



University of
St Andrews

Probation Policy

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- British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact us via the online BSL Video Relay Interpreting Service: <https://contactscotland-bsl.org>
- This document and forms associated with this document are available in an alternative format upon request.
- We encourage employees to access the [Probation webpage](#) to access FAQs regarding the probation process, and download the forms referred to in this policy.

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1. Statement

- 1.1 All employees appointed to the University are required to complete a probation period. The [length of the probation period](#) is defined by the post and is confirmed in the contract of employment.
- 1.2 The person responsible for the management of probation will vary between Schools and Units. Throughout this policy, this person will be referred to as the “probation manager”.
- 1.3 The probation manager must be confirmed with the employee at the outset of the probation and will normally be aligned with the table below.

| Employees on probation | Probation manager |
|--|---|
| Professional services staff | Team Leader / Supervisor / Line Manager |
| Teaching, research and education-focused staff | Head of School |
| Academic Researchers | Principal Investigators (PIs) |

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The probation period allows the employee and the probation manager a trial period to assess the employee’s suitability in the role, and whether they can fulfil the requirements of the role. The process does not seek perfection but is required to evidence that employees can meet expected standards, including performance, conduct, behaviour, capability, attendance, and demonstrable competence in the role.
- 2.2 The probation period also allows the employee to assess the suitability of the role, the institution, and the accuracy of advertised responsibilities and values.
- 2.3 If performance or conduct reaches the required standard at the end of the probation period, the employment will be confirmed.
- 2.4 Where the performance or conduct does not reach the required standard, the probation may be extended, or the contract of employment may be terminated, as per [section 9.3](#).

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all employees who commence employment with the University on **1 March 2023 and thereafter** and employees who agreed to transfer on to the new probation terms from 01/03/23.
- 3.2 **Employees who move into another role/have a change to their contractual terms during their probation**
- If an employee secures a new position in the University (or has a change to their contractual terms, e.g., an extension to their fixed-term contract, or their contract is made standard) during their probation, the probation will continue in the new role/contract.
 - Objectives must be revised in accordance with any new role.

- Where the employee moves into a role with a longer probation period, the time served in the initial role will usually be deducted from the probation length. The probation manager may extend the probation period to allow sufficient time to assess the employee's suitability in the new role.

3.3 **Employees who move into another role/have a change to their contractual terms after their probation**

- This policy does not apply to employees who have successfully passed a probation period with the University, and who then move internally between roles (or has a change to their contractual terms, e.g., an extension to their fixed-term contract, or their contract is made standard). Instead, the employee will set objectives in line with the applicable review and development policy ([ARDS for Academic staff/RDS for Professional Services staff](#)), and any performance concerns will be managed in line with the [Capability policy](#).

3.4 **Employees on Fixed Term Contracts**

- This policy will apply to fixed-term employees irrespective of the length of their contract, recognising that fixed-term contracts may be extended (e.g., if an employee is employed on a 6-month fixed term contract, in a role with a 12-month probation period: the 12-month probation period will be confirmed in the contract of employment allowing probation to continue if the contract is extended).

4. **General principles**

- The first day of employment will signify the start of the probation period.
- Probation should be monitored via regular review meetings between the employee and the probation manager, in line with timings described in [section 8.2](#).
- The process should allow for two-way dialogue between the probation manager and the employee.
- [HR Probation](#) will write to the probation manager at least 6 weeks before the end of the probation period as a reminder that the probation period is due to end. (For grades 1 and 2, this reminder will be sent at 4-weeks due to a much shorter probation length).
- Probation will only be deemed successfully completed once HR issue official confirmation to the employee, as per [section 9](#).

5. **Responsibilities**

5.1 **Probation Manager**

5.1.1 The Probation Manager must:

- Ensure that the employee is properly informed at the start of their employment about what is expected of them during probation (e.g. the required job outputs and standards of conduct, behaviour and performance).
- Develop suitable probation objectives/actions for the employee to work towards during their probation, and document these using the relevant probation review form (which can be accessed on the [probation webpage](#)).
- Identify and discuss with the employee any relevant training/coaching (including [mandatory training](#)).

