

PROBATIONARY PERIOD

A Network SA Staff Management Resource for Children's Services June 2009

It is usual for a three-month probationary period to apply to all new permanent (full time or part time) or fixed term employees in children's services. There are a few important considerations:

- The probation period has to be agreed on **before** the commencement of employment.
- Even though the employee is 'on probation', entitlements commence from the actual starting date of employment and not at the completion of the probation.
- Casual employees are 'hourly paid' and do not have a probationary period.
- Because the probation is a time for learning the job, and testing suitability for the job, it is essential that the employee receives regular feedback during the probationary period.
- If the employer decides during the probationary period that the new employee is not suitable for the job, it is not necessary to wait until the end of the probationary period to terminate the employment.

To enable new employees to complete the probationary period successfully, they need support and information to ensure that they clearly understand what is expected of them. There should be times set aside to give and receive constructive feedback about their work performance. A detailed and clear induction process (see Induction Resource Sheet) together with probationary review interviews are crucial, in fairness to the new employees, the other staff, the children and the director too.

Probationary reviews

Usually the director would carry out the probationary meetings, except in the case of the appointee being the director. The director's probation would be overseen by the centre operator or, in the case of most OSHC services, by the line manager designated by the school. Written documentation should be kept of the induction process and the probationary review meetings carried out with each new employee.

The probationary review interviews would be at regular intervals during the probation period, for example:

- at the end of the first week
- at two weeks after appointment
- at six weeks after appointment
- at eleven weeks after appointment

These interviews include:

- feedback given to the employee about her/his performance and conduct. This should be clear and specific to the job description and the centre policies including the code of conduct if you have one
- an invitation to the employee to give feedback on how s/he is settling in and any difficulties s/he is experiencing.

The first interviews would generally be a 'touch base' chat giving opportunity for both parties to discuss how they feel things are progressing. An employee who has not met the requirements for any aspect of conduct or work performance, should be offered support and assistance to meet that requirement, with

agreed timelines, before the next review interview. If there is no improvement you have the option of ending the employment. You do not have to wait until all the reviews have been conducted. Either party could terminate the employment at any point within the probationary period.

Each interview should be documented, signed by those present and filed on the employee's personnel file. It is suggested that a proforma is used for these interviews which should include minutes of the interviews and any feedback given.

The final review interview

The last review interview, a week before the end of the probation, should be a formal process and followed by a decision to either confirm continuing employment past the probation end date or end the employment by the probation end date. If the employee has made it to the final review interview it is likely that the feedback to the employee has been generally positive.

You must make a decision and advise the employee before the end date. You cannot just extend the probation. If the employee's performance is not satisfactory, do not continue their employment past the end of the probation period, because you will not be doing yourself, the other staff or the children and families any favours by employing this person.

Remember, if the employee's performance does not meet the standards, the employee must be informed of this prior to the end of the probationary period.

Confirming Employment

After the decision has been made to confirm the employee's appointment, you should provide the new staff member with a letter of confirmation which offers congratulations and clearly confirms their ongoing employment. (This is confirmation of the appointment, not a new 'start' date. The employment commencement date remains the first day of employment (3 months ago), not the first day after completion of probation.)

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