

Probationary Procedure for Academic Staff



Section	Page Number
1. Contents	2
2. Eligibility	3
3. Procedure	3
3.1 How will the Probationary Scheme work in practice?	3
3.2 Performance criteria	3
3.3 Preliminary Meeting and Formal Assessments	4
3.4 Third-Year Formal Assessment	5
3.5 Final Assessment	5
3.6 Decision and Subsequent Action	5
3.7 Right of Appeal	6
3.8 Provisions for Academic staff – Teaching and Scholarship Academic Career Pathways Scheme	8
3.9 Fixed term posts	8
3.10 Period of notice required during the Probationary Period	8
4. Guidance and Additional Sources of Information	9
5. Policy ownership and status	9

2. Eligibility

- This probationary procedure applies to academic staff at the University below the level of Reader (or Professor Grade 11 under the new academic titles structure), as defined in the Probationary Policy, with the exception of academic staff in the School of Clinical Medicine (clinical and non-clinical) and clinical academics in other schools, for whom there is a separate probationary procedure (a link to this can be found in Section 5 of the University's Probationary Policy).
- This probationary procedure should be read together with the [University's Probationary Policy](#).

3. Procedure

3.1 How will the Probationary Scheme work in practice?

- In the case of academic staff, the probation reviewer is usually the Head of Institution. They are responsible for managing the probationary period and ensuring that:
 - the duties of the probationer are clear and understood by the probationer at the outset;
 - the probationer completes local and central induction within specified timescales;
 - the work of the probationer is monitored;
 - the probationer is assigned a mentor;
 - any issues around performance are discussed directly with the probationer as and when they arise;
 - a written record is kept of feedback and any steps required of the probationer, using the templates indicated in this procedure where appropriate; and
 - an overall view of their progress, commitment and general contribution to the work of the institution is formed during the probationary period.
- The Head of Institution may delegate some of their duties to a nominee where indicated below, provided that the Head of Institution retains overall responsibility for the probationary process and will conduct the final assessment of performance at the end.
- The length of the probationary period is as set out in section 4.2 of the Probationary Policy.

3.2 Performance Criteria

- Passing probation is regarded as an important career milestone and a fundamental test of capability to perform the duties of the office. Clear evidence of consistent and sustained satisfactory performance of duties and adherence to the University's expected standards of conduct is therefore expected.

- Performance will be assessed by reference to research; teaching and/or researcher¹ development; service to the University and to the academic community. This will include acting as a positive role model and promoting the University's values of mutual respect and a sense of belonging for all within the University community.
- There must be no doubt that the probationer has been performing according to all the relevant criteria and meets the standards of excellence in their performance and contribution within the Cambridge context.
- Where relevant, College teaching should also be taken into account.
- Guidance on the evaluative criteria applicable to academics during probation can be found in the Report of the General Board on arrangements for the implementation of the Academic Career Pathways scheme². To ensure transparency, all Departments/Faculties are expected to adopt and publish a protocol setting out what is expected of probationers under each of the evaluative criteria, to be approved by School Councils. As there may be differences in the way probation criteria are set across the various departments and faculties, each department or faculty will determine appropriate practice in their respective area, taking into account the relevant norms for the subject discipline.

3.3 Preliminary Meeting and Formal Assessments

- The Head of Institution or their nominee will hold a preliminary one-to-one meeting with the probationer before the beginning of their first teaching term or within one month of joining, as appropriate, to confirm the duties of the post, mutual expectations, induction requirements and developmental needs. Any other relevant requirements should be discussed and recorded.
- The Head of Institution or their nominee will meet with the probationer at least once a year to conduct a formal assessment, a written record of which will be completed and a copy kept by both parties, using the Formal Probation Assessment Form. They should ensure that induction has been completed within the specified timelines.
- The purpose of each formal assessment is to review the probationer's progress under the general headings of research, teaching and/or researcher development and service to the University and the academic community, and to provide an opportunity for the individual to comment.
- The tone of the assessment should be constructive, giving positive feedback on progress and areas for improvement. Where progress has been unsatisfactory, the probation reviewer should specify the nature of the concerns and the improvements required, together with details of how and by when these need to be achieved. For example, this may involve making appropriate adjustments to the level of supervision and support given to the probationer and/or setting time-bound targets. It would also be appropriate to hold more frequent formal assessments in this case.
- During the probationary period, the Head of Institution or their nominee can seek feedback from senior colleagues regarding the progress of the probationer in terms of their research; teaching and/or researcher development; and service to the University and to the academic community. Feedback from students and peer observation views may also be sought.

¹ This would include post-doctoral researchers where relevant.