- Discuss expectations and progress with the employee during probation review meetings.
- Engage and seek objective feedback from individuals who work closely with the employee, to ensure a full evaluation of performance during the probation period.
- Ensure review meetings take place throughout the probation period, and schedule these meetings in advance (ideally at the start of the probation period), while also ensuring that the employee is given reasonable notice.
- Provide constructive feedback to the employee throughout the probation period.
- Document performance against objectives using the relevant probation review form and share with the employee. **Note:** forms should include any necessary actions, improvements, outcomes and agreed timelines.
- Identify and highlight any concerns with the employee at the earliest opportunity (i.e., not wait for a scheduled review meeting, or the end of probation to raise this).
- Where performance shortfalls are identified, provide support and guidance to the employee: establish any available training/coaching required; allow the employee a reasonable period to demonstrate improvement.
- Seek support and advice from their [HR Business Partner \(HRBP\)](#) at any time throughout the probation process.
- Conduct the final probation review meeting **prior to the end of the probation period**, as per [8.5](#).
- notify [HR probation](#) of the probation outcome on completion of the final probation review. **Note:** This action must be completed promptly and before the end of the probation to avoid delays in notifying the employee of the outcome, and ensure all contractual terms are accurately reflected as per [section 9](#).

5.1.2 The University recognises that probation is of high importance for all employees. **All employees must be probated adequately.** Failure to manage probation in accordance with this policy, will be escalated to the Head of School/Unit, or a member of the PO.

5.2 Employee

5.2.1 The employee must:

- Ensure that they understand what is expected of them during probation.
- Ask questions if they are unsure about anything during probation.
- Prepare for (and openly participate in) probation review meetings e.g., consider successes/barriers on performance to date.
- Proactively identify and request training/coaching that would assist in learning the role/successfully achieving the probation objectives.
- Complete all [mandatory training](#) during the probation period.
- Raise any concerns regarding the management of probation with their probation manager. If the employee deems it more appropriate, they can request to confidentially discuss the concerns with their [HRBP](#), or with someone from the University support services listed in [Appendix A](#).

6. Length of probation periods

6.1 The probation period is determined by the role and will be stated in the contract of employment. The length of the probation period will normally be as detailed in the table below, but may vary in exceptional circumstances as per [6.2](#).

| Grade | Probation length |
|---------------|------------------|
| 1 and 2 | 3 months |
| 3, 4 and 5 | 6 months |
| 6, 7, 8 and 9 | 12 months |

6.2 Change to the length of the probation period

6.2.1 There may be factors that alter the length of the probation period, (which are not due to the reasons outlined in [section 10](#) - Extending a probation period). These factors are not exhaustive, and may include:

- **A reduced probation period** (e.g., where evidence is provided that the employee has met the standards expected as per [2.1](#), in advance of the probation end date). Any reduction to probation requirements must be agreed with the [HRBP](#).
- **An extended probation period** providing the employee the full amount of time to complete their probation period. For example:
 - An employee on a term-time contract may not complete their probation period before their scheduled term-time leave. The probation period will pause during the leave, and resume on the employee's return to work.
 - An employee has periods during the probation where they are not working or are on reduced hours (e.g., long-term sickness, as a reasonable adjustment, chronic illness or disability, family leave, bereavement, furlough, or periods of reduced service). In these instances, the probation will pause during the leave, and resume on the employee's return to work.

Note: Probation length adjustment is not an automatic process. It is the probation manager's responsibility to notify [HR probation](#), (copying in their [HRBP](#)) of the details and rationale for the length adjustment in advance of the probation end date.

7. Notice period during probation

7.1 Notice period is as outlined in the contract of employment. Ordinarily, these periods are set in accordance with the University's [Conditions of employment guidance](#).

8. The probation process (informal stage)

8.1 What should happen at the start of the probation period?

8.1.1 The probation manager is responsible for setting clear standards/objectives, in keeping with their School/Unit objectives, at the start of probation, to ensure that the employee knows what is expected of them. This should include:

- Clear job outputs, (e.g., what the employee is expected to achieve during/by the end of the probation period).
- The standards of performance required in respect of the job duties.
- The metrics against which the employee's performance will be measured.
- The standards of behaviour, collegiality and conduct expected while working at the University.
- Required development/training activities to be completed within the probation period, including relevant [mandatory training](#).

