

Royal Northern College of Music
Probation (Academic)
Policy & Procedure
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RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

1. **Introduction**

It is the College's practice for new academic staff whose appointments are subject to a probationary period, to receive as much assistance and advice as possible either from senior members of their School/Programme/College or from other Departments within the College.

Each new member of academic staff will be assigned a mentor who will help them settle into their role, understand how the College works and its policies and procedures and their role within their Programme and/or School.

This policy is for the use of new staff, Heads/Deputies of Schools/Programmes, members of Executive Committee, designated mentors and other nominated Professional Services Departments involved in the probation of all new academic staff.

The policy has been devised to assist all parties in ensuring that the induction and probation period are constructive and successful for the individual, the School/Programme and the College.

2. **Roles and responsibilities** (see Appendix 1 for details)

2.1 Line Manager: Overall line management responsibility for the probationary period of new academic staff which includes: induction, support and guidance; assigning a mentor; clear expectations and standards expected of the role; workload management; undertaking at least one formal teaching observation; identifying and providing any development needs; managing performance; undertaking regular probationary reviews including submitting formal records; where recommending non-confirmation or continuation of probation make a case for submission to (Human Resources (HR)).

2.2 Mentor: A nominated mentor will establish a timetable of regular meetings (at least termly) with the new member of staff during the member of staff's first year. The mentor can help new staff settle in and develop networks more quickly, thus helping to overcome any feelings of isolation or alienation. New staff can learn from the practices of their mentor, gain insight into their effectiveness, and receive advice and encouragement to develop their professional skills. This engenders a feeling of support leading to greater job satisfaction and enhanced potential for career development.

It is vital that the new member of staff feels professionally 'safe' with their mentor. Therefore rules of confidentiality should be agreed at the outset between mentor and new member of staff. The extent of guidance provided during meetings is expected to vary in accordance with the seniority of the post and experience of the post holder.

2.3 Probationer: The member of staff will ensure that they: understand the requirements of the role and standards needed; familiarise themselves with College policies and procedures; are self-motivated and take responsibility for identifying any development needs they might have and work collaboratively with other staff to develop productive networks.

2.4 Head of School/Department: Identify individuals suitable to undertake mentoring from a list provided by HR, provide guidance to mentors and assign mentors to new academic staff.

3. **Scope**

This policy and its procedures apply to all new academic staff including part-time hourly paid tutors employed under a permanent or fixed term contract.

4. **Duration of probation period**

The probation period will be 12 months for all academic appointments. Any probation period can be extended at the request of the line manager for reasons related to the criteria for probation, which are outlined below. Extensions will not normally be for more than 6 months and only one extension will normally be granted.

4.1 Prolonged absences: To ensure the equitable treatment any prolonged leave of absence, such as maternity leave, or long term disability related absence, will not normally count towards completion of probation. The Deputy Principal (Performance and Programmes) or the Director of Programmes may approve any pausing of probation after discussion with the individual staff member and their Head of School/Programme, seeking advice from HR as appropriate. Any such pausing will be confirmed in writing along with details as to any revised review/confirmation timescales.

4.2 Temporary or fixed term contracts: Probationers holding temporary, including fixed-term, appointments should follow the same probationary process as those holding open-ended positions with the objectives agreed, appropriate for the period of employment. At the end of their appointment, they may request from the line manager, documentary evidence of satisfactory completion of that part of the probation process. This should count toward any subsequent review period, if appointed to a similar open ended post, requiring a similar skills/knowledge set, in the RNCM.

5. **Key stages of the probationary process (see Appendix 2 flow chart)**

- **Initial meeting** within first month between the member of staff and their line manager.
- **Progress reviews** between the member of staff and their line manager - at least once per term.
- At least one **teaching observation** undertaken by the member of staff's line manager.(template provided at appendix 3)
- **Mid-point review** by the member of staff's line manager at six months of employment.
- **Final meeting** between the member of staff and their line manager and final probation report at twelve months of employment (template provided at appendix 4).

Within the first month, the line manager should complete a record of the initial meeting which will include an outline of teaching, administration and any research duties. The initial report should include any professional development needs for the year and how these will be met. This document should be forwarded to the HR team for the staff members personnel file.

