



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>  
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
INSTITUTIONAL OFFICE

## Probation Guidelines

<b>Reference number</b>	HC255 (3Pr/3.2.1.3)
<b>Accountable executive manager</b>	Executive Director: Human Capital
<b>Guideline owner</b>	Director: Human Capital Development
<b>Responsible division</b>	Human Capital Development
<b>Status</b>	Approved by Executive Director: Human Capital

## 1 Introduction

The North West University (NWU) recognises that a supportive and developmental probation process is vital in providing the appropriate level of support and training for new staff members on commencement of their employment.

The guidelines have been developed to assist managers in the management of probation for all new employees and should be read in conjunction with the conditions of services.

## 2 Objective

A formal probation procedure helps to ensure that;

- the probation process is undertaken for all new employees and is applied in a fair and consistent manner.
- the University is provided with an opportunity to assess the performance, conduct and attendance of each new employee in a fair and consistent manner;
- employees are given the support, encouragement, training and guidance they need;
- both managers and employees understand the purpose of probation and what is expected of them.

## 3 Length of Probation

- 3.1 The probation period for all newly appointed permanent employees in accordance with [conditions of employment](#) shall be;
  - a) three months or 6 months for support staff,
  - b) 1 year for academic staff; or
  - c) As stipulated in conditions of employment.
- 3.2 After completion of the probationary period, the manager may confirm permanent appointment, or extend the probationary period according to conditions set by the manager, or terminate the appointment with written notice following the procedures as prescribed in these guidelines and the labour relations acts.
- 3.3 Any proposed extension to these probationary periods, either before or during the probationary period itself should be discussed with the Human Capital Practitioner, and should be in line with the guidance provided in [Section 8](#) of these guidelines on [Extending the probationary period](#).

## 4 Purpose of Probation

The purpose of probation is to establish whether or not the newly appointed employee's performance is of an acceptable standard before permanently employing the employee. Thus the purpose of probation is to give the manager an opportunity to evaluate an employee's performance before confirming an appointment.

Probation should not be used for other purposes, for example, to deprive employees of the status of permanent employment.

## 5 Roles and Responsibilities

### 5.1 Line manager/management of probationary employee

- 5.1.1 The line manager shall, during the probation period, ensure that a probationary employee is provided with a job description, adequate evaluation, instruction, training, guidance and counselling in order to enable such employee to perform on the required standard.
- 5.1.2 A probationary employee's work performance shall be appraised by his/her line manager in terms of the Performance Management System during the probation period.
- 5.1.3 The probationary employee shall have the opportunity to receive feedback in writing on his/her performance.
- 5.1.4 Proper record shall be kept by the line manager regarding the performance of the probationary employee.

### 5.2 Authority for Confirmation of Appointment

- 5.2.1 The immediate line manager has the authority to consider the confirmation of permanency of employees on probation, which will be based on progress reports.
- 5.2.2 The line manager will consider whether the employee meets the required standard of the job in which he/she was appointed as reflected in the job description.

## 6 Procedure

### 6.1 Initial Meeting

At the initial meeting the manager should;

- 6.1.1 Clarify the duties and responsibilities of the new employee in line with their terms and conditions of employment and their job description (providing them with a copy). The meeting should include;
  - key aspects of the role
  - policies and procedures that must be followed
  - deadlines which need to be adhered to
  - relationships with other employees within the team, school/division, NWU
  - working hours – including any flexi time arrangements/processes
  - working environment
  - health and safety
  - security arrangements
  - training and development needs, including mentoring opportunities
- 6.1.2 Identify and put in place objectives which will be statements of what should be achieved during the probationary period. These should be explained, regarding how they will be monitored and measured, the timescales and what support will be given in order to achieve them. A performance agreement signed by both parties should be completed.
- 6.1.3 Using the Personal Development Plan (PDP) template, identify and put in place ways to address any training and development requirements.
- 6.1.4 Explain fully the probation procedures to be followed.
- 6.1.5 Agree on dates for further review meetings, including formal review meetings.

