

Probation and professional development for new lecturers

Guidance for lecturers, managers and reviewers

Introduction

Newly-appointed lecturers arrive with a wide range of experience and aspirations, and they have a variety of priorities depending on the needs of their department/school and the wider University. We are committed to supporting them in getting up to speed with the University's systems and culture, so that they can make the best possible start to their academic career here.

The process described guides the lecturer and their manager / reviewerⁱ to collaborate in setting clear expectations, monitoring progress, and providing feedback. A primary goal is to align individual efforts with Department / School requirements and the broader University objectives while supporting professional growth and empowering colleagues to reach their full potential

The University's system for supporting early career lecturers comprises:

1. Probation (6 months)

The formally-defined period in which all employees are supported to settle into their new environment, and demonstrate their ability to fulfil their role. This may not include all aspects of the job description, but clear performance standards and appropriate objectives are specified. It is founded on regular interactions between the lecturer and their manager and other colleagues, so that any problems can be quickly addressed.

2. Period of Supported Professional Development

(3 years, includes probation)

During this period, most lecturers will complete a programme of professional development leading to Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, the baseline professional standard for all teaching staff at the University. In addition, they will have regular interactions with their manager and mentor, and continue to refine and develop their longer term academic performance and development plans. They will plan and undertake other professional development activities such as courses and network memberships, and will build relationships with colleagues and collaborators.

Process – Probation

In the first six months, probationary lecturers are required to:

1. Establish a performance and development plan for the short and medium term set in the context of longer term ambitions.
2. Undertake academic work according to the needs of the Department/School and their background and circumstances.
3. Engage with other domains of the academic career framework that are not included in (2).
4. Complete all mandatory training.
5. Demonstrate their commitment to academic citizenship and the values of the University

An online system will support lecturers and their managers/reviewers to keep appropriate records during the probation period. It will also supply reminders about the relevant meetings and check-points, but we recommend that all scheduled meetings (below) are in the calendar soon after the lecturer starts.

Pre-arrival	On receipt of a signed contract with confirmed starting date, HR will initiate the process by which the recruiting department/school confirms the line manager, allocated reviewer if that is different, and the allocated mentor for the new staff member.
Week 1	Departments/Faculties/School will start the usual induction process that welcomes new staff. Manager/reviewer has an initial conversation: How's it going? What do you need? (information, introductions, access) Who do you need to talk to? (To understand workload etc) Things to think about: how you will spend your first months and years.
Week 4	Discuss a plan. What teaching? How will you get involved with supporting students? What research? Which departmental and University activities and groups? What development, courses etc. Make initial Performance and Development plan (short and medium term). Will this fulfil the requirements for probation?

Week 12	How are things progressing against that plan? What's been good so far? What is proving difficult? What additional support do you need? Adjust P&D plan if appropriate and complete mid-probation report.
Week 20	How are things progressing against the plan? What's been good so far? What is proving difficult? What additional support do you need? If requirements for probation have been met, adjust P&D plan for longer term and complete end-probation report. If insufficient engagement and progress, make new plan with specific requirements and schedule new review.
	Discuss and agree ongoing arrangements for next period

What should be evident

Appropriate plans and objectives, reasonable progress against these, engagement with colleagues and the University, demonstration of values particularly inclusion and citizenship.

Causes for concern may be:

- Probationer is not visible in department/school and not engaging with colleagues
- Struggling to progress with academic work in a reasonable timescale.
- Conflict in interactions with staff or students
- Not clear about expectations (may dispute the priorities)
- Lack of information or understanding about University systems and processes

Concerns for these or any other reason should prompt managers and lecturers to seek guidance quickly, to understand the root of the problem and taking remedial action.

Process – Supported Professional Development

There is no University-mandated schedule of meetings or requirements for this period, because the lecturer and their local management are the best people to judge what should be priorities and to set appropriate expectations against which progress can be assessed.

After 3 years, normal expectation would be that a lecturer is fulfilling or is engaging with all aspects of their job description at an appropriate level. They should have been through at least one cycle of teaching and student support, engaging with quality processes and reflective practice, and beginning to take on more responsibility. In research and innovation roles, they should have started to generate outputs and be

working towards resourcing new activity. They will normally be serving the University in some capacity such as committee memberships, and will be visible and active members of the academic community.

A typical supported professional development period would include:

1. Regular manager / reviewer meetings to get feedback and review progress and plan future activities. Plan to meet at least quarterly. Many of these meetings will be informal check-ins without any need for paperwork. The key is to build up mutual understanding and enable constructive feedback, and to monitor colleagues' progress and wellbeing.

1. Mentor. The lecturer will continue to have the support of a mentor.

2. Pathway to HEA Fellowship.

4. Support when difficulties arise

5. Workload adjustment.

6. Integration into local (departmental / School) annual review system (SDPR/Career Conversations)

There is still a requirement to set clear performance expectations during this period; the foundation is a *performance* and development plan.

When problems arise

As with probation, most colleagues will make good progress during this period but many may encounter difficulties or obstacles along the way.

Similarly, lecturers may feel they are not receiving sufficient support or being set unreasonable goals.

In all cases, act quickly to understand the problem and seek solutions. Where there are serious concerns about a lecturer's ability to fulfil their role, or about their wellbeing or relationships with colleagues, managers should seek advice from HR.

ⁱ Reviewer is defined here as a senior colleague who is assigned by a Department/School to support a newly-appointed lecturer on behalf of their line manager.