Academic Probation Procedures
Assistant Professors

1. Introduction

This procedure describes the University’s processes for probationary periods for academic staff, specifically the review and confirmation of individual probationary requirements.

Academic probation supports the University’s value of pursuing excellence, by allowing the new academic to develop skills in teaching, research and administration, within a plan where targets reflect institutional priorities and personal developmental goals.

For the institution, it provides time to assess the capability and commitment of the individual for an academic career and to provide support in realising his or her potential.

This may apply to some, but not all, Assistant Professors at Grade 7 or Grade 8 and on occasion Grade 9.

2. Procedure for Setting Targets

2.1 Probationary Targets

When a decision is made to appoint a new Assistant Professor, a decision against the following criteria should be taken by the Head of School/Institute, in conjunction with relevant Dean, as to whether the individual should be subject to probation. All persons appointed as Assistant Professors will automatically serve probation unless:

(i) The person has successfully completed probation in a University.

(ii) The person previously held an academic appointment, at an equivalent level, in another recognised University. In this case, a reduction in the length of probation, or a decision that no probation is required is made by the Head of School in conjunction with the relevant Dean. This should be counter-signed by the Deputy Principal (External Relations) at the time the contract generation form is completed.

(iii) The individual has an otherwise extensive and relevant research, scholarship or experiential career portfolio in an organisation similar to higher education.

Note:

**Fixed Term contracts:** Individuals appointed to Assistant Professorships but on a fixed term basis will normally be treated as on probation for the duration of their contract. This will include the requirement for targets to be set for the period of the appointment and for some training in learning & teaching and research from the range of provision offered by the University. If the individual is later moved to an open-ended contract, their service on a fixed term contract will be taken into account towards completion of probation.
2.2 Performance Development Review (PDR) Targets

Whilst not directly related to Probation, there is an overlap in some of the requirements for PDR. The PDR process is one of the ways in which individuals can be made aware of their value to the organisation through being able to highlight their own contribution, receive feedback on that contribution and understand how it links to School/Institute/Service/team objectives. The process also enables opportunities for individual development and training opportunities to be identified and addressed and provides a formal opportunity for Reviewees to discuss and address a range of other work related issues.

In applying the PDR process, Heads of Schools/Institutes are able to agree, with individuals, objectives that are critical to the success of the School/Institute and to help ensure that individuals are managing resources effectively.

Whilst some of this information may feed directly into the report for a Probationary Academic member of staff, the probationary targets are generally agreed to assist with the development of the individual academic over a longer period of time. The PDR documents should not be submitted to the Board in lieu of the probation report.

3. Probation Monitoring and Review

Immediately following commencement of employment, probationary targets should be agreed between;

- the Head of School/Institute
- the member of staff
- the appointed Mentor
- the relevant Dean

The final paperwork, recording annual probationary targets, should be forwarded to the Dean for approval and signature, returned to the School/Institute and a copy forwarded to Human Resources within 1 month of commencing employment.

For a member of academic staff to be offered confirmation of employment, the University shall be satisfied that following completion of the probationary period the member of staff:

a) has satisfactorily engaged in the teaching of prescribed courses and the carrying out of assigned supervisory and tutorial work;

b) has satisfactorily engaged in research or scholarship at the expected level, has contributed towards the advancement of his or her subject or, where appropriate, has completed a research degree; actively engaged in seeking research funding and performing research

c) has conscientiously carried out such examining duties and satisfactorily performed such administrative duties as have been required of him or her.

d) shows promise through his or her work and enterprise in continuing to develop as a university teacher and scholar; and

e) has actively undertaken appropriate and relevant development as part of their on-going professional enhancement (e.g. from the range of professional training and development provision provided by the University.) Such development should be included as a key part of an individual’s personal development objectives.
These requirements are specifically detailed in the contract of employment.

Schools should submit one report for each probationary member of staff on an annual basis for review by the Deans detailing performance against targets. Procedural guidance is available from HR.

The probation report may include reference to individual circumstances* that may have affected the ability of individuals to reach their specified targets over the probation period. These procedures ensure that no individual suffers a detriment as a result of such circumstances. Where individual circumstances require amendments to probationary targets reference should be made to PDR and other relevant measures to indicate satisfactory performance. These alternative processes should demonstrate a reasonable level of compliance with probationary targets to enable the University to conclude an individual has met their performance targets.

* Individual circumstances could include maternity, sickness absence, change in working hours, and a change in personal circumstances.