6.1.6 Managers should be sensitive to issues of equality and diversity and adapt their approach accordingly e.g. where an employee's first language is not English, the manager should read the probation requirements to the employee and ensure that he/she has a clear understanding.

## **6.2 Probation Review Procedure**

6.2.1 A Probation Review Form is provided for this purpose and must be signed by the employee and his/her line manager at the initial meeting and each subsequent review point to provide a formal record of the probationary period.

6.2.2 Throughout the probation period an employee's performance and competence should be subject to assessment by their manager within a supportive and developmental context.

6.2.3 Regular and informal one-to-one meetings should be held to review performance and to ensure that new employees are kept informed of their progress against the required standards; to advise them of any concerns and how these can be addressed; and to ensure employees are able to raise any questions they may have about their work performance or training requirements.

6.2.4 In addition to informal one to one meetings, formal, documented probation reviews are to be carried out as follows;

- a) 3 Month probation period reviews conducted month 1, 2 and month 3
- b) 6 month probation period reviews during month 1, month 3 and month 6
- c) 1 Year probation period reviews every quarter (every three months)

6.2.5 Human Capital will send reminders of formal review dates to schools/divisions and it is the responsibility of the manager to carry these out in a timely fashion.

6.2.6 The purpose of the formal review meetings is to formally assess and document the standards of work performance, conduct and attendance of the employee against the targets set at the initial meeting and to identify any further support, training or guidance which is required.

6.2.7 Formal reviews should be set up in advance so that both parties have time to prepare for the meeting.

## **6.3 Review Meetings**

6.3.1 As part of the formal review meeting managers should;

- praise good performance and achievements made so far
- discuss the employee's performance against the requirements of the position identified in the job description
- discuss the employee's performance against any objectives (KPAs) and targets set at the initial meeting
- review time keeping and attendance, including sickness absence
- review training requirements and agree any further development needs
- identify any areas of performance, conduct, attendance that need improving – identifying the standards required and how this can be achieved
- provide support and guidance
- be sensitive to issues of equality and diversity, seeking guidance as appropriate.
- set date for next review meeting
- document the details of the review meeting on the probation form.

## 6.4 Probation Form

- 6.4.1 It is a manager's responsibility to ensure that a written record is kept of the initial meeting and subsequent formal review meetings. The Probation Review Form should be completed to record details of each meeting.
- 6.4.2 The form should be completed by the manager and signed by both parties (i.e. the manager and the employee) to confirm the discussion that has taken place.
- 6.4.3 The original signed form should be kept by the line manager and a copy given to the employee.

## 7 Confirmation of Appointment

- 7.1 Employment may be confirmed if the employee is deemed suitable for the position after a period of probation is undertaken.
- 7.2 The line manager should complete the final section of the Probation Review Form (signed by the employee and his/her manager) to indicate that the employee's appointment should be confirmed or not.
- 7.3 The line manager will recommend to the appropriate authority (generally the Director of School/ Director of Unit/ Division) who shall consider the confirmation of permanency of the employee on probation. This will be based on progress reports from the line manager.
- 7.4 If the appropriate authority under 7.3 above is satisfied that a probationary employee meets the required performance standard, a recommendation will be made to Human Capital recommending the confirmation of permanent employment.
- 7.5 Line manager submits the completed Probation Review Forms to Human Capital: Operations who in turn will issue the Letter of Confirmation of Permanent Employment.

## 8 Difficulties during Probation

- 8.1 Managers should discuss with their new employees, any difficulties which arise during the probation period at the time when they occur, rather than leaving them until the formal review meetings.
- 8.2 Where difficulties arise the manager should meet with the employee, informally in the first instance to:
- clarify what the difficulties are in detail – specifying where and how their performance, conduct and/or attendance are falling below what is acceptable.
  - where possible provide evidence/examples of the problem/issues to be discussed
  - allow the member of staff an opportunity to raise and respond to any concerns
  - discuss the action required by the member of staff to address the problem - set targets specifying in detail what standards of performance, conduct and/or attendance are required to reach an acceptable level
  - identify any training needs which may need to be met in order for him/her to achieve the targets
  - set dates when the target should be met
  - monitor the employee's performance/conduct/attendance and review them at the time of the target dates
  - explain what the consequences may be if the standards/targets are not met – that it may be necessary to discuss the matter at a formal meeting and that ultimately it could result in the employee not being confirmed in their post.
  - discuss any actions required by the manager and agree timescales for completing these, where there is an issue of concern to the employee.

