



Thinking Schools Academy Trust “Transforming Life Chances” Professional Growth Policy

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Sep 21	1	This policy was adopted following consultation with recognised trade unions
Sep 25	2	The policy was reviewed for use in 2025-2026 with decoupling of pay decisions and changes to schedule/dates
Dec 25	2	Formatting of policy

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1. Why do we have this policy?

1.1. This policy sets out a framework for a clear and consistent approach for the professional development of all employees working for Thinking Schools Academy Trust (from this point known as the Trust). This framework aligns to the Academy's plan for improving educational provision and performance, and the standards expected of teachers and support (TSFE teams – separated policy). Unless evidence suggests otherwise, we assume that all staff are meeting the standards of their role.

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Should an individual not meet these standards, arrangements to support improvement are also included in this document. More serious concerns are addressed outside of this through the Capability Procedure.

2. Who does this policy apply to?

2.1. The Professional Growth Policy is for all employees working within an Academy managed by the Trust with the exception of those Employees on contracts of less than one term, those undergoing induction (i.e. NQTs), and those who are subject to the Capability Procedure which sits outside the scope of this policy. This document can be found on Our Trust website.

3. Principles

3.1. Our approach to Professional Growth is to create a more reflective, supportive and consistent approach, helping staff to be their best selves, and ultimately help our student/pupils to achieve the best possible outcomes. We believe that the professional development of our staff should be a positive and engaging process.

Professional Growth is more than meetings and measures; it is a continuous process of:

- Recognising and promoting a culture of professional dialogue and development
- Identifying and acknowledging iterative progress through regular reflection
- Mastering the skills that are core to an individual's success in their role through creating opportunities for learning, experimenting and practicing.
- Supporting staff to own and lead their professional development and learning
- Interacting and collaborating with colleagues to gain perspectives, support, exchange feedback and learning

3.2. We aim to build trust with staff irrespective of role. We work from the assumption that, unless evidence is noted to the contrary, an employee is delivering to the standards of their role. The objectives that are agreed should support the ambitions of the Trust, School and also the professional development of the individual setting them.

3.3. We recognise that in order to deliver the best outcomes for our student/pupils or customers we must invest in our staff development including seeking staff views on their needs and providing CPD opportunities through our Professional Development programmes.

3.4. Professional Growth focusses on the progress made against key priorities agreed, with appropriate support, in addition to assessing and recognising overall performance in the job against any relevant standards/accountabilities.

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- 3.5. The process of Professional Growth will be carried out in accordance with this policy, which is underpinned by the statutory regulations for teachers and local agreements for support staff.
- 3.6. The Governing Body, Executive Team, Senior Management Team and Headteacher/Principal will monitor the operation and effectiveness of the Academy's or Central Team's Professional Growth processes including carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 3.7. The Professional Growth process will be treated with confidentiality. Normally only the reviewer, reviewee and the Headteacher/Principal or SMT Member will have access to development information and documentation relating to the reviewee.
- 3.8. However, to support moderation of objectives, records may be shared with members of the Senior Leadership Team.
- 3.9. In the event of an Ofsted inspection taking place, Ofsted inspectors may request that anonymised information about the Academy's Professional Growth arrangements. Governors may also request an anonymised sample of Professional Growth reflections to enable them to perform their role in monitoring the effectiveness of the Academy's approach.
- 3.10. The Governing Body, Headteacher/Principal or SMT Member will ensure that all written Professional Growth records are retained securely for six years and then destroyed in line with GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- 3.11. Where an employee's performance is affected by a health problem and/or sickness absence, the matter will normally be dealt with in accordance with the Academy's Absence Policy and Procedure. This can be found on the TSAT website and intranet. This is likely to lead to a referral to Occupational Health in order to assess the Employee's fitness for work and offer appropriate support.

4. Professional Growth Process

- 4.1. The Professional Growth Process for all employees will run for twelve months. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the process and date schedule.
- 4.2. Fortnightly 'Check Ins' will take place using 'Think Ahead' software accessible via the Intranet link or Teams link to Weekly 10/Sensei – Think Ahead provider. These are short online opportunities for progress to be noted, feedback to be shared and provide a body of supporting information for face-to-face discussions. Sufficient CPD time will be provided to do this, and these conversations take part via an online platform to reduce the need to meet in real time. The aim of these touch points is to support more regular dialogue about performance, allow smaller shifts in performance to be acknowledged and truly support professional development to be continuous.

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4.3. Employees who are employed on a fixed-term contract of less than one year will approach their professional development in line with the principles underpinning this policy. The length of the period will be determined by the duration of their contract.