² *Reporter*, 6547, 2018-19, p.562

3.4 Third-Year Formal Assessment

- In the course of the third year of probation, there should be a formal assessment. An overall minimum of three references should be sought, of which at least one should be external, unless there is no duty to undertake research. The probationer will nominate two of these references. The Head of Institution or their nominee may seek additional references, if these are required. Names of referees sought by the Head of Institution or their nominee are not disclosable to the probationer for the purposes of this procedure.
- The Head of Institution may decide at this stage to recommend to the Selection Committee³ that the appointment be confirmed and should complete a final assessment (see para 3.5 below). If it is decided that confirmation of appointment is premature, the Head of Institution may hold a final assessment at a later date as set out below. In the interim, they should discuss with the probationer any areas for development or improvement and any training or support required.
- If a concern arises about the probationer's research performance, the Head of Institution or their nominee may seek references sooner rather than later in order to be able to assess progress during the period leading up to the third-year formal assessment.

3.5 Final Assessment

- The Human Resources Division will send regular reports to Institutions, notifying them of probationary periods, so that formal and final assessments can be scheduled in a timely way.
- The Head of Institution will conduct the final assessment in the course of the third, fourth, or fifth year depending on the probationer's progress.
- The final assessment should be recorded in the Final Probation Assessment Form, a copy of which should be supplied to the probationer. The Head of Institution should arrange for references to be updated and/or additional references to be sought, in line with the requirements under para 3.4 above.

3.6 Decision and Subsequent Action

- Confirmation (or non-confirmation) of appointment by the Selection Committee must occur, if possible, not less than nine months before the end of the five-year period. The recommendation by the Head of Institution to the Selection Committee should be made no earlier than three years into the probationary period.
- Where the probationer has performed to the expected standard, the Head of Institution will recommend to the Selection Committee that the appointment be confirmed, setting out their case in writing, supported by the probation assessment forms, references and the probationer's CV.
- If the appointment is confirmed by the Selection Committee, the Head of Institution will arrange for written confirmation of satisfactory completion of probation to be sent to the probationer and for their central staff record to be updated. On confirmation of appointment by the Selection Committee, a holder of an academic office shall hold office, subject to the provisions of Statute C, or any Special Ordinance made under it, until the retiring age or until the end of their appointment in the case of officers on

³ The Selection Committee is as constituted under Special Ordinance C (x): Selection Committees (Special Ordinance under Statute C XIII 2). Note that this may be the Selection Committee or an alternative School level committee as set out in the local protocol constituted as a Selection Committee, or in the case of unestablished academic staff the relevant School-level or departmental committee.

fixed-term appointments, so long as they satisfactorily perform the duties of the office.

- In the event that performance during probation is judged to be unsatisfactory, the Head of Institution, after consulting with the probation reviewer and the relevant School HR Team, will inform the probationer that they will recommend the extension or termination of the appointment to the Selection Committee.
- The probationer will be given an opportunity to make written representations to the Selection Committee and may attend the meeting of the Committee if they wish to do so, in order to present their case. They will have the right to be accompanied at the meeting by a trade union representative or work colleague.
- They must tell the relevant School HR Team who their chosen companion is in good time before the meeting. If their companion cannot attend, they should inform the relevant School HR Team immediately so that an alternative time can be arranged. If the companion is unable to attend within a reasonable period of the meeting, the University may ask the probationer to choose another companion.
- Where a probationer has indicated that they wish to make representations in person, they must make every effort to attend the meeting. If they fail to attend without good reason, or are persistently unable to do so, the University reserves the right to proceed on the evidence available.
- Where circumstances require it, and in particular, to avoid delay, the meeting may be held by way of video or teleconference.
- The Selection Committee may be supported by a member of the relevant School HR Team at the hearing. The University may also arrange for a notetaker to be present.
- The Head of Institution will supply the probationer's probation assessment forms, together with any supporting documentation, to the Selection Committee ahead of the meeting, with a copy to the probationer.
- The meeting may be adjourned if required to gather further information, provided that any adjournment will not lead to unreasonable delay.
- If a decision to dismiss is made by the Selection Committee, the probationer will be given written notice of termination, including the reasons and a right of appeal.
- Exceptionally, the Selection Committee, may extend the probationary period, for instance, where a probationer has not had sufficient time to demonstrate their suitability due to factors beyond their control (e.g. a long leave of absence on account of illness or family commitments) and where there is a realistic prospect of a satisfactory outcome. Usually, extensions will be for up to one year. Heads of Institutions should consult with the relevant School HR Team at an early stage, if they believe that an extension will be required.
- At the end of an extension period, a further final assessment will be conducted as set out under paragraph 3.5 above.

3.7 Right of Appeal

Established academic staff

- If the appointment is terminated, the officer will have the right to appeal under the provisions of Special Ordinance C (xiii) (Appeals), which can be found at https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2017/special_c-section16.html, and Ordinances, Chapter II, section 23 - Septemviri, which can be found at <https://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/2017/chapter02-section23.html>

- Where a probationer appeals against dismissal, the date on which dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of the appeal. However, if the appeal is successful the probationer will be reinstated with no loss of continuity or pay.