- 8.3 The manager should use the Probation Review Form to keep a record of the details referred to in the meeting and ensure that this is signed by both parties (i.e. the line manager and the employee).
- 8.4 If an employee's performance/conduct/attendance does not improve following the initial meeting, within a reasonable and realistic timescale, it may be necessary to discuss the matter at a more formal meeting.
- 8.5 Where a formal meeting is to be arranged to discuss difficulties during probation, advice should be sought from the Human Capital Practitioner, who may also be present at the meeting.
- 8.6 The employee should be invited in writing to attend the meeting, giving them appropriate notice. The letter should state the reasons why they have fallen short of the required standards and they should be provided with evidence of this, where available, prior to the meeting.
- 8.7 The employee will have a right to be accompanied at the meeting by a work colleague or union representative and should be notified of this in the invite letter.
- 8.8 At the formal meeting the steps set out in the above informal process should be repeated. Following the meeting, the employee should be given an opportunity to improve their performance and be advised that should they not improve and reach the required standards of performance/conduct/attendance by the time of the final review meeting, they may not be confirmed in post, and could therefore have their employment with the University terminated.
- 8.9 The manager should confirm in a letter to the employee the details and actions of the meeting, sending a copy to the Human Capital: Operations for retention on the employee's personal file. Advice on letters to confirm actions taken under the formal procedure should be sought from the HC Practitioner.
- 8.10 The above steps should continue to be followed and monitored during further formal meetings and during the formal review meeting process. Where an employee has not reached the required standards of performance/conduct/attendance during their probation, despite efforts to address this, then the procedure described in the section on where possible provide evidence/examples of the problem/issues to be discussed
- allow the member of staff an opportunity to raise and respond to any concerns
    - discuss the action required by the member of staff to address the problem - set targets specifying in detail what standards of performance, conduct and/or attendance are required to reach an acceptable level
  - identify any training needs which may need to be met in order for him/her to achieve the targets
  - set dates when the target should be met
  - monitor the employee's performance/conduct/attendance and review them at the time of the target dates
  - explain what the consequences may be if the standards/targets are not met – that it may be necessary to discuss the matter at a formal meeting and that ultimately it could result in the employee not being confirmed in their post.
  - discuss any actions required by the manager and agree timescales for completing these, where there is an issue of concern to the employee.
- 8.11 The above steps should continue to be followed and monitored during further formal meetings and during the formal review meeting process. Where an employee has not reached the required standards of performance/conduct/attendance during their probation, despite efforts to address this, then the procedure described in section 10 on Non Confirmation of Appointment should be followed and explained to the employee in advance of their final review meeting.

## 9 Extending the Probationary Period

- 9.1 Extension of the probation period will only be considered in special circumstances and is subject to the approval of the Executive Dean/Director or next in line superior. Any request to extend probation should be submitted early in the last month of probation to ensure that a decision is reached prior to the probation end date.
- 9.2 If the employee does not meet the required standards the line manager must recommend appropriate measures to ensure that the employee receives the necessary counselling and/or training.
- 9.3 The probation period may be extended for a further period during which period these measures are affected and the line manager and immediate superior shall meet again and make recommendations to the Human Capital division.
- 9.4 Where the probation period is extended, the following must be discussed between the line manager and the employee;
- reasons for the extension
  - length of the extension period
  - any assistance/guidance/training to be given during the extension
  - any areas of improvement that are required and how these will be monitored (where these arise the guidance in the section on [Difficulties During Probation](#) should be followed)
  - explain the consequences should they not reach the required standards by the time of the final review meeting - that they may not be confirmed in post, and could therefore have their employment with the University terminated.
- 9.5 If performance is deemed to be satisfactory then a final copy of the Probation Review Form should be completed, signed by both parties. The confirmation of appointment should be recommended by the line manager and sent to Human Capital Operations.
- 9.6 Where an employee has not reached the required standards of performance/conduct/attendance during their probation, despite efforts to address this, then the procedure described in the section on [Non confirmation of Appointment](#) should be followed and explained to the employee in advance of their final review meeting.