6. **Criteria for Successful completion of probation**

In evaluating the member of staff's progress, consideration will be given to all or some of the following criteria where appropriate:

- **Teaching** - assessment of teaching skills, contribution to curriculum development, quality of examination and (if relevant) coursework assessment and feedback to students.
- **Student support** - assessment of academic/music support skills, approachability, ability to listen, pastoral care.
- **Research** (as appropriate) - progress on developing an integrated and strategically directed programme of activity, with evidence (where possible) of publicly disseminated outputs. Research supervision. Research grants/awards. Evidence of, for example seminars given, invitations to conferences, relevant professional activity.
- **Administration** - efficiency and effectiveness in contributing to School/Programme and wider College-based administration; quantity and quality of work undertaken. IT competency. Teamwork including relationship with others and communications with staff and students. Supporting/managing staff, managing resources (as appropriate).
- **Academic Leadership** - significant contribution to the development of other staff (as appropriate).
- **External contribution** - level and extent of involvement with external academic and professional bodies, e.g. external examining, external teaching (as appropriate).
- **Fellowship of AdvanceHE** - staff who have prior experience of teaching and learning at the Higher Education level but who have no formal qualification in teaching will be strongly encouraged and supported to make an application for Associate, Fellow or Senior Fellowship of AdvanceHE within two years for full time staff and four years for part-time staff of the start of their appointment.

7. **Support provided**

The College assists new academic staff to achieve a successful appointment and to develop their career, both during the probation period and beyond. During probation, the Line Manager provides clear expectations of tasks and standards required.

The Line Manager provides support during induction, for professional development, and guidance (including on College policies and procedures) and support appropriate to the level of experience of the new member of academic staff.

Line Managers will provide clear feedback on progress and, if appropriate, raise any areas of concern during regular discussions in order for such areas to be addressed in a timely manner.

The Line Manager will discuss development needs with the member of staff and seek funding (where required) through the Director of Programmes.

8. **Extension of probation period**

If, at the end of the probationary period, the member of academic staff's work is unsatisfactory, or the member of staff has been absent for an extended period during probation, an extension of the probationary period may be appropriate.

An extension should normally only be considered where there are special circumstances to justify it. The Line Manager will discuss the case with the HR Department. An extension should only be agreed if, in their opinion, this will enable a satisfactory level of work to be achieved.

Where it is agreed that the period of probation will be extended, a meeting will be held to discuss this with the member of staff and the terms of the extension will be confirmed in writing by the HR Department. The notification will state:

- the length of the extension and the date on which the extended period of probation will end;
- the reason for the extension;
- the work standards or work that the member of academic staff is required to achieve by the end of the extended period;
- any support e.g. further training that will be provided during the extension;
- that if the member of academic staff does not meet fully the required standards by the end of the extended period of probation, their employment may be terminated.

9. Unsatisfactory work

Where the work is unsatisfactory and it is clear that further training or support is unlikely to result in improvement, employment may be terminated.

To give a member of academic staff full opportunity to reach the required standards, a decision to dismiss will not normally be taken until the end of the probationary period. However, where there is clear evidence that the member of staff is wholly unsuitable for the role, the Line Manager should consult with the HR Department to discuss early termination.

9.1 Procedure

The member of academic staff will be given a minimum of 5 working days' notice, in writing, of a meeting to discuss their continued employment. The letter will outline the circumstances that may lead to the termination of employment. The member of staff will also be advised of their right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or a work colleague.

A meeting will be held between the Line Manager and the member of academic staff. A member of the HR Department will also be present. The Line Manager will explain clearly and precisely the area(s) in which the member of staff is falling below the expectations of the role. The member of staff will be given the opportunity to respond to the concerns raised.

Staff will be informed of the outcome at the meeting, or where this is not possible within one working day. Where the member of staff is dismissed they will be informed of the date their employment will terminate and of their right of appeal. The outcome will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days of the meeting.

If a member of academic staff wishes to appeal against a decision to dismiss, the appeal must be made to the nominated College representative detailed in the outcome letter. The appeal must be made in writing stating the grounds for appeal, within 5 working days of receiving written confirmation of dismissal.

9.2 Appeal

Where possible, the appeal meeting will be convened as soon as possible, normally within 5 working days of receipt of the appeal.

An appeal meeting will follow the same format as the dismissal meeting. A more senior academic manager not involved in the case will chair the meeting, or where this is not possible, another academic manager. Records and notes of the original meeting will be made available to the person hearing the appeal.

The member of academic staff will be informed of the arrangements for the meeting as soon as possible and of their right to be accompanied by a trade union representative or work colleague of their choice.

The member of academic staff will be informed of the outcome at the meeting, or where this is not possible within one working day. The appeal decision and the reasons for it will be confirmed in writing to the member of staff within 5 working days. Where the appeal is against dismissal, the letter will identify that the decision is the final stage of the College's appeal procedure.

10. Staff performance development review (PDR)

The College operates a performance development review scheme for the regular review of staff performance. The review is carried out by a trained reviewer which is either the Line Manager or another nominated senior colleague.