8.1.2 The probation manager should meet with the employee at the start of their probation to discuss the above points and agree the objectives and required standards. The meeting should occur within the **first 2 weeks of the start date**. Objectives should be clearly documented on the relevant probation review form and shared with the employee, enabling them to evidence progress against objectives, and plan for probation review meetings.

8.2 How often should a probation review meeting take place?

8.2.1 Probation review meetings should ideally reflect the structure detailed in the table below. However, the probation manager or employee may require to schedule additional meetings (e.g., if there are concerns regarding the employee's performance or wellbeing or additional support is required).

| Probation meetings | Timing |
|--|---|
| Induction meeting (objective setting) | End of week 2 at the latest |
| Review meetings | At least every 2 to 3 months. <i>For probation durations that last 3-months in total, the probation review should take place roughly every 4-weeks (after the induction meeting).</i> |
| Final probation review | At least 2-weeks before the probation end date. * |

8.2.2 Probation reviews should take place **in addition to** regular informal catch-up meetings with the employee.

8.3 What should be discussed at a probation review meeting?

8.3.1 The probation review meeting should aim to:

- Highlight areas where the employee is doing well.
- Review progress against the role's required standards/objectives, discuss and record specific examples of performance/conduct.
- Review training/coaching/mentoring undertaken during the probation period.
- Clearly outline any areas where the employee is performing below the required standard; provide constructive feedback as appropriate.
- Discuss other relevant matters such as timekeeping, attendance, and general conduct.
- Enable the employee to raise points/questions/concerns about any aspect(s) of their employment.
- Discuss progress on a one-to-one and confidential basis.

Note: The probation manager may need to invite another person to probation review meetings (e.g., a supervisor/team leader or mentor), if they are closer to the performance of the employee. In these cases, the probation manager will seek prior agreement from the employee.

8.3.2 At the end of each review meeting, the probation manager should agree an action plan with the employee, to clarify expectations, and what will be assessed/discussed at the next review meeting.

8.3.3 Probation managers should document the outcome of each review meeting/action plans on the relevant probation review form and share with the employee for review and comment.

Note: There is a specific probation review form for Professional Services staff, and another one for Academic staff. These forms can be accessed from the [probation webpage](#).

8.3.4 Probation managers must take reasonable steps to ensure that all probation documentation is kept secure and confidential whilst it is in their possession (e.g., secure folder on the shared drive, or locked in a cabinet).

8.4 Serious concerns during the probation period

8.4.1 It may not be appropriate to wait until the end of the probation period to address situations where there is sufficient evidence/serious concern(s) that the employee is unsuitable for the role. Employment may be terminated at any stage during the probation period if:

- Standards/requirements are not met (or are unlikely to be met).
- There are serious concerns/evidence of misconduct.
- The employee refuses to undertake training/coaching without reasonable explanation.

8.4.2 The probation manager must consult with their [HRBP](#) as soon as possible to discuss the case before any decision is made on next steps.

8.4.3 If it is decided that formal action should be taken prior to the end of the probation period, the employee will receive an invitation letter to attend a hearing. The process will follow the steps outlined in [section 11](#). The outcome of this meeting can potentially be early termination of employment.

8.4.4 If a sufficiently serious matter requires investigation, the employee may be suspended with full pay whilst the investigation is in progress. The University's [Disciplinary procedure](#) details the suspension process that would be followed in this instance.

8.5 What happens at the final review meeting?

8.5.1 The probation manager must schedule a final review meeting with the employee **at least 2 weeks before the probation end date** (unless there are serious concerns which should be reviewed earlier in the process, as per section [8.4](#)).

8.5.2 The final probation review meeting will allow the probation manager and employee to discuss the points stated in [8.3](#) and:

- Establish how the employee feels about their employment in general.
- Confirm the outcome of the probation period ([section 9](#)).

9. Probation outcomes

9.1 The probation manager must notify [HR probation](#) of the outcome on completion of the final probation review, **at least 2 weeks before the probation end date**. This email should include the completed probation review forms.

