

United Learning Probationary Period Guidance

Scope

The guidance set out in this document applies to all staff employed by United Learning (United Church Schools Trust and United Learning Trust) including teaching, support, fixed-term, part-time, full-time, permanent and temporary staff. The two companies (UCST and ULT) are referred to in this guidance by their trading name, 'United Learning'. In the absence of other specific probationary arrangements, this guidance will also apply to trainee teachers and NQTs.

Where this guidance refers to 'School' or 'Head Teacher', within Central Office this should be interpreted to refer to the department where a member of staff works and their Head of Department.

As a values-led organisation our values of ambition, confidence, creativity, respect, enthusiasm and determination are key to our purpose and underpin all that we do.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The probationary period is a period of review which has positive benefits for both the employee and the school. It supports new employees to settle into their role and achieve the standards expected from them as quickly as possible.
- 1.2 The intention of this guidance is to ensure all employees are treated in a supportive, fair and equitable manner.
- 1.3 The probationary process gives managers an opportunity to ensure that new starters are performing to the standards expected of them and gives an opportunity to recognise high performance for new starters.
- 1.4 The process also gives an opportunity to check in on an employee's wellbeing, find out how they think their first few months have gone and how best we can support them.
- 1.5 The probationary period allows Schools to ensure that any concerns can be addressed with new employees at the earliest possible opportunity. These concerns could be regarding a new employee's performance in role, their behaviours or their wellbeing.
- 1.6 The probationary period varies between groups of employees and is therefore identified in an individual's contract of employment. For a general guide on the suggested length of probationary periods please see Appendix 1.

2. Probationary Period Procedure

- 2.1 It is recommended that the line manager should set a probationary meeting schedule with all new employees (see Appendix 2). A copy of the completed probationary meeting schedule should be passed to the school HR Administrator to keep on an employee's file. Probationary reviews are the line manager's responsibility.
- 2.2 The line manager should ensure that new employees are aware of the standards expected of them, both in their work and in the behaviours required e.g. refer to their job description, the performance management scheme and associated professional and behavioural competencies/standards.



- 2.3 In normal circumstances, the line manager will complete the first probationary meeting by the end of the fourth week following the employee's start date. At this meeting the line manager will state the purpose of the discussions and explain that notes will be recorded.
- 2.4 Notes should be made of each probationary period meeting and stored in an employee's personnel file.
- 2.5 The remaining probationary meetings should be carried out according to the agreed schedule. These meetings provide an opportunity for two-way, constructive and effective communication, and line managers should respond positively to any agreed development needs. Appropriate support and monitoring as identified at these meetings should be supplied throughout the period.
- 2.6 Where a line manager has specific concerns regarding the new employee, they must provide clear examples and evidence to the employee of these concerns and give them an opportunity to respond.
- 2.7 The following list gives some suggested topics to be discussed at probationary meetings, although each meeting should be tailored to the individual circumstances:
- a) How the employee is settling into the job;
 - b) Whether the employee is clear about the requirements of the role and where further clarification is needed e.g. refer to the job description;
 - c) How the employee communicates with colleagues/pupils;
 - d) How the employee works as part of a team, responds to supervision/instruction;
 - e) How efficiently the employee carries out the job e.g. meeting deadlines, time management, workloads, preparation;
 - f) Areas where the employee is experiencing difficulties. Identify what is necessary to remedy the situation;
 - g) Areas where the employee is doing well and meeting/exceeding the performance level expected of them;
 - h) Identify any training needs and whether providing this is appropriate taking into account the new employee's past experience
 - i) Confirmation of completion of any relevant safeguarding training, and any other mandatory training;
 - j) Agree an Action Plan, if necessary, to enable all employees to meet, or exceed, the standards required in their job.
- 2.8 The employee and/or line manager may wish to present specific examples of relative strengths and weaknesses at these meetings relating to performance and achievement during the period. These examples may be informal or formal and may include:
- a) Specific observations on their quality of work or behaviours demonstrated;
 - b) Third party feedback;
 - c) Questionnaires;
 - d) Attendance records;
 - e) Observation, monitoring and support of teaching feedback; *and/or*
 - f) Reports from external bodies.