## 10 Non-confirmation of Appointment

- 10.1 If the employee still does not meet the required standard, the Executive Dean/Director or immediate superior may recommend dismissal of the employee. This recommendation, including all relevant documentation will be forwarded by the line manager to the Human Capital: Practitioner.
- 10.2 Should an employee's permanent employment not be confirmed after the stipulated or extended probationary period, this will be deemed to be termination of service with written notice in accordance to the Labour ACT.
- 10.3 Any decision reached should be confirmed in a letter to the employee by the Human Capital.
- 10.4 Where a decision is taken to terminate an employee's employment, the letter to the employee should state the reasons for the dismissal, their final date of employment and notice/pay in lieu arrangements. They should further be advised of their right to appeal.

## **11 Right to Appeal**

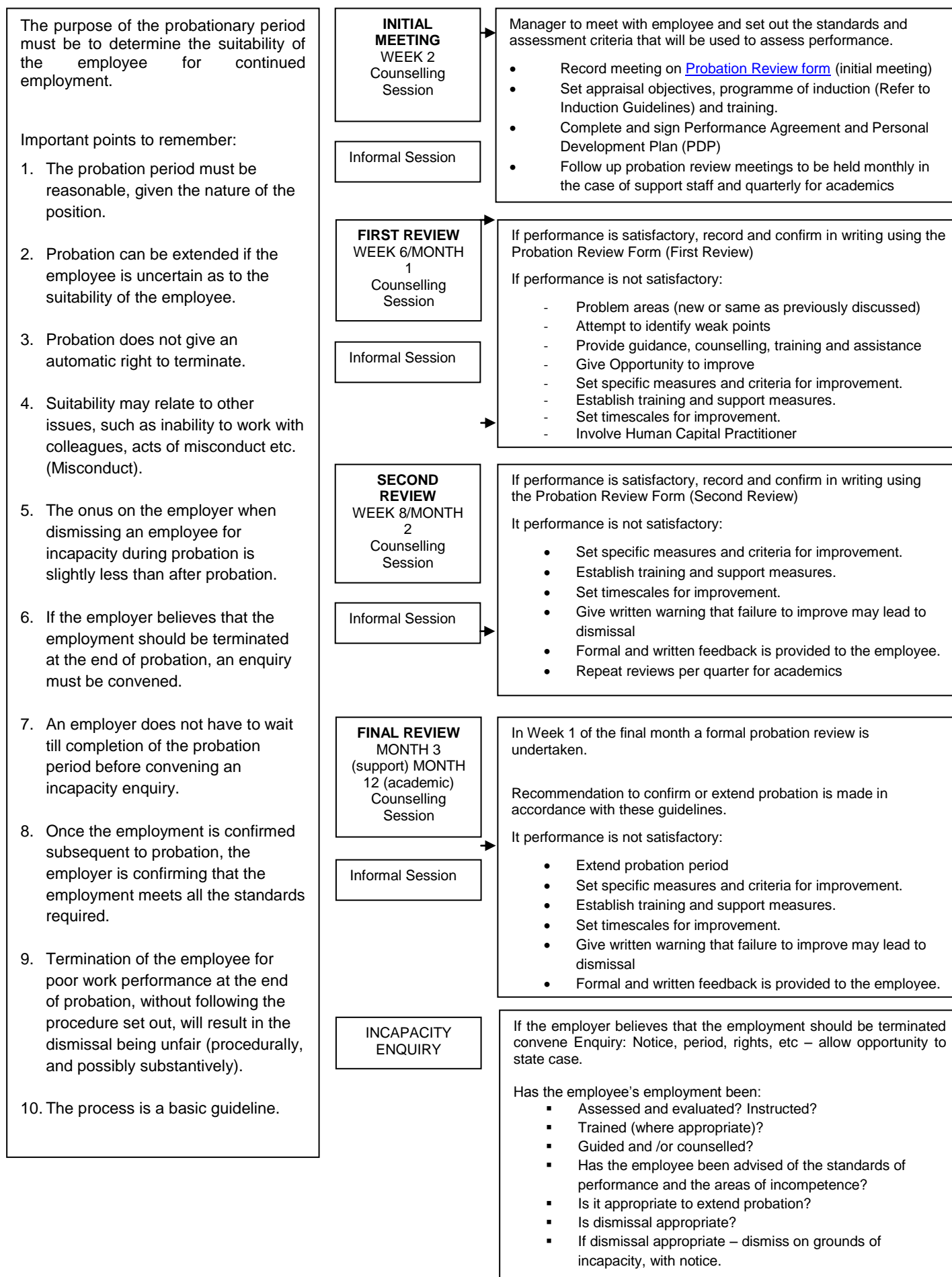
- 11.1 Where an employee's employment has been terminated during their probation period they have a right to appeal against the decision to dismiss them from the University. Existing appeal panel mechanisms will be followed. See the Behavioural Manual (Grievance Procedures) for details.
- 11.2 In order to appeal the employee should write to the Executive Director: Human Capital stating the reason for their appeal within 10 days of receipt of the confirmation of the decision in writing.
- 11.3 The decision taken at the appeal hearing will be final.