NB: The Professional Growth process will no longer link to the pay arrangements for employees (from 2025/26 cycle onwards).

5. Reviewers

5.1. The Headteacher/Principal's Professional Growth will be discussed and agreed with the Governing Body, supported by a suitably skilled adviser. This is normally the Chief Executive (CEO), or a person nominated by this person.

5.2. In this Trust the task of agreeing Professional Growth objectives for the Headteacher/Principal will be delegated to a sub-group consisting of members of the Governing Body. The appointed governors will be known as the Professional Growth Committee (PGC).

The CEO retains the right to be a member of the PGC.

5.3. The Headteacher/Principal or SMT Member will decide who will review other teachers, support staff or Central Services staff, however this will normally be the employee's line manager. The Headteacher/Principal has the discretion to delegate the review process to other Employees who will normally be line managers. Reviewers will have the necessary knowledge and training in order to undertake this role.

5.4. Where performance concerns arise (see section 7), the Headteacher/Principal or SMT Member may redelegate the reviewer role to a senior manager or undertake the role of reviewer themselves.

5.5. The line manager is an individual or group that have been recognised and appropriately trained by the Trust with responsibility of conducting the performance management on the member of staff.

Reviewee	Reviewer
CEO	Board
Executive	CEO, COO (Deputy CEO) & Board
Head	Executive & AAB
All other school staff	As directed by the Head
All other trust staff	As directed by the COO (Deputy CEO)

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6. Agreeing Objectives

6.1. The Headteacher/Principal's objectives will be agreed with the Governing Body after consultation with the CEO. Objectives for each Employee will be agreed before, or as soon as practicable after, the start of each performance management cycle.

6.2. Staff of all levels will focus on three objectives that they should propose which should be agreed in collaboration with their line manager. The complexity and expected impact of those objectives will reflect the level and responsibilities of their role. Targets must all be 'Important' meaning linked to either the Trust Strategic Development Plan, Services Vision: Right Thing, Right way, Right Cost or School Improvement Plan.

6.3. In agreeing objectives, reviewers will have regard to what can reasonably be expected given the Employee's role and level of experience. A shared understanding of an employee's growth in their role must also be present at the outset of the Professional Growth process.

6.4. Agreed objectives will be:

- Important: be linked to (a) the TSAT Strategic Development Plan, (b) the Service Values "Right Thing, Right Way, Right Cost" or (c) the School Improvement Plan.
- Specific: state exactly what will be done, implemented, or achieved.
- Measurable: include up to seven success criteria that demonstrate the impact of the work.

Objectives will have regard to a reasonable level of expectations of the employee in the context of work/life balance.

7. Identifying Progress

7.1. A core principle in Professional Growth is progress in the approach taken to delivering objectives alongside the impact that this has had. Both engagement and outputs of reflective practice through use of the Think Ahead will also be considered when reviewing a staff member's success in delivery of their objectives. Progress against objectives and in professional growth discussions will not solely be based on teacher generated data and predictions, or on the assessment data for a single group of pupils, although this information can be used to inform the setting of objectives. Progress should be acknowledged, and smaller milestones identified throughout the year to support incremental growth.

8. Supporting Information

8.1. An employee or their reviewer may refer to a range of sources of information to demonstrate how they have developed and delivered impact within their focus areas or exceeded expectations beyond these. This information should be used to share improvements made in these areas as opposed to proving competence more broadly

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in the role. Regular engagement with the check in process on the Think Ahead app will provide useful insights and help to demonstrate progress thereby reducing the associated workload.

8.2. A successful outcome will automatically be assumed unless significant concerns about standards of performance have been raised in writing with the staff member through the Professional Growth process and have not been sufficiently addressed through support provided by the Academy by the conclusion of that process. TSAT Teaching Standards may be used to identify improvements as part of a professional growth conversation but should not be used as an exhaustive checklist. These standards can be found on the TSAT website and intranet.

9. Observations

9.1. Observations should serve a variety of purposes and fall into the categories outlined below. It is our intention that a staff member should receive no more than 3 hours per year unless requesting more or where their performance is subject to the Managing Performance Concerns Policy. This policy can be found on the Our Trust website.

