

## 4. PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE MANAGEMENT OF PROBATION

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Although a paradigm shift has occurred in the philosophy underlying the contemporary utilisation of the probationary process in the Public Service, the findings and proposals contained in this report, which stem from the era immediately prior to the adoption of the new Public Service Regulations, are still highly relevant. What is now no longer applicable to the probationary period in terms of the new regulatory framework, has however not fallen by the wayside and is still of paramount importance. It needs to be emphasised that human resource management practices are interrelated and that the various practices represent building blocks. Human resource management, of which the probationary process represents a small but important part, must not be approached indifferently.

### 4.2 AMENDMENT OF PRESCRIPTS ON THE DURATION OF THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD

#### Departments prefer a longer probationary period

Given the current ineffective management of the probationary process and the notable absence of purpose-designed policy as well as training and orientation programmes, departments' preference for a probationary period of up to 12 months is understandable. It also explains departments' need for a guide or code of practice.

#### Practical considerations lend support to departments' preference

Practical considerations obviously also play a part in the expressed preference. Sufficient time is required for the evaluation of performance and for probationers to improve their performance. In some cases the successful completion of specific training courses spanning over a number of months as a prerequisite for confirmation of appointment in certain occupational classes, also needs to be considered. However, within the new legislative framework a shift in emphasis has taken place. The probationary period is no longer viewed as an apprenticeship period. It is now viewed as a period during which broad orientation takes place and where confirma-

tion is obtained that the new appointee does in fact possess the necessary qualities to be successfully employed. It also affords the new appointee the opportunity to consider whether his/her choice of career and employer were correct.

Although probation is no longer regarded as an apprenticeship period, the fact remains that the concept of being empowered optimally in developmental terms, as the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education emphasises, is regarded as a career-long exercise. Training and development do not only extend far beyond the probationary period, but it is crucial to acknowledge that the notion of life-long training and development is actually set in motion in a purposeful and meaningful manner during the probationary period. For the probationary period to be managed appropriately, this needs to be thoroughly inculcated.

#### Prescripts need to be amended

It is therefore proposed that the Department of Public Service and Administration -

- obtain Cabinet's approval to deviate from the prescripts contained in the White Paper on Human Resource Management, i.e. not to limit the probationary period to six months as called for by the White Paper;
- retain the current wording of section 13(2)(a) of the Public Service Laws Amendment Act, 1997, since departments are generally in favour of a longer probationary period; and
- amend the Public Service Regulations to bring the provisions contained therein in line with section 13(2)(a) of the Public Service Laws Amendment Act, 1997, i.e. to reiterate the duration of the probationary period so as to leave no room for doubt.

### 4.3 MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION ON PERSAL

#### Management of PERSAL information needs attention

Since departments are solely responsible for the

administration of information on the PERSAL system, it is proposed that they establish and address both the extent and the real cause of the incomplete and incorrect human resource data currently captured on PERSAL.

The current insufficient recording of reasons for transfers does not allow for a distinction between transfers as a result of rotation, poor performance, wrongful placement, restructuring, etc. It is proposed that this be addressed by the PERSAL Component in National Treasury.

It is further proposed that the PERSAL Component conduct a training needs survey in respect of PERSAL users to address this matter from a training perspective.

#### **Information on PERSAL needs to be utilised**

As a result of the incomplete and inaccurate state of PERSAL data on probationary appointments, a program was developed by the PERSAL Component to assist the Commission with the extraction of information on probation from the system. It is proposed that departments utilise this program in order to monitor the management of probation in future.

#### **PERSAL information requires updating**

In order to timeously identify and address shortcomings in the management of probation, it is proposed that departments monitor this on a regular basis by utilising the following information on PERSAL:

- Extensions of the probationary period, the time periods involved and the reasons
- Probationers' performance and an indication of possible problem areas and developmental needs
- The type and frequency of movements that take place amongst probationers and the reasons
- The type and intensity of training received during the probationary period.