Note: not notifying by this deadline may delay HR notifying the employee of the outcome. If HR do not receive confirmation of the probation outcome by the probation end date, this will be escalated to the Head of School/Unit or PO.

9.2 Probation is successful

9.2.1 If the probation manager is satisfied that the employee has met the required standards/objectives, they must confirm this to the employee at the final probation review and:

- Conclude that the employee will receive written confirmation of their appointment.
- Explain how performance will be managed going forwards (e.g., [ARDS/RDS](#), regular one-to-one meetings). Probation managers may take this opportunity to agree/set objectives with the employee for assessment at the next ARDS/RDS review point.)

9.2.2 The probation manager should submit all probation documentation to [HR Probation](#) and destroy any duplicate copies (including digital copies).

9.2.3 Upon receipt of all necessary probation documentation, [HR Probation](#) will email the employee to confirm their appointment.

9.3 Probation is unsuccessful

9.3.1 If the probation manager deems that the employee's performance or conduct has not met the required standard, they must:

- Contact their [HRBP](#) to explore options and agree next steps **prior to conducting the final probation review**. Next steps may include extending a probationary period ([section 10](#)), or inviting the employee to a formal probation hearing ([section 11](#)).

9.3.2 After discussing the matter with the HRBP, the probation manager should:

- Conduct the final probation meeting with the employee, to explain/provide examples of where progress has not met the required standards and confirm next steps.
- Conclude that the employee will receive written confirmation from HR that their probation has been extended ([section 10](#)), or that they will be invited to a formal probation hearing ([section 11](#)).

9.3.3 The probation manager should inform [HR Probation](#) that the probation has been unsuccessful, submit all probation documentation, and destroy any duplicate copies (including digital copies).

10. Extending a probation period

10.1 An extension should normally be sought only where there are special circumstances justifying it and should last no longer than 3 months. Reasons for extending a probation period may include:

- The employee's performance has improved, however not to the level required at this stage.
- The employee has not managed to complete the required training/development in the role (e.g., due to staff absence), and an extension will allow that to take place.
- Certain duties are cyclical and cannot be assessed during the probation period.

10.2 A probation will normally only be extended once. **Note:** Extenuating factors (as outlined in [6.2](#)) will not be treated as an extension to probation.

- 10.3 When confirming the outcome to [HR Probation](#), the probation manager must provide the following details to include in the extension confirmation email:
- How long the extension will last
 - The probation extension end date
 - Rationale for the extension
- 10.4 The probation manager must set out the terms of the extension in writing to the employee using the probation extension form (this will be issued to the probation manager from HR Probation), copying in the HRBP for awareness/to provide support. The terms of the extension should clearly state:
- The date on which the extended period of probation will end
 - The performance standards/objectives that the employee is required to demonstrate by the end of the extension
 - Any support, such as further training, that will be provided/explored during the extension
- 10.5 The employee must meet the terms of the extension for the appointment to be confirmed.
- 10.6 During a probation extension, regular review meetings should be arranged to review performance and conduct (see [8.3](#) for guidance). The probation manager should remind the employee of the potential outcomes should the employee not reach the required standards during the extended probation period (i.e., invite to a formal probation hearing).
- 10.7 **At the final probation extension review, the probation manager must:**
- 10.7.1 If the probation extension has been **successful**:
- Confirm this to the employee by following the guidance in section [9.2](#).
 - Confirm the outcome and submit all documentation (probation review forms and probation extension form) to [HR Probation](#) (copying in the HRBP).
- 10.7.2 If the probation extension has been **unsuccessful**:
- Discuss with the [HRBP](#), who will advise on next steps (e.g., progressing to a formal probation hearing).
 - Confirm the outcome and submit all documentation (probation review forms and probation extension form to [HR Probation](#), copying in the HRBP).
- 11. The probation hearing (formal stage)**
- 11.1 Evidence gathering**
- 11.1.1 The employee will be invited to a formal probation hearing if:
- Their performance or conduct is unsatisfactory, and it is clear that further training/support is unlikely to alter the situation
 - Their performance/conduct has not adequately improved during an extension
 - For any other substantial reason(s), the employee is judged unsuitable to be confirmed in post

Note: The outcome of the formal probation hearing may be termination of employment.