- 2.9 The line manager will confirm at the end of each meeting any agreed follow up action, the time scale involved and the date of the next meeting. Ideally this should be documented on the probationary review template document (Appendix 4) and shared with the employee following the review meeting. Where the matter progresses to a formal hearing, then the arrangements for a hearing will be confirmed in writing.
- 2.10 In exceptional circumstances, the line manager may decide to end an individual's probationary period early where they are significantly exceeding the school's expectations of their performance. Such an approach rewards the employee for their effort and boosts morale.
- 2.11 Following the final probation review meeting, the line manager must confirm the outcome of the probationary period (see paragraph 3).
- 2.12 If at any stage during the probationary period minor concerns are identified in a new employee's conduct or work performance, these will be discussed with the employee and an action plan agreed to address these concerns. Every effort should be made to provide additional advice, training and supervision to assist in eliciting an improvement. The line manager may wish to seek the advice/support of an appropriate senior colleague.
- 2.13 If at any stage there are more serious concerns raised during the probationary period which potentially give reason for the manager to question to the suitability of the employee to work within the School, then these matters will be discussed with the employee at the earliest opportunity. Following this meeting and where there are still considered to be serious concerns such as safeguarding, disciplinary issues, examples of serious behavioural concerns, then it may be appropriate to invite the employee to attend a formal meeting with the Headteacher as at 3.4 of this policy to consider the termination of their employment.
- 2.14 This procedure is intended to support employees during their probationary period, and those involved should not hesitate to address any issue as soon as possible and not necessarily wait until the next scheduled meeting.
- 2.15 It is important to remember that probationary periods are also about recognising, praising and challenging employees who are performing well, and not just about managing current or potential capability issues.
- 2.16 Where line managers need advice on managing and supporting employees during their probationary period they are encouraged to contact their Central Office HR Business Partner.

3. Probationary Period Outcomes

- 3.1 When the employee has successfully completed their probationary period they will be informed by their line manager and this will be confirmed in writing. This can be at any stage of the probationary period.
- 3.2 In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to extend the probationary period. The duration of the extension will be determined on an individual basis and should feature regular (e.g. monthly) reviews. This will be confirmed in writing to the employee, together with an agreed action plan and a new meeting schedule.
- 3.3 Where performance is failing to reach the required standard, the employee should be informed in writing at the earliest opportunity that this could result in termination of their employment, as per the terms of their contract. This letter should be recorded on an individual's personnel file.



- 3.4 Where the probationary period is considered to have not been successful, and an (further) extension would not be appropriate, the Head Teacher (or nominated SLT delegate) may consider terminating the employee's employment, with contractual notice, after consultation with their Central Office HR Business Partner. The Head Teacher, or delegated SLT member, must write to the employee inviting them to a meeting and setting out the reasons for the meeting and explanation that a potential outcome of the meeting is termination of their employment during the probationary period.
- 3.5 At the meeting the reasons why the probationary period is considered to have been unsuccessful should be discussed and the decision to terminate the employee's employment may be communicated at the end of the meeting. The employee has the right to be accompanied by a colleague or Trade Union representative at a formal probationary review meeting where dismissal is a potential outcome and a HR representative may be present. The decision from the hearing should be confirmed, in writing, within seven working days of the meeting.
- 3.6 In the event of a request for a postponement of a probationary hearing, the employee may request that it can be rescheduled or postponed by up to 5 working days for good reason but the hearing will not be delayed further unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a meeting can't be held within a reasonable time then the Head can make a decision based on the available evidence. Adjustments to the hearing will be considered to allow an employee to make written submissions or for a representative to attend on their behalf if required.
- 3.7 The employee should be informed that they can appeal against a decision to terminate their employment during a probationary period by writing to their School's HR Business Partner (details will be provided in their outcome letter) within ten working days of the date of the written notification. They will then be contacted to confirm arrangements for an appeal hearing including who will be chairing this. This could be another member of the School's Leadership team, a School Governor or a Senior Officer from United Learning.