4. Academic Probation Boards

These will be held locally rather than centrally with a summary of probationary outcomes reported to University Executive annually by the Director of Human Resources.

4.1 Composition of the School Academic Probation Board

Each School/Institute will have their own Board which will meet once a year. This Board will normally be made up as follows:

- The Head of School/Institute, Convener
- The appropriate Dean of the University (or nominee)
- The Director of Teaching & Learning for the School
- The Director of Research for the School
- Clerked by a Human Resources Partner

4.2 Deliberations of the Board

The Board will consider annual reports prepared by each probationer along with the opinion of their mentor. Upon consideration of the reports the Board will reach one of the following decisions:

a) continue on probation, including a statement on progress relative to probation targets,
b) satisfactory completion of probation including justification of the decision
c) for cases for early completion of probation – the reasons for the early completion of probation requested.
d) extension to probation including reasons why probation has not been completed within the agreed period and a new timetable for completion.

The Board will give feedback on each case. For a person to be offered confirmation of employment, the University shall be satisfied that the criteria laid down in the conditions of employment statement and all targets set have been met.

In those cases where an extension to probation has been agreed, the Head of School/Institute and academic mentor will work with the individual concerned to revise the targets and timetable. If appropriate it will be made clear to the probationer that the extension is a final opportunity and that failure to meet the revised targets could lead to dismissal.

In the event of a failure to complete probation as a result of the extension, proceedings in relation to termination of employment will be initiated under the Capability Policy.
5 Outcomes

The HR Partner will take minutes of the discussions at the School Board noting any recommendations and feedback required.

5.1 Feedback to individuals

All completion of probation cases will be confirmed in writing to the individual by Human Resources along with any extensions to probation. These will be sent directly to the Head of School/Institute to deliver to individuals on a one to one basis.

6. Appeals Process

The appeals process against non-confirmation or extension of probation is set out in a separate document.

7. Equality of Opportunity

We value and encourage each unique and positive contribution, acknowledging that our diversity enriches us. The University welcomes and supports applications for career progression from all members of the University Community.

To help us to ensure that our processes are fair, accessible and free from discrimination we will collect and use equality data for monitoring and evaluation purposes. This information will be held in accordance with Data Protection requirements.

Supporting documents for Probation Managers and Probationers:

Form for setting probationary targets -
http://www1.hw.ac.uk/hr/htm/policies/Probationary_targets_template_2013.xls

Academic Promotions – Criteria for Assessment:
http://www1.hw.ac.uk/hr/htm/policies/CriteriaAcadStaff-final.doc
Appendix A

Guidelines for the implementation of the appointment and development of probationary academic staff

To be read in conjunction with the Academic Probation Procedures

Introduction

The main aim of the probationary period, is to ensure the long term appointment of academic staff eventually capable of the highest quality in both teaching and research, and competent in academic administration. Care must therefore be taken to protect probationary staff from duties or tasks that detract effort away from developing and demonstrating emergent abilities in these crucial areas.

The probationary period is normally a total of three years. Where the person appointed has previously held an academic appointment in another university, the Dean shall agree any reduction in the length of the probationary period with the Head of School/Institute. When the person has successfully completed three years of probation, then there will be no further need to serve a probationary period.

The probation period should be amended to take account of individual circumstances* that may have affected the ability of individuals to reach their specified targets over the probation period. These procedures ensure that no individual suffers a detriment as a result of such circumstances. Where individual circumstances require amendments to probationary targets reference should be made to PDR and other relevant measures to indicate satisfactory performance. These alternative processes should demonstrate a reasonable level of compliance with probationary targets to enable the University to conclude an individual has met their performance targets.

* Individual circumstances could include maternity, sickness absence, change in working hours, a change in personal circumstances. Discretion may also be applied in cases where an extensive and relevant research, teaching or experiential career portfolio can be adequately demonstrated.

Development

In consultation with the Dean, the Head of School/Institute, shall appoint a senior academic staff member of the School/Institute (a Mentor), who shall be responsible for offering advice and guidance on the performance of duties to the probationary member throughout the probationary period. This should not be the Head of School nor the individual's PDR reviewer.

The Mentor should also monitor the probationer's progress and input annually to the School Academic Probation Board.

Assistance from the University

Probationers are expected to undertake some training in learning & teaching and research from the range of provision offered by the University (e.g. the core academic practice course PGCap, recommended for staff who have teaching as part of their responsibilities and for research active staff a Crucible programme. Considerable benefits come from probationers being able to meet and share experiences. These facilities will also be organised by The Centre for Leadership & Academic Development.
The individual can approach his or her Mentor for any guidance or help, independent of the Head of School and/or PDR reviewer and can also seek assistance from The Centre for Leadership & Academic Development for teaching and learning guidance.

The individual may also at any time contact the Dean for assistance in any matter related to their probation and academic development.

Criteria for the satisfactory completion of probation

For a person to be offered confirmation of employment, the University shall be satisfied that having regard to his or her age, standing, experience, and to the opportunities which he or she has been offered:

1. he or she has satisfactorily engaged in the teaching of prescribed courses and the carrying out of assigned supervisory and tutorial work

2. he or she has satisfactorily engaged in research at the expected level, has contributed towards the advancement of his or her subject, or where appropriate has completed a research degree, actively engaging in seeking research funding and performing research.

3. he or she has conscientiously carried out such examining duties and satisfactorily performed such administrative duties as have been required of him or her

4. he or she shows promise by his or her work and enterprise of continuing to develop as a university teacher and a scholar

5. he or she has actively undertaken appropriate and relevant development as part of their on-going professional enhancement (e.g. from the range of professional training and development provision provided by the University. Such development should be included as a key part of an individual's personal development objectives.
Appendix B

The Role of the Academic Mentor

1 The position of the Academic Mentor arises from the current national collective agreement on Probationary Staff which provides that where an appointment is made for a probationary period the University must provide the probationer training of a helpful and comprehensive nature, including advice and guidance by a senior colleague nominated (by the Head of School) for this task.

2 The University clarifies the support and assistance the Probationer may expect in the 'Guidelines for the implementation of the appointment and development of probationary academic staff'.

3 The Guidelines require the Probationer's Head of School in consultation with the Dean to appoint as Mentor a senior academic staff member of the School. The Head of School should not normally act as a mentor to any member of their School staff nor should the individual PDR Reviewer.

4 As the relationship between Mentor and Probationer is based on trust and confidence it is essential that both Mentor and Probationer are consulted before a mentoring appointment is made and should it be necessary either is free to ask the Dean to appoint another Mentor after consulting the relevant Head of School. A Mentor should be appointed within one month of the Probationer.

5 On appointment a Mentor should ensure that he/she is familiar with the conditions which require to be met for satisfactory completion of probation and where appropriate for progression up the pay scale. The Criteria for assessment is on the University webpage and can be found at link

6 The role of the Mentor must not be confused with that of a Probationer's PDR Reviewer. The Mentor is responsible for offering supportive advice and guidance on the performance of duties to the Probationer throughout the probationary period. For this purpose the Mentor and Probationer may wish to make use of the help available from The Centre for Leadership & Academic Development. The PDR Reviewer may be the Head of School or a senior member of staff to whom this responsibility has been appropriately delegated. Link to PDR info on website

7 The Mentor is required to comment on an annual basis on the achievements of the Probationer detailing performance against targets. It would be in keeping with the spirit of the relationship between Mentor and Probationer for such a report to be in terms agreed by both parties. This is reviewed by the School Academic Probation Board who will notify the Mentor of satisfactory or unsatisfactory development, performance or conduct by the Probationer.

8 The precise relationship between Mentor and Probationer may vary considerably depending on the Probationer's previous experience, and qualifications but a Mentor would normally be expected to arrange to meet with a Probationer at least three times in the academic year.

The objectives of the Head of School, the Probationer and the Mentor are of course the satisfactory completion of probation but while the Head of School is responsible for the
management of the Assistant Professor’s probationary period - by, for example, ensuring the Probationer is excused major School and administrative functions such as admissions officer or examinations officer and/or have a reduced teaching load - the Mentor’s role is to use his or her own experience and knowledge to give advice and support to the Probationer. Whilst a Probationer may seek help and guidance from other staff as appropriate, the following are examples of how a Mentor may be able to provide support:

Teaching
- discussing the preparation of lectures
- observing a lecture when requested to do so by the Probationer
- in consultation with Head of School, advising on curriculum development
- responding to student evaluation questionnaires
- advising on preparing and marking examinations and assessments
- advising on dealing with group projects and innovative teaching methods
- identifying literature which may assist Probationer

Research
- developing a research competence/programme
- advising on sources of materials
- advising on obtaining funding
- advising on possible contacts for collaborative projects
- writing proposals

Administration
- time management
- dealing with students/mentees
- acting as first source of information about the University
- building relationships with the School Management team?
- developing a relationship with Head of School and allocation of duties
- application and embedding the Athena SWAN Principles