11.1.2 The probation manager must set out the reasons why they deem the probation to have been unsuccessful and submit this to the [HRBP](#) along with any relevant/appropriate evidence. Evidence will normally include:

- A copy of the completed probation review form/probation extension document
- Details of support, advice and training provided
- Documented examples of where the performance/conduct, or other matters (e.g. absence) was below the required standard
- Documentation of unsuccessful steps that have been taken to improve the situation

11.2 Invitation to a probation hearing

11.2.1 On receipt of the relevant evidence ([11.1](#)), HR will invite the employee to a probation hearing, usually by email. The invitation will indicate:

- Details of the hearing (date, time, location and whether in person or online)
- The right to be accompanied (by a work colleague or Trade Union representative)
- A summary of reasons for the hearing
- Who will conduct the hearing (The Chair)

Note: The Chair should be impartial, objective, have no substantial conflict of interest, nor prior substantial involvement in the case.

11.2.2 The employee will receive the papers that will be discussed at the hearing, usually with the invitation letter. Typically, papers will comprise the documents outlined in [11.1.2](#).

11.2.3 The employee will have at least **7 working days' notice** to attend the hearing (on receipt of the probation papers). The University recognises that involvement in a probation matter can be difficult and stressful and therefore, if an employee requests to waiver their notice period, the Chair will endeavour to hold the hearing sooner than 7 working days, if diaries allow.

11.3 The probation hearing

11.3.1 The Chair will conduct the hearing, and a member of HR will attend to provide support and guidance.

11.3.2 At the hearing, the Chair will summarise the meeting papers and give the employee the opportunity to:

- Present their case
- Respond to the reasons provided by the probation manager
- Outline any mitigating circumstances before a final decision is reached

11.3.3 The Chair may deem it necessary to carry out further investigation after the probation hearing. As part of the investigation, the Chair may request a meeting with the probation manager to clarify why they deem the probation to be unsuccessful. In many cases, the documented evidence provided for the hearing may be sufficient.

11.3.4 The person accompanying the employee (e.g., colleague or Trade Union representative) is entitled to advise the employee, address the hearing, and ask questions. However, they are not entitled to answer questions on the employee's behalf.

11.3.5 The University does not permit the making of electronic or digital recordings of meetings or telephone calls without all-party consent (unless required and approved as a reasonable adjustment on grounds of disability). Further information on the recording of meetings can be found in the [Guidelines on Recording of Meetings involving University Staff and Students](#).

11.4 Outcome of a probation hearing

11.4.1 When all the evidence has been heard, the Chair will adjourn the hearing to consider the decision which will be confirmed in writing to the employee, usually electronically, and within 10 working days of the hearing.

11.4.2 The University recognises that involvement in a probation matter can be difficult and stressful therefore, if diaries allow, decisions will be communicated as soon as possible after they are taken.

11.4.2 The authority of the Chair is to make one of the following judgements:

- Resume the probation period (where appropriate) or confirm the appointment
- Extend the probation period, ensuring the employee is provided with clear terms
- Dismiss the employee: depending on circumstances this will either be with or without notice/payment in lieu of notice

Note: This list is not exhaustive and only gives an indication of possible outcomes the University might reach. Any alternative proposals are subject to approval by the Director of Human Resources.

11.4.3 Where the decision has been made to issue a formal sanction (e.g., terminate the employee's contract), the employee will have the right to appeal ([11.5](#)), which will be confirmed in the outcome letter.

11.5 Right to appeal

11.5.1 If an employee feels a decision is wrong or unjust, they can appeal via the University's appeals process. The appeal should be addressed to the [Director of HR](#) in writing, within 10 working days of the outcome letter's issue date. Appeals must clearly confirm the grounds for the appeal (i.e., reasons why the employee is dissatisfied with the outcome).

11.5.2 The employee will be sent written confirmation that the University has received the appeal. HR will arrange for an appropriate person to hear the appeal. This person will be known as the "appeal manager" and will normally be in a more senior position than the Chair who made the original outcome. A member of HR will attend to provide support and guidance to the appeal manager. These individuals should have no substantial conflict of interest, nor prior substantial involvement in the case.