4. Disabilities and reasonable adjustments

- 4.1 All employees are protected at work against unlawful discrimination, including disability discrimination. If an employee who is on probation has a disability, and/or his or her sickness absence is due to a disability, the employer will need to consider making reasonable adjustments
- 4.2 Where there are specific concerns regarding the employment of an employee potentially as a result of an employee's disability, then the line manager should discuss this with the employee at the earliest opportunity. Further advice and support can be gained from your HR Business Partner and through our Occupational Health provider.
- 4.3 Where there are no known disabilities impacting the individual, managers will give the employee every opportunity to discuss any concerns that they have and any adjustments or support that they feel they should be given to support them. This information will be recorded in meeting notes and held on an employee's file.

5. Wellbeing

- 5.1 Probationary periods are a crucial time when communication is key. Managers should be aware of their responsibilities and the actions they can take in helping to reduce the causes of stress and to proactively manage stress in the workplace. The process also gives an opportunity to check in on an employee's wellbeing and find out how best we can support them.



5.2 individuals need to take responsibility for promoting their own general health and well-being and should ask for support where they feel this is needed.

5.3 Wellbeing should be a key focus of probationary discussions and gives an opportunity for issues to be discussed and resolved during the early stages of employment.

6. Review

This guidance will be reviewed annually to ensure consistency, fairness and effectiveness, and in light of any changes in employment or educational legislation.

Version number:	2.0	Target Audience:	All staff
UCST/ULT/Both:	Both	Reason for version change:	Review
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Date Last Reviewed (no changes made)	September 2020		
JNC Involvement	Subject to consultation but not agreed		



Appendix 1 – Guidance on Length of Probationary Periods

- 1. A probationary period should be long enough to allow the employee to settle into United Learning and learn the key elements of the job. It should also be long enough for the line manager to assess whether or not the employee is capable of fulfilling the requirements of the job. The probationary period should not, however, be any longer than is necessary to achieve these objectives.
- 2. Suggested length of probationary periods

Teachers	Six months
Support Staff	Three months

- 3. The periods given above are meant as a guide and may need to be varied depending on the nature of the role. For example, the seniority or complexity of the role may require a longer probationary period, whereas the limited length of a fixed term contract may require a shorter probationary period. For further advice on probationary periods please contact the Central Office HR team.



Appendix 2 - Probationary Meetings Schedule

Name.....	Line Manager.....
Job Title.....	School/Location.....
Start Date.....	Probation End Date.....

During this period you will be required to attend a series of probationary meetings to help you settle effectively into your new role and to ensure you are achieving the required standards. The procedure is contained in the United Learning Probationary Period Guidance. The schedule of probationary meetings is given below. The number of scheduled meeting will be determined by the length of the probationary period, but will not normally exceed six.

In each meeting your line manager will give you constructive feedback on your performance to date and highlight any achievements or areas of development, which will form part of an action plan. The meeting also presents you with the opportunity to discuss how you feel you are progressing and any areas of concern or success.

Meeting Number	Date	Time	Location
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			



Appendix 3 – Probation Review FAQ

1. What is a probationary review meeting?

The probationary period is a period of review which has positive benefits for both the employee and the school. It assists new employees to settle into their role and achieve the standards expected from them as quickly as possible. This is an opportunity to discuss how well the employee has settled into the role and gain feedback post-induction. This can also be a space where performance related discussions can be held to set expectations going forward.

2. Can I bring a colleague or trade union representative to a probationary review meeting?

An employee may be accompanied by a colleague or Trade Union representative at formal meetings only where the termination of employment is a potential outcome.

