Managing Employee Probation Periods

A probation period gives an employer and employee a structured opportunity to review suitability, training and support. It is a contractual arrangement, not a separate category of employment with fewer basic rights. Employers should define expectations and review progress before making decisions.

1. Set measurable expectations from day one

Explain the length of probation, review dates, training, expected skills, absence reporting rules and the possible outcomes. Check the employee's written terms. There is no general statutory requirement to have a probation period or a fixed maximum length.

Review point	What to record
Induction	Role duties, necessary policies, training and acknowledgement.
Midpoint check-in	Progress, practical examples, gaps and support offered.
Final review	Evidence against expectations, employee response and decision.
Extension if permitted	Reason, revised objectives, dates and contractual basis.

2. Address concerns while there is time to improve

Give prompt, specific feedback and reasonable support. Do not let the first conversation about poor performance occur at the final review. Consider whether disability, health or other protected factors require changes to the assessment or reasonable adjustments.

Example A | A review identifies a training gap

A new employee has difficulty with a site reporting procedure after four weeks. No supervised demonstration was included in induction.

Employer response: Arrange training and an observed follow-up, document the outcome and assess the employee against the clarified standard rather than failing probation immediately.

3. Make a lawful decision

Confirm whether probation is passed, extended under the relevant terms, or employment will end. Follow a fair process, explain the reasons and check notice, holiday and final pay. Discrimination, whistleblowing and other protected reasons can give rise to claims irrespective of short service.

4. Be precise about the 2027 legal change

Under the published Employment Rights Act timetable, the ordinary qualifying period for unfair-dismissal rights reduces to six months for dismissals from 1 January 2027. The new rule does not abolish probation periods, but employers should plan reviews with the applicable dismissal protections in mind.

How Assyst helps employers organise probation records

Assyst has a dedicated probation feature that allows employers to set the probation duration for each employee and retain reviews throughout the period. HR can record observations, recommendations, agreed actions and decisions as the probation progresses, including the final outcome. These records are held together in the employee's HR file, providing a clear history of what was considered and communicated. Access to sensitive employee information is controlled through HR permissions.

Discuss your workforce requirements with Assyst

Assyst Workforce Management is a workforce management platform for multi-site employers, bringing together HR and paperless onboarding, time and attendance, workforce scheduling, payroll calculations, task management and a mobile staff app. To find out more or discuss how Assyst could support your business, visit www.assyst.uk and contact us through the website.

Useful official sources

Acas — Probation periods
https://www.acas.org.uk/probation-periods

Acas — Dismissal during probation
https://www.acas.org.uk/probation-periods/dismissal

GOV.UK — Employment Rights Act implementation timetable
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-plan-to-make-work-pay-and-employment-rights-act/plan-to-make-work-pay-and-employment-rights-act-timeline-update

General guidance for employers in Great Britain, reviewed November 2026. Contract terms and individual circumstances may require professional advice.