Guidance for Probationary Academic and Research Staff

Foreword from Vice-Chancellor

Welcome to the University of Essex. We are an internationally-oriented, research intensive university with a commitment to excellence in research and excellence in education through research-led teaching, the personal development of all our students, and offering all an outstanding campus-based student experience. Our commitment to research that matters, and that has global impact, informs all that we do.

We take our commitment to research-led teaching seriously and our staff are expected to be both great researchers and great teachers; our curriculum is regularly updated by the latest research; and our students undertake research themselves. Because our University is on a human scale, there is also a very strong sense of community.

The type of university we are places on you an obligation to take personal responsibility for developing within your role to make sure that you are contributing at the highest level to research and education, and to the University community. We consider probation to be a very important aspect of helping you to meet that obligation. As well as giving us the opportunity to ensure that you are capable of undertaking the responsibilities demanded of our academic staff, the probation period is designed to offer you help and support. You will be allocated a probationary supervisor and will be expected to agree targets as part of your initial probation agreement.

Your performance during the three year probation will be monitored and subject to regular review. By the end of the probationary period you will be expected to be able to demonstrate that you have developed a scholarly and reflective approach to education and its enhancement and (unless you are not contractually obliged to undertake research) can demonstrate independence and originality in your own programme of research. You will also be expected to gain HEA Fellowship before permanency can be granted to ensure that your practice is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework.

Professor Anthony Forster
Vice-Chancellor
1. Probationary period

As a new member of our academic staff you are required to serve a period of probation before your appointment can be confirmed. Probation is both:

- A period during which probationary staff must demonstrate the necessary skills, aptitudes and initiative in research and teaching in their academic discipline. This is so the University can be confident that, if confirmed in post, the individual will continue to fulfil the full range of responsibilities expected of them, and (if contracted to undertake research) continue publishing research considered ‘internationally excellent’ for the foreseeable future; and
- A period of sustained support and career development advice to help enable you to meet the required performance standards in teaching and research.

The standard period of probation is 3 years. The probationary period may be extended by the amount of any unpaid leave of absence, sick leave or maternity leave.

At the outset of your probationary period you are required within the first six months of appointment to discuss and agree with your Probationary Supervisor/Head of Department a Probation Agreement which sets out the expectations and the objectives to be achieved to ensure confirmation of your appointment. The Agreement will also need to be approved by the Executive Dean of Faculty.

During your probationary period, as well as regular informal reviews, your Head of Department will be asked to provide the Academic Staffing Committee with:

- Your probationary agreement including interim and final targets and;
- an Interim Report on your work and progress at approximately 18 months into your appointment;
- a final report on achievement of objectives to be submitted alongside your permanency application.

You will receive copies of your signed agreement and Interim Report.

2. Workload

You will be expected to have a full and balanced academic load commensurate with your position as a probationary member of staff as determined by your Head of Department, and you may be required to teach subjects within your discipline which are not central to your personal research. For staff on probation, a lighter than average teaching and administrative load is given during the first two years of probation.

3. Supervision and Support

On appointment you will be assigned a probationary supervisor. Your supervisor will be a senior colleague within your Department, not normally your Head of Department or line-manager, who will advise and act as your mentor during your first few years at Essex. Your supervisor should meet with you at least once a term and the main purpose of the role is to provide support, guidance and feedback on performance.
4. Appraisal and Personal Development

The Appraisal and Personal Development Scheme applies to all staff at the University of Essex. During your period of probation, you will have an annual appraisal meeting with an appraiser assigned by your Head of Department and usually this will be your probationary supervisor. This process is designed to complement, not duplicate, the regular reviews taking place during your probation and so agreed objectives should be the same in both processes. The appraisal meeting will provide an opportunity for you to discuss your role and to highlight any development needs. It will also provide you with feedback on your performance against your Probation Agreement and give the opportunity to agree priorities for the coming year. However, if you have any concerns about the level of support you require or are receiving during your period of probation, you should raise these with your Head of Department straight away rather than wait for your formal appraisal.