Once the probation period has been successfully completed, academic staff will be reviewed either annually for full time and pro-rate staff or on a triennial basis in the case of part-time hourly paid staff (with the first review taking place within one year after the probation end date).

11. Probation records

Full records should always be made of formal review meetings with new academic staff about their work and forwarded to the HR department.

Records taken and produced during the probation management process will be held confidentially and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR.

Related policies

- Induction
- Performance and Development Review

Appendix 1 - Roles and responsibilities

Line manager

- The effective and timely implementation of the review process, including completion of the associated record forms.
- An appropriate induction process, providing key information/advice on, for example: the norms and standards for research activity / outputs in the College (if relevant to the role); the norms and standards for teaching activity and the evaluation of such teaching; the mechanisms in place to support their ongoing personal and career development; the management of a work-life balance; the operation of the School/Programme/College e.g. deadlines for various activities, advice on preparing teaching materials, writing research proposals, the scope of various administrative tasks etc.
- Introduction of the mentor to the probationer.
- The probationer is made fully aware of expectations in order to be successfully confirmed, via the development of a Probation plan/provision of regular feedback.
- Line management of the probationer.
- Provision of a manageable workload in line with any relevant workload allocation framework, and appropriate training and development support to meet the defined objectives.
- Staff performance concerns are addressed, taking advice where necessary, including initiating formal performance review.
- Records are maintained, including activity undertaken to support the probationer.
- Where they recommend non-confirmation/continuation of probation they prepare and present the case to HR.

Mentor

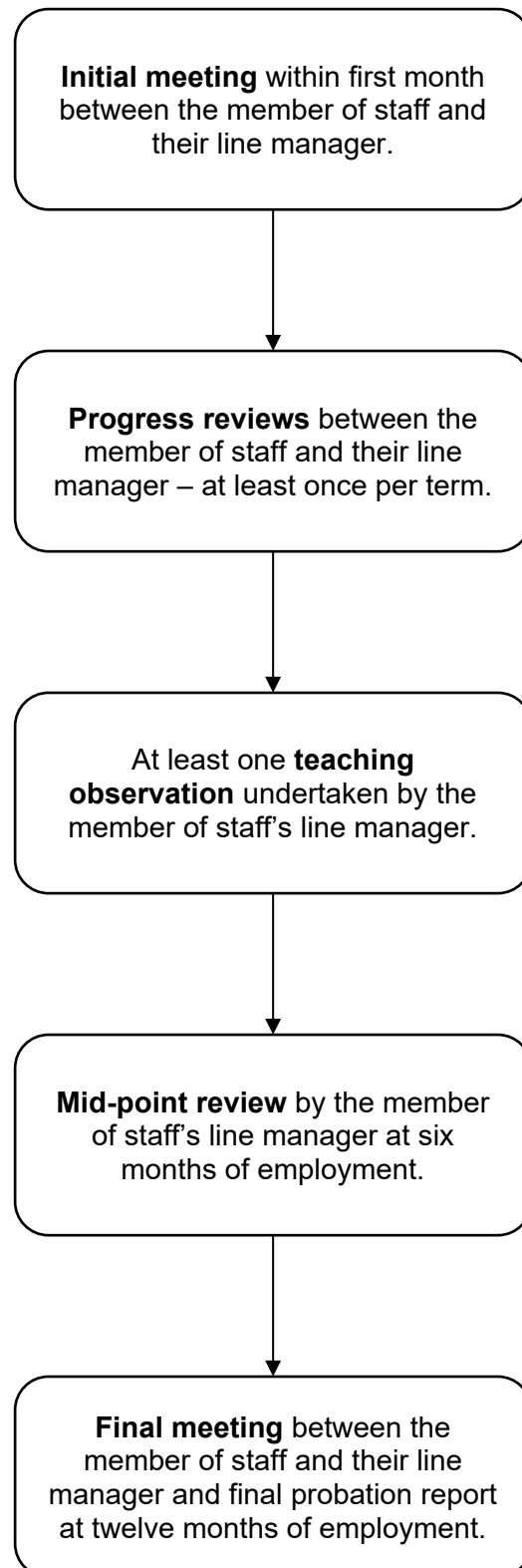
- Agreeing rules of confidentiality at the outset between mentor and new member of staff.
- Help new staff settle in and develop networks more quickly, thus helping to overcome any feelings of isolation or alienation. New staff can learn from the practices of their mentor, gain insight into their effectiveness, and receive advice and encouragement to develop their professional skills. This engenders a feeling of support leading to greater job satisfaction and enhanced potential for career development.
- Assisting with the identification and provision of appropriate guidance and support.
- Having regular review meetings throughout the review period. Ideally monthly during the first 6 months and then on a regular basis to be determined by the mentor/probationer.
- In fulfilling their responsibilities they should seek to familiarise themselves with key information e.g. any College guidance on the induction process, teaching/assessment guidelines etc.