Unestablished academic staff

- Where the appointment is terminated, the probationer may appeal in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of the notice of dismissal, setting out the grounds of their appeal. They should direct this letter to the Director of HR.
- The Director of HR will appoint an Appeal Chair, who shall be a University officer of equivalent or greater seniority than the Selection Committee, and who has had no prior involvement in the case.
- The appeal hearing will be arranged within 10 working days of the appointment of the Appeal Chair, or as soon as is reasonably practicable thereafter.
- The probationer and a member of the Selection Committee⁴ may make representations in person and/or in writing at the appeal hearing. Copies of the probation assessment forms and supporting documentation, and any written representations should be supplied to all parties in good time ahead of the hearing. The Appeal Chair may be supported by a member of the relevant School HR Team at the hearing. The University may also arrange for a further member of HR to act as note-taker.
- The probationer is entitled to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague. They must tell the relevant School HR Team who their chosen companion is in good time before the appeal hearing. If their companion cannot attend, they should inform the relevant School HR Team immediately so that an alternative time can be arranged. If the companion is unable to attend within a reasonable period of the original appeal hearing date, the University may ask the probationer to choose another companion.
- Where a probationer has indicated that they wish to make representations in person, they must make every effort to attend the hearing. If they fail to attend without good reason, or are persistently unable to do so, the University reserves the right to proceed on the evidence available.
- Where circumstances require it, and in particular to avoid delay, the hearing may be held by way of video or teleconference.
- The Appeal Chair may adjourn the appeal hearing if required to gather further information, provided that any adjournment will not lead to unreasonable delay.
- The Appeal Chair will inform the probationer of their decision in writing, wherever practicable within 10 working days of the appeal hearing or adjourned appeal hearing, setting out reasons for the decision. There is no further right of appeal.
- The Appeal Chair may vary the procedure above, as necessary, provided that the appeal is dealt with fairly and impartially and without unreasonable delay.
- Where a probationer appeals against dismissal, the date on which dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of the appeal. However, if the appeal is successful the probationer will be reinstated with no loss of continuity or pay.

⁴ See Para 3.4 for definition of Selection Committee

3.8 Provisions for Academic staff – Teaching and Scholarship Academic Career Pathways scheme

- The Teaching and Scholarship Academic Career Pathways scheme has been designed for academic staff whose primary responsibilities are the delivery of teaching. It applies in some but not all institutions at the University.
- The provisions of this Probationary Procedure for Academic Staff will apply in full to academic staff on the Teaching and Scholarship Academic Career Pathways scheme, with the exception of the specific variations set out below:

Variations

- Performance will be assessed under the headings of teaching and scholarship and service to the University and to the academic community. Further guidance can be found at [Scheme A](#) and [Scheme B](#).
- The Third-Year formal assessment referred to at 3.4 will take place in the course of the second year for staff on Grades 9 or above and in the course of the first year for staff on Grades 6-8.
- The Head of Institution will conduct the final assessment referred to at 3.5 in the course of the first, second or third year depending on the probationer's grade and progress.
- The reference requirements at 3.4 will apply to staff on Grades 9 or above only.
- Confirmation (or non-confirmation) of appointment by the Selection Committee under 3.6 must occur, if possible, not less than two months before the end of the 3-year period for staff on Grades 9 and above and 2-year period for staff on Grades 6-8. The recommendation by the Head of Institution to the Selection Committee should be made no earlier than 2 years into the probationary period for staff on Grades 9 or above and 1 year into the probationary period for staff on Grades 6-8.

3.9 Fixed term posts

- The provisions of this procedure (including any timings) will be adjusted to take into account shorter probationary periods for fixed term academic offices and unestablished academic posts.

3.10 Period of notice required during the Probationary Period

- The period of notice to terminate the appointment during the probationary period, will normally be three months on either side (one month's notice for an appointment of less than one year's duration).

4.

Guidance and Additional Sources of Information

Policies and Guidance	Templates and Documentation
Practical Guidance for Probation Reviewers	Formal Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff (Research and Teaching ACP) (HR63a)
	Final Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff (Research and Teaching ACP) (HR63b)
	Formal Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff G6-8 (Teaching and Scholarship ACP) (HR64a)
	Final Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff G6-8 (Teaching and Scholarship ACP) (HR64b)
	Formal Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff G9+ (Teaching and Scholarship ACP) (HR65a)
	Final Probation Assessment Form – Academic Staff G9+ (Teaching and Scholarship ACP) (HR65b)
	Confirmation of Appointment template letter (HR66)

5.

Policy Ownership and Status

5.1 This procedure is not contractual. It will be reviewed by the HR Division on a regular basis and amendments may be made in the light of any changes in legislation or operational requirements.

Version	Summary of Amendment	Date
V1	New Procedure	01/10/21