This would usually only apply to the final meeting where concerns have been raised at previous meetings and support offered but the necessary improvement may not have been made. It would not apply to initial and interim informal review meetings.

3. Do I have to reschedule the meeting if an employee is unavailable to attend a meeting?

Probationary review meetings should be scheduled during an employee's normal working hours and employees are expected to make every effort to attend.

In the event that an employee is absent from work, then the meeting may need to be rescheduled to take place within 5 days of the original date.

Where an employee does not engage with the probationary review process and there are performance concerns, then consideration may be given to proceeding to a formal probationary review meeting.

4. Should my manager seek Occupational Health advice before going to a final probationary review meeting?

Where there are specific concerns regarding the employment of an employee potentially as a result of a disability, then the line manager should discuss this with the employee at the earliest opportunity and request further medical advice where necessary.

If you feel you need additional support during your probationary period or at any time in your employment then you should raise this with your manager at the earliest opportunity.

Further advice and support should be discussed with your Line Manager who may consider making a referral to Medigold, our Occupational Health provider.

5. I have just started managing an employee after their previous manager left. The employee has been working here for five months. I am concerned about their behaviours at work and the quality of their teaching. There are no previous notes on his/her file. What are my options?

You should review the employee's performance, absence, relationships with other colleagues and document your concerns ahead of a meeting to discuss this with the employee.



As a Line Manager, you are responsible for the probationary process and ensuring that the employee successfully meets your expectations during this period. It may be possible to extend an employee's probationary period where you have not been able to sign off their probationary period based upon limited evidence etc.

6. As an employee, can my probationary period be shortened if I want to leave?

If you are not enjoying your role you don't have to wait until the probation period has ended if you would like to leave as long as you follow the notice period set out in your contract.

7. What are the circumstances in which a probationary period can be extended?

A probation period can be extended for several reasons, for example, if there are concerns about performance or if the employee has been off work due to sickness during the probation period (and there has therefore not been sufficient time to assess performance). Extensions must be communicated to the employee following the process set out in this guidance.

8. What happens if any employee is off sick for part of the probation period?

If any employee is off sick for a lengthy period during probation, it may not be possible to adequately assess their performance in the job. In these circumstances, an extension is likely to be appropriate. In the event that an employee has frequent short-term absence, this may also be taken into account when making a decision whether or not employment continues. Care should be taken to exclude disability or pregnancy related absence from this assessment.

9. Can I extend a probation period more than once?

Normally a probationary period can only be extended once. After this time, a decision on future employment should be made. If you feel there is a reason why an exception should be made to this rule, please discuss this with HR before taking any action.

10. A new starter in my team is significantly underperforming. Do I have to wait until the end of the probation period before taking action?

No. Hold a meeting with them as soon as possible. Highlight the areas of underperformance and set targets for improvement. Keep monitoring the situation and have regular dialogue with the employee. Ensure that you keep notes throughout. If the situation fails to improve, you will need to make a recommendation about continued employment.



Appendix 4 – Probation Review Checklist

Probation Review Checklist:	
Name of Employee:	Employment Start date:
Name of Line Manager:	Expected Probationary Period end date:
Suggested Topics:	Comments:
Employee Wellbeing:	
Employee Performance:	
Targets and KPIs:	
Challenge:	
Management Feedback and Observations:	
Working Hours and Work-life balance:	
Relationships with colleagues, stakeholders and Line Manager	
Induction and training:	
Further Support:	
Any difficulties at work?	
Any adjustments required?	



Agreed Actions:	Comments
1 -	
2	
3 -	
4 -	
5 -	
6-	

Overall Assessment and next steps	Comments
Date of Next Review Meeting:	
Or Manager recommendation – 1) successful completion of probation 2) recommend probation unsuccessful – hearing to be arranged 3) extension of probation	

Employee signature

Manager signature

Signature

Date:

Additional Notes and Comments:

