

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Academic Probation Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. This Policy sets out how probation of academic staff shall be managed, having regard to the grade of post and experience of the individual member of staff. The primary purpose of probation is to:

- provide a period of development to enable them to gain appropriate experience, with advice and guidance from senior colleagues in order for them to achieve the agreed objectives; and
- ensure that the individual staff member is able to contribute effectively as a member of the School team in helping to deliver the School Plan.

1.2. While the probation period for Fellows/Lecturers is normally three years, it is expected that staff will be confirmed in post when they have met the essential criteria and can demonstrate readiness to progress against the relevant Academic Profile.

Probation, at Fellow/Lecturer level, may be extended by one year (or by up to two years for those working within the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences) if it is expected that the relevant criteria and Priorities may be achieved with adequate support.

1.3. The School Probation Committee will meet two to three times during the year and will review the probation progress of all academic staff, up to and including those at Reader level, at least annually.

1.4. The Head of School will review staff appointed to the level of Professor after their first six months.

2. Appointment of Probationer

2.1. The Head of School, upon the probationer commencing employment, will:

- (i) appoint a PDR Reviewer;
- (ii) appoint an initial peer observer to review the probationer's teaching in year one;
- (iii) through the People and Culture Directorate, confirm to the member of staff in writing the standards to be attained, as set out in the academic probation profile;
- (iv) establish a School Probation Committee, the membership of which will normally comprise of:
 - the Head of School (or nominee for larger Schools)
 - a Director of Research } *who shall not be the PDR Reviewer of*
 - a Director of Education } *the probationer being reviewed*
 - a School Swan representative
 - a Faculty PVC appointed senior academic manager from within the Faculty (this may be from another School, but preferably a Dean)

The discipline subject lead may be requested to attend, as deemed necessary.

3. Annual Review Process

3.1. PDR Reviewer

The PDR Reviewer shall meet regularly (at least quarterly) with the probationer to provide support, advice and guidance, and review progress against agreed objectives and assess the probationer's potential to work effectively as a member of the School team in helping to deliver the School Plan. The frequency of such meetings will be determined by the grade and experience of the individual and the progress being made. Where the PDR Reviewer is not the Head of School, they should provide regular feedback to the Head of School on the probationer's progress.

3.2. Peer Review of Teaching

Ideally, the peer observer should be a more senior member of academic staff who has experience and knowledge in the discipline and is broadly familiar with the subject the probationer is teaching (i.e. DE, Subject Leader, etc.). In some instances the probationer's PDR Reviewer may be the most appropriate peer observer. Should a peer observer raise any areas of concern, peer reviews should be completed more often. This should be discussed and agreed with the probationer's PDR Reviewer and the School Probation Committee. At least one peer review per year should be completed during the probationary period, and where possible each review should be undertaken by a different peer observer. Allocation of peer observers should be determined by the Head of School. Guidelines for the peer observer and the peer review teaching form can be accessed under Useful Links on the [Probation Early Career Academics](#) webpage.

3.3. Requirements to pass probation

To pass probation at Fellow/Lecturer level, probationers must have completed the PhD Student Supervision course (Lecturers – Education are exempt unless they supervise PhD students) and have obtained a Higher Education Academy (HEA) qualification¹, or equivalent, or have registered on the QUB PGCHET course (on a waiting list for this course does not constitute registration).

3.4. Review Documentation

The School Probation Committee shall review a probationer's progress at least once each year², requesting the following documentation in advance of the meeting:

- from the probationer – a Cover Letter and Academic CV
- from the Peer Observer(s) – A Peer Observer Report

3.5. School Probation Committee

3.5.1. Review of Probation Progress in Years One and Two

The School Probation Committee will review all documentation prior to the meeting and will agree one of the following outcomes:

- (i) Progress is satisfactory and probation should continue as planned;
- (ii) Some issues of concern need to be addressed during the remainder of the probation period;
- (iii) Progress has been exceptional, the probationer has exceeded expectations through outstanding achievement and will be confirmed in post; or,
- (iv) Progress is unsatisfactory and consideration should be given to the termination of the contract of employment.

3.5.2. Review of Probation Progress in Final Year (Year 3)

¹ Equivalent qualifications will be verified by the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work.

² The timing of the School Probation Committee will vary subject to the date of appointment and duration of the probationary period. The School Probation Committee may also decide to review a probationer's progress more often, especially if there are concerns regarding capability.

If the probationer has not already been confirmed in post, the School shall ensure that the School Probation Committee review the probationer's progress before the end of their probation period. The School Probation Committee will review all documentation prior to the meeting and will agree one of the following outcomes:

- (i) Progress is satisfactory and the probationer will be confirmed in post;
- (ii) Progress is limited and the probation period will be extended. Probation should only be extended when it is considered that the probationer should be capable of meeting the required standards/objectives during the extended period of probation; or
- (iii) Progress is unsatisfactory and consideration should be given to the termination of the contract of employment.

3.6. Termination of employment

Should the School Probation Committee conclude that progress is unsatisfactory and the contract of employment should be terminated (as per 3.5.1 (iv) and 3.5.2 (iii)) the following steps will be actioned:

- (i) the Head of School will invite the probationer to discuss their progress with a School Probation Subcommittee. The Head of School will chair this committee, which will include at least two other members of the Probation Committee. The Faculty HRBP will also be in attendance;
- (ii) the probationer will be given an opportunity to present at this meeting and will be entitled to be accompanied by a University colleague or a representative of a recognised trade union;
- (iii) the subcommittee will decide if:
 - a. the contract of employment is to be terminated;
 - b. the contract of employment is to be extended (if this option has not already been exhausted as per point 1.2); or
 - c. the probationer should be confirmed in post.

4. Appeal

4.1. An individual will have the right to appeal the decision either to have his/her contract extended or terminated. This appeal, outlining the grounds on which the appeal is based, should be submitted in writing to the Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor within twenty working days from the date of the letter of notification of the outcome of probation.

4.2. The appeal will be considered by a Faculty Committee, the membership of which will normally comprise of:

- the Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor
- a Faculty Dean
- a Head of School (from a different School to the probationer's School)

The Faculty HRBP will also be in attendance.

4.3. The member of staff (the appellant) has the right to attend the hearing of the appeal and is entitled to be accompanied by a University colleague or a representative of a recognised trade union.

4.4. The Head of School will also be asked to attend.

4.5. The decision of the Faculty Committee shall be final and will be communicated in writing to the member of staff by the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor or nominee.

5. Compliance Review

The Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors will meet annually to review the outcomes from School Committees to ensure consistency across the University.