Academic Probation Scheme

1. Introduction

1.1. Appointments to academic roles (Research Assistant, Lecturer and Research Fellow) may include a period of probation. The probation period will normally be for three years although appointing committees may decide to reduce this period to one or two years based on an individual’s previous research and/or teaching experience. Details of the duration of probation are confirmed within an offer of employment letter.

1.2. Where an employee’s appointment is for a fixed term basis, their period of employment will normally count towards the standard three year probation.

1.3. The probation scheme aims to ensure that employees are given appropriate opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and experience to equip them for a university career.

1.4. Deans of faculty will work closely with the relevant divisional head(s) to review progress during a probation. They will ensure that any problems that arise during the probation are discussed at the earliest opportunity.

1.5. An employee’s progress will be formally considered on an annual basis by the dean of faculty and probation panel. The composition of the panel will be the Deputy Principal (Operational Strategy and External Affairs), Dean of Student Affairs, and a Dean of Faculty (rotated annually). The panel will meet to consider probation reports in February, June and November each year. Probation reports will be considered as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probation Panel Meeting</th>
<th>Panel will consider probation reports for employees who commenced role between:</th>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>January to April</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>May to August</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>September to December</td>
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1.6. Following the panel meeting, outcomes will communicated to employees within two weeks.

1.7. Deans of faculty will ensure progress is discussed with employees at least once every semester and will meet formally with each employee prior to the submission of the probation reports.

1.8. Deans of faculty will ensure the appropriate allocation of teaching and associated responsibilities in line with the employee’s level of appointment and experience. For Lecturers with teaching and research responsibility this will normally mean that teaching contact hours will be around half the average of Lecturers within the department for the first year of probation and less than average for the remaining probation period. For Lecturers with teaching only responsibility the expectation is that, where appropriate, the employee’s teaching load will be less than the average of Teaching Fellows within the department during probation.
Process Steps

Stage 1

2. Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

2.1. Lecturers with teaching and research, and teaching only responsibilities, are required to successfully complete the first module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) called Designing and Facilitating Learning (LTHP100). This credit-bearing module runs over the first semester of the academic year from September to December. The course must be completed during the first year of appointment to the University where possible. All enquiries about the PGCLTHE should be directed to academicdevelopment@stir.ac.uk.

2.2. Exemptions from attending this course may be considered on written request from the dean of faculty following discussion with the employee if, for example, the employee has attended a similar Higher Education course at another University in recent years or is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA).

3. Personal Tutor Training

3.1. All new teaching colleagues will be expected to act as personal tutors. A requirement for completion of probation shall be attendance at one of the half-day personal tutor training events that are run three times each year.

4. Probation Plan

4.1. In the first 8 weeks of appointment, employees must complete and submit a probation plan to their dean of faculty for approval. Once approved, deans of faculty will submit the plan onto HR Services for the employee file. The probation plan template is available here.

4.2. A probation plan can be developed in discussion with senior colleagues, deans of faculty and/or relevant divisional heads. Deans of faculty (or nominee) should meet with staff on probation to discuss the plan and ensure that it is realistic and achievable.

4.3. A probation plan should cover the whole of the probation period, establishing parameters and targets for each year. The plan should indicate how the employee intends to further develop their knowledge and skills of teaching and learning throughout the probation period.

4.4. Academic Development colleagues (academicdevelopment@stir.ac.uk) are available to discuss staff teaching, research and staff development needs and agree an appropriate programme of staff development which can be included in probation plan. Information about the staff development opportunities available can be found on the Organisation and Learning Development webpages (http://www.stir.ac.uk/hr-od//learning-and-development/).

4.5. A probation plan is based on the best available information at the time and may need to be revised and updated during the probation. Minor changes should be agreed with the dean of faculty and any major changes should be highlighted in the annual probation report for the consideration of the probation panel. A revised copy of the agreed plan should be sent onto HR Services for the employee file.
4.6. In constructing the research element (where relevant) of the plan, it should be kept in mind that by the end of the probation period, the member of staff should have completed (or completed a significant part of) a coherent research programme and should have produced outputs that have been subject to peer review.

5. **Senior Colleague Scheme**

5.1. Employees will have a nominated individual to act as a senior colleague during their probation period. Senior colleagues will be assigned by deans of faculty in consultation with the chair of the appointing committee. Employees will be notified of their senior colleague in the offer letter of appointment. Deans of faculty will ensure that employees are introduced to their senior colleague as soon as possible after commencing their appointment.

5.2. The senior colleague will not have a formal supervising relationship or any involvement in the formal assessment of the employee.

5.3. The senior colleague will normally share the same discipline or experiential background as the employee.

5.4. The senior colleague can be on the same grade as the employee as long as they are not themselves on probation.

5.5. The role of the senior colleague is to offer advice and guidance as a more experienced colleague. This may involve discussion to identify training and development needs arising from new responsibilities or the improvement of existing skills and knowledge. It should also involve an exchange visit to each other’s classes or work base visits to allow further discussion on themes related to good classroom practice or working methods, and should involve helping the employee map out a programme for personal and professional development in the institution. At this stage, the senior colleague is likely to be of particular value in helping with the preparation of the probation plan. The senior colleague will also support and offer guidance on the overall direction of research proposals where appropriate.

