Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the ability of some Probationers to undertake elements of their role and therefore they may have been unable to achieve some of their agreed Probation objectives. The impact of Covid-19 on the work of Probationers is uneven and varies in nature and impact across the University.

Examples of potential Covid-19 impacts include but are not limited to:

- The requirement to provide care due to school, nursery and other day care facility closures during periods of lockdown.
- Changes to workload allocation to accommodate additional teaching and additional preparation of online teaching materials, to the detriment of research and other activities.
- The closure of University laboratory facilities, which has impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The restrictions on fieldwork and travel, which have impacted upon the ability of an individual to undertake research.
- The cancellation of conferences and other external activities that limit the ability of academic staff to demonstrate achievement of professional standing and wider engagement.
- Delays to the review of submissions to journals and funding bodies.
- Reduction in funding calls in certain disciplines.

Although many and varied, the impact of Covid-19 can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Personal circumstances beyond the control of the Probationer that have impacted upon their ability to undertake some aspects of their role; for example, additional caring responsibilities as a consequence of national lockdown.
- Changes in work allocation necessitated by the prioritisation of student facing activities, adoption of a blended learning approach and increased need for the provision of student support, which have impacted on workload and the ability of Probationers to spend time on other elements of their role.
- Changes in the workplace and external working environments that have made it harder for a Probationer to undertake or progress some aspects of their role; for example, closure of research facilities, inability to travel or the cancellation of conferences.
This guidance outlines how adjustments to objectives should be managed and the considerations for assessing the outcome for cases for progression and completion. The guidance does not change any part of the Probation process but instead focuses on how expectations and objectives can be adjusted to avoid detriment to Probationers impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The guidance outlines the role of the Probationer, Probation Adviser, Head of Department and Faculty Probation Panels in this process.

**Actions for Probationers**

**Ongoing review and adjustment of objectives**

Probationary objectives should be kept under regular review under normal circumstances, irrespective of the Covid-19 pandemic. Probationers who believe that their ability to work as normal has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic should proactively discuss this with their Probationary Adviser. They should explain the specific impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on their ability to fulfil or work towards their objectives. Such concerns should be raised with the Probationary Adviser to enable ongoing iterative discussion and to ensure that considerations of support and adjustments to objectives can be made in a timely manner.

**Annual Review**

The Probationer should participate in the annual review process as normal, reflecting on their progress over the past year and completing the ‘Probationers comments’ sections in the final ‘Progress Update Overview’ and ‘Milestones’ sections of the Probationary form before submitting to their Probationary Adviser/HoD in line with the University [Probation Procedure](#). If they have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic their comments should include details of the specific circumstances that they have experienced; the length of time this was in place; and the impact it had on their ability to undertake their normal academic duties or achieve their objectives. Examples are as follows:

- The specific circumstance(s) that they have experienced.

*Example* - “Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and specifically the closure of Schools, I have had significant additional childcare responsibility which has limited my ability to undertake parts of the role”

*Example* - “As a Level 1 Undergraduate Co-ordinator I have needed to spend approximately 60% of my working time in this role due to the pandemic. This was allocated to take 10% of my time.”
Example - “Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and closure of campus, I was unable to access the lab for a four-month period, significantly delaying my research”

• The length of time that the circumstance(s) was in place.

Example - “This additional childcare responsibility occurred from late March 2020 to the re-opening of School in June 2020.”

Example – “My teaching and leadership workload has increased throughout the pandemic and has taken an estimated average time of 60% between March 2020 to date”

• The impact it had on their ability to undertake their normal academic duties.

Example - “I was homeschooling for 2 days a week, making it extremely difficult to identify dedicated periods of time to undertake research and writing”

Example - “The additional workload has had a significant impact upon the ability to undertake research. I have lost approximately 30-40% of normal research time over this period as a result”

Example - “This has impacted on my ability to demonstrate the requirements under leadership.

Example - “As a result I have been unable to finalise a planned journal article(s) on …………..

**Actions for Probation Advisers**

**Ongoing review and adjustment of objectives**

The Probation Adviser should, together with the Probationer, review the current probationary objectives on an ongoing basis to ensure the Probationer is undertaking the key activities required to support the department and is able to broadly address the main areas of research, teaching and leadership across the probationary period. Any adjustment to workload should be undertaken through the usual departmental process for workload adjustments and include discussions with the HoD. All changes to the objectives should be recorded on the Probation form.

**Annual Review**

At the end of the academic year, in line with the University Probation Procedure, the Probation Adviser/HoD should undertake the annual review of Probation for the Probationer. The Probation Adviser/HoD will review progress against the Milestones
and the overall objectives in the Probationary Plan, and should ensure that there is a record on the probation form of where the Probationer has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, if applicable.

**Actions for HoDs**

**Annual Review**

In line with the University [Probation Procedure](#), following the annual review meeting the HoD should complete the Head of Department Review section, providing their assessment of the performance of the Probationer. The HoD should record:

- If, in the round, the Probationer has fulfilled the contribution expected of them by their department, considering the details of the achievements of the main elements of Probation, namely research, teaching and leadership.
- Ensure that the linkage to Covid-19 is legitimate and if the Probationer was on track to achieve the necessary level of achievements prior to March 2020; for example, a journal article has been submitted and internally reviewed as at a required quality but has not yet been reviewed by the Journal due to a delay in their reviewing processes.
- Consider the past performance by the Probationer (which may include the period prior to Probation) in each of the areas that have been affected, where applicable. If they have a successful track record of delivery, then this may indicate that the individual would have been expected to fulfil the objectives were it not for the impact of Covid-19.
- Recognise the impact on progress may be felt after the changes personal circumstances, workload or external environment have ended, and that there may be a legacy effect on performance which outlasts the time period of, for example, caring responsibilities, illness, closure of lab facilities or grant calls, due to a longer term impact on the pipeline of publications, grant submissions or professional standing.

**Actions for Faculty Probation Panels**

**Annual Review**

Faculty Probation Panels undertake an annual review of the progress of all Probationers, and approve the completion of Probation for those who have successfully met the requirements. If a Probation form cites the impact of Covid-19 on the Probationer to achieve an objective(s) then the panel should:
• Consider the comparable ways in which performance may be demonstrated. For example, this could be through demonstrating leadership through teaching contributions where other leadership roles have been unable to be progressed; research performance through internally reviewed articles where Journals have not assessed a submitted paper in normal timescales; teaching innovation shown through developing online material.

• Take account of past performance including the period prior to Probation when assessing if the Probationer meets the requirements and is able to demonstrate that they are working as an established academic. For example, this could be through publications or leadership roles undertaken with the benefits realised before the start of the probationary period.

• Look to assess if the Probationer has achieved the contribution expected of them by their department during the time period of Covid-19. For example, the Probationer may have carried a higher than normal teaching allocation, or a complex leadership role that has had a detrimental impact on their ability to undertake research or demonstrate professional standing.

• Where performance has been impacted by external factors outside of the Probationers control, for example, closure of lab facilities, reduced number of funding calls in their area, and lag times in the review of publications by journals, faculty panels should look to assess if the Probationer has achieved the contribution expected in the round and met the basic expectations in the core elements of Probation of research, teaching and leadership across the whole probationary period. This may include adjustments to expectations in terms of volume/quantity against specific objectives.

Provided the Probationer has met the basic expectations in the core elements of Probation of research, teaching and leadership across the Probationary period, it is expected that they would progress or complete Probation in the usual timescales.