

# 12. How to Manage Probationary Periods

## 1 OVERVIEW

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Many organisations set a probation period for new starters.

A probation period allows a period of time for both the employer and employee to determine whether the individual is right for the role and it focuses attention on ensuring the new employee has the training, support and guidance they need to perform in the role. The first few months in a role are crucial to the long term performance of an individual.

Continuing employment is usually subject to successful completion of probation. Organisations should determine how long the probationary period is for new starters and should apply this consistently to staff. The probation period is usually between three months and six months.

## 2 DURING THE PROBATION PERIOD

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It is good practice to have regular one-to-one meetings with all employees but it is particularly important that this happens with new starters throughout their induction and probationary period.

The aim of one to one meetings at this stage is to touch base about how the new starter feels things are going, ensure they are getting the support they need and to provide them with any feedback on how they are performing to date.

A mid-point probation review meeting should be arranged around half way through the probation period. At this stage there is time to address any issues and provide appropriate guidance, support or training where necessary. It also means there will be no surprises for the individual when it comes to the end of probation meeting and that you will be able to demonstrate that you have done everything you can to support the new employee in their new role.

If you do have concerns about the performance of an individual at this stage in their probation it is advisable to speak to a HR representative to advise on the procedure to follow and how you can support individuals to meet the performance standards.

If things are not going as well as hoped at this point, the individual should be advised where they need to improve if their probation is to be signed off at the end of the probationary period. They should also be advised at this point that their probation could be extended or their contract ended.

## 3 REVIEWING THE PROBATION PERIOD

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At the end of the probationary period, a review meeting should be held. Employees should be formally invited to the meeting to review the probation period and the possible outcomes of the meeting clearly outlined.

You should prepare for the probationary review meeting, ensuring you are clear in relation to the standards expected, have evidence or examples to support their view on whether the employee is or is not meeting the required standards, and can discuss what support has been provided.

## Outcomes of the probationary review meeting

The possible outcomes of the review meeting are:

- confirmation that the probationary period has been successful
- extension of the probationary period and provision of further support as necessary
- confirmation that the probationary period has been unsuccessful and that employment will be terminated.

You will have to take different steps for each of these outcomes.

## 4 SUCCESSFUL PROBATION PERIOD

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If you are satisfied that the probationary period has been successful this should be conveyed to the individual at the meeting and confirmed in writing.

## 5 EXTENDING A PROBATION PERIOD

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If there are still concerns about suitability for the role, but you believe that with further time and support these concerns can be addressed, you could consider extending the probationary period. How long probation is extended for will depend on what the concerns are and the availability of support. It is recommended that this is no less than one month and not more than three months.

It is advisable to take advice from a HR representative before extending a probation period to ensure that the correct procedures are followed. When extending a probation period, a plan should be put in place for managing the extension period. Any additional support or training should also be discussed and arranged. It is important to keep a note of the probation meeting outlining what was discussed.

The decision to extend the probation period should be confirmed in writing. This should make clear what will happen if the standards of performance are not met.

If following the extension of the probation period the employee is still not meeting the standards or performance required despite the support provided, you should hold a meeting to discuss termination of employment. Notes of the meeting should be kept and the individual should have the opportunity to state their position in relation to their performance. It may be appropriate to have a HR representative at the meeting to support and advise on process and to ensure a record is kept.

## 6 UNSUCCESSFUL PROBATION PERIOD

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If the employee has not met the required standards of performance, despite the support they have been given, a decision can be taken to terminate the probationary period at this stage and notice given that their employment will end.

The notice to be given will depend on what was stated in the contract of employment.

Contracts often state that notice is one week during probation, increasing on completion of probation. Check the notice period outlined in the employee's contract. The employee should be written to confirming that they have not successfully completed their probation period and that their employment is being ended.

## 7 LINKING PROBATION AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

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Once a new employee has completed their probation, they will be capable and competent to carry out the role and it is important that they are set clear objectives at this stage.

It is likely that the end of an individual's probation does not coincide with the annual review process so it is important that your appraisal process bridges the gap between the completion of probation and the annual review cycle.

## 8 NEXT STEPS

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- Decide whether you would like your new employees to have a probation period when they join, and if so, how long will this be.
- Be clear on what goals and objectives you expect your employee to achieve during their probation period and ensure you communicate this to them during their induction.
- Develop template forms to record information during the mid-probation meetings and the end of probation meeting.

## 9 FACTSHEETS & TEMPLATES TO HELP

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- How to identify training needs
- How to prepare for your new employee
- How to create an action plan for employees
- How to conduct an appraisal
- Employee Action Plan
- Pre Appraisal Form
- Appraisal Form

## 10 FOR MORE ADVICE AND INFORMATION

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**ACAS** - (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law. [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

**Achieve in Bath & North East Somerset** - free recruitment support, advice and help. Matching job seekers, employers and course providers to help employers recruit, train and retain employees.

[www.achieveinbathnes.co.uk](http://www.achieveinbathnes.co.uk)

**Future Bright** - free help & support for businesses and employees to realise their full potential. Provide access to training and development, workshops and networking. HR support to promote career progression and best practice to attract and retain staff. [www.futurebright.org.uk](http://www.futurebright.org.uk)

**Bibliography** - this fact sheet was produced by Rathbone HR Solutions in association with Cool Ventures Ltd in December 2018 with content sourced from; HR Inform ([www.hr-inform.co.uk](http://www.hr-inform.co.uk)), ACAS ([www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)), CIPD ([www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)), the pensions regulator ([www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers](http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers)), HMRC ([www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs)), the Information Commissioner's Officer website ([www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk))



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