subject to a further probationary period.

Probationary Periods

The length of the probationary period is determined by the Appointment Board to take account of the prior experience of the candidate appointed. Normally, this will be 6 months for Grades 1-6, and 12 months for higher grades.

Notice Periods

For monthly paid staff, the appointment will be subject for its termination, during the probationary period, to one month's notice, in writing, on either side. For weekly paid staff, termination within the probationary period will be subject to 1 week's notice, in writing, on either side.On successful completion of the probationary period and confirmation of their appointment staff will be subject to the appropriate contractual notice period as stated in their contract of employment.

Disciplinary Procedure

During the probationary period it should not be necessary to invoke the full University Disciplinary Procedure with regard to performance problems, although the University reserves the right to invoke the Disciplinary Procedure, should it be deemed necessary, in the case of behavioural problems. This will be clearly stated in the offer of employment.

Review of Performance

A Probationary Advisor will be nominated from amongst the staff of the School/ Department. The Probationary Advisor will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that local and university induction procedures have been completed within the first two weeks of starting;
- Meeting the individual within 2-3 weeks of their start date to define the objectives to be achieved during the probationary period;

- Plan regular scheduled meetings to review progress and discuss performance;
- Ensuring that the new member of staff receives guidance and help;
- Facilitating access to training and development as required during the review period.

In order to review and measure performance during the probationary period it is essential that the Probationary Advisors sets clear work objectives which can be monitored for progress and which can be a focus for discussion. The person specification and job description list the skills, knowledge, qualifications/training and personal characteristics that are required of the post holder, and provide a basis for defining standards of performance, and identifying objectives against which performance can be measured.

Objectives should be specified, and recorded in an initial meeting (See proforma Appendix 1). Further review meetings, no less frequently than every two months, should be held to discuss progress, and notes should be taken. A review meeting form should be completed (See proforma in Appendix 2). All forms should be signed by both the Probationary Advisor and the member of staff to indicate that both parties agree with the discussions that have taken place and any suggested actions.

Problems during the Probationary Period

If there are concerns about any aspects of an individual's performance these should be discussed with the individual as soon as possible and not left to the next scheduled review meeting. The Probationary Advisor may increase the frequency of review meetings from that originally planned. It is important that new, specific objectives are agreed which address the shortfalls in performance, and there should be clarity about what action needs to be taken, how action will be monitored and what the timescales are for improvement. Consideration should be given to any necessary training that is needed to help the individual to improve. It is important that notes of meetings are kept, and that there is evidence of actions taken and any continued underperformance. It is essential that in the event that the individual's performance fails to reach the required standard, and when an extension or termination of appointment is recommended, that there is sufficient evidence to support the decision.

If the Probationary Advisor has concerns about the individual's performance, and is contemplating an extension or termination of appointment, it is essential that advice is taken from the designated HR Advisor and the Executive Dean / Head of Department as soon as possible.

Determining outcome of the Probationary Period.

A final review meeting should take place no later than six weeks (monthly paid staff) or four weeks (weekly paid staff) before the end of the probationary period. The completed Probation Recommendation Form (see Appendix 3) should be completed and signed by the member of staff, the Probationary Advisor and the Executive Dean / Head of Department.

The completed Probation Recommendation Form should sent to Human Resources before the end of the probationary period, and where termination is being considered this should be sufficiently in advance to allow for the due notice period to be applied. Where there is a recommendation to terminate the appointment the supporting evidence should also be made available (see iii termination of the employment contract below)

i) Successful Completion of the Probationary Period

When the final review meeting has been completed, the Probationary Advisor should make a recommendation to the Executive Dean / Head of Department that the appointment should be confirmed using the Probation Recommendation Form, which will briefly state the reasons why the decision to confirm has been taken.

Human Resources will issue a letter confirming the appointment to the individual.

ii) Extension of the Probationary Period

Where appropriate, on the recommendation of the Probationary Advisor and the Executive Dean / Head of Department, a probationary period may be extended to allow the individual more time to reach the required level of performance. This decision, and the reasons for it, should be stated on the Probation Recommendation Form, along with a recommendation for the extension period, which should be no more than three months.

Human Resources will issue a letter confirming the extended probationary period to the individual. The Probationary Advisor should make clear to the individual the reasons for the extension, and set clear objectives to be achieved during the extension period.

iii) Termination of the Employment Contract during or at the end of the Probationary Period

If the individual has consistently failed to meet the required standard of performance during or at the end of the probationary period and further training, guidance or an extension to the probationary period is considered unlikely to have a beneficial effect, then the University may terminate an employee's contract with due notice. Termination is also possible after completion of an extension period during which insufficient improvement in performance has been achieved.

In these cases, and before termination of employment is recommended, the Probationary Advisor must involve the HR Advisor and the Executive Dean / Head of Department in determining whether there is sufficient and detailed evidence to support the case for termination.
Where appropriate, a probationary period may be extended to allow the individual more time to reach the required level of performance. This decision, and the reasons for it, should be stated on the Probation Recommendation Form, along with a recommendation for the extension period, which should be no more than three months.

The Probation Recommendation Form and/or other written notification should be completed by the Probationary Advisor and the Executive Dean / Head of Department and sent directly to the Director of Human Resources stating the recommendation that the appointment should not be confirmed. When reviewing the request, the Director of Human Resources will want to consider:

- The relevant probationary reports;
- The written evidence of review meetings with clearly defined objectives;
- Whether sufficient support, guidance and training has been provided.

After careful consideration of the relevant documents, the Director of Human Resources will make a decision regarding the dismissal of the employee, giving consideration to:
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- Whether an extension or further extension of the probation period would not improve performance;
- Whether the member of staff fully understands the situation and has had adequate opportunity to improve, or meet the required standards. If there is insufficient evidence to determine if this is the case, the member of staff will be invited to a meeting with the HR Advisor and given the opportunity to respond.

If the Director of Human Resources confirms the decision to dismiss the employee, a formal meeting should be held with the member of staff (who may be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or work colleague). Present at the meeting should be the Executive Dean / Head of Department and the designated HR Advisor.

The individual will be informed that the appointment will not be confirmed and the reasons why.

Following the meeting, the Director of Human Resources will issue a letter of dismissal. This letter will state:

- The grounds for dismissal;
- The right of the employee to appeal to the Chief Operating Officer within five working days of the date of the letter, a copy of the appeals procedure will be enclosed;
- The right of the employee to be accompanied at appeal by a Trade Union representative or a work colleague.

If the member of staff does not wish to appeal, the contractual notice period will be as stated in the letter of dismissal.

If the Director of Human Resources decides that a dismissal is not appropriate, then he/she will meet with the Executive Dean / Head of Department, the Probationary Advisor and the HR Advisor to discuss the matter.

If, following the meeting, the Director of Human Resources still considers that dismissal is not warranted, he/she will inform the Executive Dean / Head of Department and indicate what action should be taken.

Appeals Procedure

The employee has the right to appeal to the Chief Operating Officer against the decision to dismiss.

The appeal should be made in writing, within five working days of the date of the letter of dismissal, indicating the reasons for the appeal.

The employee will be informed in the letter of dismissal that he/she has the right to be accompanied at appeal by a Trade Union Representative or a work colleague.

On receipt of the written appeal the Chief Operating Officer will:-

- Consider the relevant probationary reports and any supporting documentation;
- Arrange to see the employee at the earliest possible opportunity, the date to be agreed between the Chief Operating Officer and the employee.

Following the appeal meeting and within seven working days, the Chief Operating Officer will:-

- Inform the employee in writing of the decision;
- Inform the Director of Human Resources of the decision;
- Inform the Executive Dean / Head of Department of the decision.

If the Chief Operating Officer decides that the appeal should be upheld, he/she will inform the Director of Human Resources and Executive Dean/ Head of Department what action should be taken.

The Chief Operating Officer's decision is final.

If the decision to dismiss is upheld, the contractual notice period will commence on the date of the appeal meeting.

Training of Probationary Advisors

Probationary Advisors will be expected to undertake training which is arranged by the Centre for Staff and Graduate Development

HR/98/3(4)
1/12/98
prob3 (approved by Council 16/12/98)
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APPENDIX 1

Probation - Initial Meeting Form

Name:
Job Title:
School/Department: :
Start Date:
Probationary Period:
Date of Initial meeting:
Objectives for the probationary period: (with dates for completion)

Training / Development Needs (Include dates)
Agreed review meeting schedule:
Any other matters discussed or raised during the meeting (with any recommendations for action)

Signed by:

Probationary Advisor:…….. Dated:……..

Staff member::…… Dated:……..

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APPENDIX 2

Probation - Record of Review meeting

Name:
School/Department: :
Meeting Date:
Achievements/ Strengths **(**note objectives achieved, areas of work that have gone well)
Areas for Improvement (note aspects of the work that are still not at the required standard, or where there is insufficient progress towards achieving objectives)
Revised /New Objectives: (note any objectives need which need to be revised from the initial meeting, or any new objectives written to address any performance shortfalls)

Specific Actions Required: (by either the Probationary Advisor or the member of staff. Include any training/development.)
Overall Comments / Summary
Date of Next Review Meeting

Signed by:

Probationary
Advisor:…….Dated:……..

Staff member::…… Dated:……..

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APPENDIX 3

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Probation Recommendation Form

(for use with reference to the Probationary Procedure for Support Staff)

Name …… School/Dept ……..

Job Title ……..

Date of Appointment: …… Probation period: ……..

SECTION A (To be completed by the Probationary Advisor)

Please tick one:

- ☐ I recommend confirmation of the above appointment
- ☐ I recommend an extension of probation for a period of …… months
- ☐ I recommend termination of contract

I make this recommendation for the following reasons;

Please note that where confirmation of appointment is not recommended the process detailed in the Probationary Procedure should have been followed - see paragraphs:

- Problems during the Probationary Period
- Termination of the Employment Contract during or at the end of the Probationary Period

Appropriate evidence and documentation must be available to support your recommendation

DATE: …… SIGNED: ……..

SECTION B (Comments by Executive Dean/Head of Department)

Please tick one:

- ☐ I recommend confirmation of the above appointment
- ☐ I recommend an extension of probation for a period of …… months
- ☐ I recommend termination of contract

I make this recommendation for the following reasons.

DATE: …… SIGNED: ……..

SECTION C (To be completed by the member of staff)

I have seen this report form, which has been discussed with me.

I am satisfied with the guidance given to me: YES/NO

If no, my reasons are as follows:

DATE: …… SIGNATURE OF MEMBER OF STAFF:……

SECTION D (For Human Resources Use)

Date received by Human Resources ……

Note of Action Taken:

DATE: …… SIGNED: ……