#### **4.4 DEVELOPING DEPARTMENTAL POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF PROBATION**

##### **Implications of poor policy or a lack of policy**

The investigation revealed that where departments do not have a departmental policy on probation, much

uncertainty exists about what has to be done and by whom. Consequently probationers are not utilised and trained optimally. This not only undermines probationers' confidence, but also negatively affects their morale. Low morale may contribute to an increase in personnel turnover, which is a costly exercise in view of present-day recruitment and resettlement costs and hidden costs such as poor productivity.

In addition to the foregoing, it is also important to consider that there can hardly be a link between important strategic service delivery and human resource management objectives if these are not covered by emphatic and unequivocal policy statements and procedures.

#### **Policy needs to be developed**

To ensure that probation is managed in a professional manner so as to provide the Public Service with competent and confident new appointees, it is proposed that the following matters be addressed as a matter of urgency by the departments:

- Departmental policy on probation needs to be developed to address at least the following:
  - Defining objectives with the management of probation with due regard to service delivery objectives
  - Incorporating the human resource management principles contained in all applicable White Papers
  - Standardising on fair and equitable processes and procedures
  - Allocating responsibility to all key role-players
  - Providing formally structured orientation and in-service training programmes
  - Providing mentoring techniques
  - Ensuring that ongoing assessment of probationers' performance and progress takes place
  - Ensuring that the management of probation as well as the processes and procedures involved are monitored.



- Departments should also ensure that organised labour is fully involved in the development of such policy
- Managers and supervisors must be fully conversant with departmental policy.
- Additional control measures must be introduced to ensure that managers and supervisors adhere to existing procedures and processes. This can typically be taken care of by -
  - establishing standard procedures to be adhered to,
  - monitoring that the above procedures are adhered to,
  - establishing a utilisation and development programme for probationers,
  - monitoring adherence to the foregoing programmes,
  - formalising quarterly assessments to be handed in at departmental Personnel Offices,
  - monitoring whether these are handled appropriately and are handed in, and
  - monitoring the recording of data on PERSAL.
- Departmental Personnel Offices should oversee the foregoing and conduct the monitoring as indicated.

#### 4.5 CAPACITY-BUILDING OF PROBATIONERS

##### Training of probationers needs attention

In order to effectively address the capacity-building of probationers, departments need to pay attention to the following:

- The updating of job descriptions/duty sheets for all posts in consultation with organised labour
- Defining minimum standards (quality and quantity) of training in cases where they do not exist and introducing control measures to ensure adherence to the standards that do exist

- Defining training objectives, providing orientation and in-service training as well as other forms of training
- Embarking on a training needs analysis in respect of in-service training and addressing such training needs
- Introducing a process at departmental level whereby the effectiveness of capacity-building is evaluated on an ongoing basis.

##### Training of supervisors needs attention

- Supervisors ought to be trained in the basic skills of training and they should be educated on the importance of structured utilisation and development programmes, the ongoing assessment of performance, updated job descriptions and the value and methodology of mentoring.
- Supervisors also need to be made aware of the crucial role that they have to fulfil in the development of their subordinates, especially new appointees.

#### 4.6 MONITORING PROBATION AS A PROCESS

##### Self-monitoring is required

In order to enhance the management of probation departments need to pay attention to the following:

- Establishing departmental policy and procedures to regulate the management of probation
- Establishing a structured probationary process with due regard to its main constituent elements, viz. orientation, performance-monitoring and corrective/supportive actions such as mentoring and training
- Consulting with organised labour
- Ensuring that the information on PERSAL in respect of probation is administered correctly and updated regularly
- Establishing specific procedures to ensure that the monitoring of processes and procedures is put into effect.

##### Monitoring of capacity-building is required

In order to ensure that orientation, in-service training

and the day-to-day guidance of new appointees are placed on a meaningful platform, departments ought to continually monitor performance, training needs and training outcomes.

#### **4.7 PROVIDING A CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE**

The Department of Public Service and Administration should, as a matter of priority, establish a code of good practice in respect of the management of probation. There is not only a need for this, but an actual desire by departments to obtain such guidelines to assist them with their policy development and the management of probation.