5. Professional Development and Accreditation

Firstly, you are required to attend the University’s general staff induction within six months of appointment. There are also some mandatory training courses that you are required to complete in respect of Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity. Throughout your period of probation, you are expected to engage in relevant professional development activities relating to the duties of your role.

Before being able to be confirmed in your appointment as an academic member of staff you are required to demonstrate achievement of Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). This can be achieved in two ways:

a) If you can demonstrate considerable teaching experience or have completed an equivalent programme in another HE institution you can choose to complete an application for professional recognition through CADENZA, the University’s Professional Development Framework. CADENZA is mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework for those teaching and supporting learning in higher education and has been fully accredited by the Higher Education Academy at four levels of recognition (Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow).

b) If you would like to further develop your professional practice in teaching and supporting learning and gain a formal qualification, you can choose to complete the University Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice. (60 credits) This is a work-based and flexible programme which is typically completed part-time over two years. Fellowship of the Academy is awarded on successful completion of the first module (30 credits).
6. Research (only applicable for those on ASER contracts)

You will be expected to undertake research and to publish high quality outputs appropriate for your discipline as set out in your Probation Agreement. The emphasis is on ambition of research questions and quality and impact of output. Your research outputs are required to be at least at 2* level with some at 3* and 4* level\(^1\) within 3 years, ensuring your research is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour. The volume of publication will be a contributing factor, but quality appropriate to Research Excellence Framework (REF) inclusion must be clearly established, as must evidence that the publication activity is continuing.

It is also expected that you will be able to demonstrate the potential to win external research funding, begin to contribute towards the supervision of research students and make an active contribution to the research life and culture of your department. It is recognised that there are different subject norms in this area but where appropriate probationary staff are expected to demonstrate their ability to work as an independent researcher capable of securing external funding for work that they lead. Expectations will be outlined clearly in your Probation Agreement.

7. Education

You will be expected to set the highest standards in learning and teaching, linking research and education in distinctive and creative ways to provide a unique and stimulating environment for our students to learn and develop.

Most importantly, you will be expected to show that you value students, their time and their education. You will demonstrate this by:

- undertaking teaching which is research-led and intellectually challenging to your students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level;
- undertaking teaching, when required, of subjects within your discipline but which are not central to your personal research or research plans;
- being readily accessible to your students and colleagues about matters concerning teaching and assessment;
- reflecting on feedback from your students to improve your teaching, and contributing to curriculum development where practicable; being innovative in learning and teaching, and assessment methods, incorporating available technology where appropriate;
- undertaking examinations work and course assessment as directed by your Head of Department, and contributing within your Department to the development and conduct of fair and transparent assessment;
- providing appropriate feedback, support and guidance to students.

\(^1\) 4* Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour,
\(^3\) 3* Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence
\(^2\) 2* Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour
8. Leadership/citizenship

As a member of the university community, you are expected to adhere to the principles of good citizenship, being generous with your help and support to others and collaborating with your academic and professional colleagues in matters relating to research and education and working for the benefit of your Department and the University as a whole.

As a probationary member of staff you will be expected to undertake, effectively and efficiently, administrative tasks that are assigned to you by your Head of Department. You are also expected to support and collaborate appropriately with administrative and technical colleagues, making an active contribution to an inclusive community in which diversity is embraced and celebrated.

Behaviour not in keeping with the above principles of collegiality may provide a valid reason for not confirming a probationary appointment.

9. Confirmation of appointment

In order to confirm your appointment, the University must be satisfied that you have

- fulfilled all the expectations and requirements as set out in your Probation Agreement;
- engaged in the teaching of prescribed courses and the supervisory and tutorial work assigned to you, to a suitably high standard;
- engaged in research towards the advancement of your discipline through the publication of research in peer reviewed and refereed journals, to an international standard;
- conscientiously carried out such examining duties and administrative duties as have been required of you;
- achieved HEA Fellowship.

During your probationary period, your Head of Department or Probationary Supervisor will review your progress regularly and will provide a formal interim report on your progress and performance to the Academic Staffing Committee approximately eighteen months following your appointment. A final report from your probationary supervisor will be submitted with your permanency application, alongside the Head’s report which will include a recommendation on whether to confirm your appointment or not.

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