The staff member should normally have the same mentor throughout their probationary period. However, it is recognised that there may be the need for an alternative to be allocated e.g. should a mentor take a period of extended leave. In such cases the Head of School, after consultation with HR, the probationer and mentor, will appoint a replacement.

Probationer

- Jointly formulating objectives/milestones for the full review period with the Line Manager.
- Agreeing with the Line Manager their route to FHEA accreditation (or application for full/partial exemption) with a view to completing this within two years for full time staff and four years for part time staff of the start of their appointment.
- Being self-motivated and taking appropriate responsibility for considering and identifying their development needs within the context of their role and taking account of their career development.
- Organising and attending regular review meetings with their mentor.
- Summarising their progress on the probation progress form.
- Raising any problems or concerns with their mentor or Line Manager.
- Participating as appropriate in any in/formal performance improvement processes.

Appendix 2 – Key stages of the probation procedure



Appendix 3 - Teaching Observation Record

Section 1- Briefing *(to be completed by the employee and sent to their line manager)*

Employee	
Observer	
Date	
Module	
Number of students	
Activity (lecture, tutorial, one-to-one lesson etc.)	
Topic	
Session length (hrs.)	

What are the specific intended learning outcomes of this teaching session?

What is your perception of your role and responsibilities with respect to student learning for this session?

Teaching observation focus: (List the aspects you would like the observer to focus on.)

Are there any aspects of your teaching that you would like to develop?

Yes ☐ (Please provide details)

No ☐

Section 2 - Observation *(to be completed by the observer and shared with the employee)*

	Identified strengths	Areas for future focus
Clarity and achievability of ILOs		
Planning & organisation		
Teaching methods/approach		
Delivery and pace/time management		
Content (currency, relevance, accuracy, use of example, level to match students)		
Student engagement		
Use of teaching resources (where relevant)		
Development of students' skills		
Generation of enthusiasm		
Feedback and assessment		

Quality of the session in relation to the agreed focus of the observation
Recommendations

Section 3 - Action Plan *(to be completed by the employee taking account of feedback in Section 2)*

To build on your reflections of the session and the peer observation feedback you received.

Action	Any support required	Target date

To confirm the peer observation of teaching has taken place and all parties are satisfied with the process please send the completed form to human.resources@nmc.ac.uk and copy to your observer.

Appendix 4 - Academic Probation sign-off form

Employee	
Line Manager	
School / Programme of Study	
Employment start date	
Grade	
Date of teaching observation	

In evaluating the member of staff's progress, consideration will be given to all or some of the following criteria where appropriate. Please refer to the [Academic Grading Profile](#) for the assessment of performance against the expected criteria of the employee's grade.

Please provide your comments in the areas assessed.

Teaching Assessment of teaching skills, contribution to curriculum development, quality of examination and (if relevant) coursework assessment and feedback to students.
Student support Assessment of academic/music support skills, approachability, ability to listen, pastoral care.
Research (as appropriate) Progress on developing an integrated and strategically directed programme of activity, with evidence (where possible) of publicly disseminated outputs. Research supervision. Research grants/awards. Evidence of, for example seminars given, invitations to conferences, relevant professional activity.
Administration Efficiency and effectiveness in contributing to School/Programme and wider College-based administration; quantity and quality of work undertaken. IT competency. Teamwork including relationship with others and communications with staff and students. Supporting/managing staff, managing resources (as appropriate).

Academic Leadership

Significant contribution to the development of other staff (as appropriate).

External contribution

Level and extent of involvement with external academic and professional bodies, e.g. external examining, external teaching (as appropriate).

Fellowship of AdvanceHE

Staff who have prior experience of teaching and learning at the Higher Education level but who have no formal qualification in teaching will be strongly encouraged and supported to make an application for Associate, Fellow or Senior Fellowship of AdvanceHE within two years for full time staff and four years for part-time staff of the start of their appointment.

I confirm that I have assessed the employee's performance in role during the probation period and wish to confirm their appointment

Yes ☐ This form can now be sent to human.resources@ncm.ac.uk

No ☐ Please continue with the sections below

Are there any areas of particular concern where progress is not being made and an improvement is required?

Yes ☐ Please provide details below:

No ☐

Should the probationary period be extended to allow additional time for improvement?

Yes ☐ Please specify the improvement required, actions to be taken by when.

No ☐

Please send the completed form to human.resources@ncm.ac.uk