11.5.3 The appeal manager will consider whether the reasons for recommending dismissal (or other formal outcome) are reasonable/supportable, and will consider any evidence from the employee. The appeal manager may request further information/evidence, and may wish to meet with the employee, the probation manager, the original Chair, and other relevant parties, where appropriate.

- 11.5.4 Entitlements and timings for formal appeal hearings reflect the formal probation proceedings outlined in [11.2](#) (e.g., right to be accompanied, right to 7 working days' notice to attend the hearing).
- 11.5.5 The employee will be notified of the outcome of their appeal in writing, usually electronically, without unreasonable delay. The decision following appeal is final and there will be no further internal right of appeal.

12. Support and advice

- 12.1 The University recognises that individuals who are required to participate in probation/other formal processes may feel anxious and upset and is committed to providing support and assistance. [Appendix A](#) provides a list of internal support available to employees.
- 12.2 If employees feel the process is causing them to feel unwell, they can seek support and advice from [Occupational Health](#). In line with the management referral process, probation managers can request referral to Occupational Health if an employee is showing signs of distress and upset.

13. Version control

- 13.1 This policy will be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure continuing suitability for organisational needs. Employees should raise any questions, concerns and/or request changes to the policy through their [HRBP](#) in the first instance, or the support services outlined in [Appendix A](#).

| Version number | Purpose / changes | Document status | Author of changes, role and school / unit | Date |
|----------------|--|-----------------|---|------------|
| 1.0 | Migration of policy to the Governance Zone. | Published | Lisa Stewart Human Resources | 27/06/2019 |
| 2.0 | Major review of the policy: Change to process and length of probation periods for Grade 5 and above. | Published | Lisa Stewart HR | 01/03/2023 |
| 2.1 | Amending broken links only. | Published | Lisa Stewart HR | 23/04/2024 |
| 2.2 | Remove reference to previous probation and ARDS policy only. | Published | Lisa Stewart HR | 01/05/2024 |
| 2.3 | Amending the expiry date only to coincide with policy review consultation dates. | Published | Lisa Stewart HR | 04/07/2024 |

Appendix A: Internal support contacts

| Name of Department | Contact details | Service provided |
|--|---|--|
| Chaplaincy | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/chaplaincy/ chaplaincy@st-andrews.ac.uk 01334 462866 or 462492 | Offers pastoral care and support for any employee, regardless of religion or belief (including non-belief). This includes sympathetic, confidential listening and a safe place to talk to someone about any issues affecting health and wellbeing. |
| Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/hr/edi/ diversity@st-andrews.ac.uk 01334 461649 | Provides a confidential service of advice to members of the University community (staff, students, visitors) on any aspect of EDI. |
| Human Resources | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/hr/ hr.general@st-andrews.ac.uk (general email enquiries) 01334 463096 | Provides support to employees of University of St Andrews. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR web and policy page • Dedicated HR Business Partner team for each School and Unit |
| Mediation | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/mediation/ mediation@st-andrews.ac.uk | The Mediation Service is a service for all staff and students and members of the public who are connected to the University who want to resolve disagreement informally. |
| Occupational Health | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/ehss/occupation/health/ 01334 462750/2752 occhealth@st-andrews.ac.uk | Employees can refer themselves to OH for confidential health advice at any time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-to-one consultation/ appointments • Expert support and advice • Recommended adjustments to support the employee • Partnership with external health practitioners i.e., counselling services and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). |
| OSDS | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/osds/ 01334 467198 Email: osds@st-andrews.ac.uk | Organisational and Staff Development Services (OSDS) is the University's central provider of professional development for all University staff and is also responsible for a wide range of organisational development projects and initiatives. |
| Trade Union Representatives | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/workplace-wellbeing/ | Trade union representatives are trained to deal and support employees with any workplace related matters of concern. |
| Wellbeing Officer/Director (Schools) Wellbeing Champion (Units) | https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/wellbeing-officers/ wellbeingforstaff@st-andrews.ac.uk | The Wellbeing Officer/Director, or Champion can signpost available resources, services and activities to colleagues. The role is not intended to act as a health/wellbeing practitioner or to tackle individual health/wellbeing issues. |