## **12 Communication**

- 12.1 If the line manager is satisfied that a probationary employee meets the required performance standard, a recommendation will be made to Human Capital: Operations recommending the confirmation of permanent employment.
- 12.2 If the Executive Dean/Director is satisfied that a probationary employee does not meet the required performance standard, the Executive Dean/Director will give instruction to the line manager to counsel the affected employee.
- 12.3 In the case of a probationary employee not meeting the required performance standard, the line manager shall counsel such employee.
  - 12.3.1 The aim of such counselling shall be to assist the employee to improve his/her work performance in order to meet the required standard as well as to ensure that the employee understands what the standard entails.
  - 12.3.2 A written record of such counselling shall be kept by the manager.
  - 12.3.3 The reasons for the unsatisfactory work performance shall be sought during the counselling process and, in the light of the reasons, ways will be considered to remedy the problem.



## 13 The Management of Probation



## **14 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **14.1 Immediate Line Manager/Supervisor**

The immediate line manager is responsible for:

- Facilitating the performance management process in accordance with these procedures and the Performance Management Guidelines.
- Ensuring that the provisions of the Probations Policy are applied to all employees who are on probation in their area.
- Ensuring that unsatisfactory performance is promptly identified and communicated to the employee.
- Recommending the confirmation or termination of employment to the appropriate delegated authority at two weeks prior to the end of probation.

### **14.2 Human Capital**

- Ensuring local procedures and administrative practices are consistent with the probation policy and procedures. (HC: Client Services)
- Ensuring that the staff personnel files and HR Information records are updated to reflect either confirmation or termination of employment. (HC: Operations)
- Providing immediate supervisors with a monthly report of impending probation end dates. (HC: Operations)
- Providing advisory services to the line manager. (HC: Client Services/HC Practitioners)

### **14.3 Human Capital Development**

- Human Capital Development is responsible for the development and continuous improvement of these guidelines.
- Ensure the communication and training of these guidelines.

### **14.4 Employees**

Employees are expected to:

- Understand their role in achieving the School/Division or University's objectives.
- Share responsibility for the development of their performance and development plan.
- Actively participate in probation review discussions regarding induction, performance and development goals and outcomes relevant to the objectives of their work area and the University.

## **15 RELATED DOCUMENTS AND FORMS**

- NWU Conditions of Employment
- Probation Review Form
- Performance Management Policy
- Induction and Orientation Guidelines

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