5.6. The University recognises that the desirable qualities in a senior colleague include a ready availability and approachability; a willingness to listen; and an ability to be sympathetic and alert to the challenges facing a new employee. For a senior colleague to carry out the role in a valuable way, they are likely to give some significant time to the needs of the employee. The University expects that this contribution to staff development will be recognised as an element in the senior colleague's overall work programme.

5.7. The Academic Development team are available to provide individual guidance to new senior colleagues on their role and how best to work with employees on probation.
Stage 2

6. **Probation Report**

6.1. Probation progress will be considered on an annual basis by the dean of faculty and probation panel through the completion of the probation report. A probation report must be submitted for each year of probation. The probation report template can be found here.

6.2. Employees must complete a probation report and submit it first to the dean of faculty. The dean of faculty will review the report and once approved, add their comments and submit it to HR Services for consideration at the relevant probation panel meeting.

6.3. HR Services will provide faculties with a list of staff with probation reports due to be considered at each panel meeting, two months in advance. Each faculty will then notify those employees with reports due.

6.4. A probation report must be submitted with a copy of the agreed probation plan, an up to date CV, and a completed teaching assessment.

6.5. Employees will have their teaching assessed, where applicable, each year of probation; a teaching assessment must be submitted with each probation report. The dean of faculty will be responsible for observing and completing the assessment, or arranging for another senior academic to do so (this should not be the nominated senior colleague).

6.6. The probation report and teaching assessment will be made available to the employee who may submit a written statement to the dean of faculty and probation panel if they do not agree with the comments made within the report.

6.7. The probation panel will measure progress against the probation plan and determine whether progress to date is satisfactory. If there is cause for concern, specific measures will be communicated to employees and the deans of faculty.

6.8. Outcomes will be confirmed in writing by HR Services.

Stage 3

7. **Completion of Probation**

7.1. When the final probation report is being considered, the probation panel will review the relevant information and determine whether probation has been successfully completed. Successful probation is dependent on the objectives and deliverables being achieved as outlined in the probation plan.

7.2. If, on investigation, it appears to the Deputy Principal that the probation period has not been completed successfully, then they will recommend that the appointment be terminated. This information will be passed to the employee’s dean of faculty. In this situation, the employee will be invited to make representation to the Deputy Principal.

7.3. If the final recommendation is that the appointment should not be confirmed, the Deputy Principal will convey the reasons for this to the employee in writing. The employee will have the right to appeal in accordance with Ordinance 68, part II, V.
8. **Extending a period of probation**

8.1. In cases where a probation period has been set and the employee does not achieve the objectives set out in the probation plan, the dean of faculty and/or the probation panel may consider it appropriate to extend the period of probation to a further and final year report.

8.2. If the dean of faculty recommends in a probation report that a probation period be extended, they must explain the reasons to the employee prior to the report being submitted to the probation panel. In such an instance, the employee can submit a written statement to the dean of faculty and probation panel. Following consideration of the case by the panel, the employee will receive confirmation of the decision from HR Services.

8.3. Employees may themselves request to have their probation period extended if they consider it to be beneficial. They should first discuss the issue with their senior colleague and dean of faculty and, if agreed to be appropriate, the employee should formalise their request in writing to their dean of faculty. The dean of faculty will then add their comments to the case and send it to HR Services for onward consideration by the probation panel.

**General**

9. **Principal Supervisor Responsibility**

9.1. Employees will not normally be appointed as principal supervisors while on probation. Where employees on probation have won externally funded research studentships they may be appointed as principal supervisors with the support of an experienced second supervisor. It will be the responsibility of the dean of faculty to ensure that when appointing principal and other supervisors, including substitutes, employees are sufficiently expert to be able to provide the student with appropriate supervision.

10. **Administrative Duties during Probation**

10.1. During a probation period, teaching, research (where applicable) and administration will be the key evaluation areas. Employees on probation are not normally expected to carry significant administrative duties, particularly in the early years of the probation period, however they will be expected to carry out routine administrative functions effectively (for example module administration) and by the end of the probation period they may be expected to take on a more significant administrative role.

11. **Achieving Success**

11.1. To avoid duplication of effort it is agreed that, during probation, employees are not required to undertake Achieving Success meetings with their managers as it is considered that the probation plan and the annual probation reports are in line with Achieving Success. When the probation period has been successfully completed, employees are expected to engage with the Achieving Success process.
12. **Part Time Working Hours**

12.1. The length of the probation period will normally be the same for part time as for full time staff. The part time nature of an appointment will be taken into consideration when assessing progress made during the probation period. This should also be taken into account when drawing up the probation plan.

13. **Maternity Leave and Leave of Absence**

13.1. Maternity leave is normally excluded from the period of probation with the probation period being adjusted accordingly by the equivalent period of maternity leave. Other leave of absence (other than holiday leave) may also be excluded if it is of a significant duration.

14. **Adviser of Studies**

14.1. Employees on probation would not normally be a member of the departmental advisory team during their first year of probation. To be eligible staff must have completed two full semesters, have a contract of at least two years, be at least 0.5 FTE and be contracted to teach undergraduates.