- a. To enhance professional growth by giving staff feedback on how to improve the quality of education that they are providing for student/pupils. These observations are unlimited as they are requested by the staff member.
- b. To provide leaders with information to guide whole school or departmental improvement. These observations will not exceed 3 hours across the year and should not exceed 30 minutes per term or 6 times per year.
- c. To monitor standards across the school. Frequency and duration of these observations are at the discretion of the Senior Leadership Team

9.2. To aid with their continued professional growth, a reviewee can request input from their line manager/coach/ peer in the form of a lesson observation or meeting at any point during the professional growth annual cycle. This should be sharply focused around an area that will improve a teacher's practice and should, therefore, be followed up with face-to-face feedback. The frequency and duration of this will need to be agreed between both parties.

9.3. Observations should form part of a constructive dialogue to help an individual to reflect, identify strengths or progress and improve their practice. This should link to the 'mastery' agenda, where every member of staff is engaged in reflective practice to improve student/pupil outcomes.

9.4. All observations will be carried out in a constructive and supportive manner. Teachers and Academy based union reps will be consulted annually over the proposed pattern of observations in their Academy.

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9.5. In keeping with the Academy governing body's commitment to supportive and developmental classroom observation the Headteacher/Principal will:

- Ensure a high quality of Professional Growth conversations (linked to classroom practice) to support staff in achieving their goals.
- Ensure that staff are informed of any observations that are going to take place in a timely manner before the observation (except for Trust QA reviews and standards walks).
- Consult teachers and Academy union reps on the pattern of classroom observations (for B and C above) which they can expect annually and aim to seek agreement with teachers and professional representatives on these arrangements.
- Arrange, as far as possible, for all professional growth observations to take place at a time agreed between teacher and observer.
- Ensure that there are agreed, timely lesson observations that support staff in their Professional Growth.
- Provide adequate Professional Growth support for staff in any extenuating circumstances.
- Ensure that planning that takes place at the start of the Professional Growth process is agreed through a discussion with line manager (in role of instructional coach) or at discretion of SLT/Head; Advise on the amount and duration of observations; the focus of the observation, when during the Professional Growth process the observation will take place and who will conduct the observation.

9.6. In order to support professional growth and to support efforts to deliver the Academy's commitment to streamlining data collection and minimising bureaucracy and workload burdens on teachers, the information gathered will be used for multiple purposes, mainly to aid staff on their professional growth journeys, but also supporting with Academy self-evaluation and Academy improvement strategies. This will enable the Headteacher to discharge their duty to evaluate the standards of teaching and learning and to ensure that proper standards of professional performance are established and maintained.

9.7. In this Trust, professional growth observations (A above) can happen at any agreed time and at any agreed frequency as they are connected to a collaboration between reviewer/coach/peer and reviewee with the aim of supporting the latter to work towards mastery in an area/domain of pedagogy. Observations for B are connected to reviewing classroom-based employees' performance against the teaching standards, but the amount and type of classroom observation will depend on the individual circumstances of the Employee and the overall needs of the Academy at that time, but limited to a maximum of 3 hours per year for all purposes (these limits will not apply to staff who are NQTs, trainees or those subject to structured management support). The duration and frequency of these observations can be set by the Headteacher locally but should not exceed 3 hours unless performance concerns have been formally raised. Staff will always be supplied with formative

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feedback identifying their key strengths and areas for improvement. Classroom observation of teachers will be carried out by those with QTS.

- 9.8. As part of C, the Headteacher/Principal or other leaders with responsibility for standards in the classroom may 'drop in' in order to evaluate the standards of teaching and to check that high standards of professional performance are established and maintained (in line with the teaching standards). Teachers will be notified of the purpose of such 'learning walks' or 'drop ins' in advance. The length and frequency of 'drop in' observations will vary depending on specific circumstances. Such 'drop ins' will not be used in isolation to form judgements of individuals linked to annual Professional Growth review.
- 9.9. Professional growth observation feedback (A above) should take place in an agreed way with reviewer/coach/peer and reviewee. As soon as practicable after an observation (for B above) and within 2 working days, verbal feedback will be given to the Employee – this should focus on what went well and where there may be room for improvement, with the aim of creating a dialogue with the member of staff about their professional practice, providing them with clear next steps to aid with their progression. To support the teachers' reflection process, all observations (for A, B and C above) should be logged via the Think Ahead app by the staff member or manager when reviewing their latest check in, ideally within 5 days. Where it is not reasonably practicable to provide feedback within these timescales, feedback will be provided at the earliest opportunity thereafter.
- 9.10. Teachers (including the Headteacher/Principal) who have responsibilities outside the classroom, and support staff or Central Staff who are not classroom-based may also be observed carrying out their role to help identify strengths, development areas and gain insights into their approach to their role.
- 9.11. Observations undertaken by Ofsted inspectors or due to Trust monitoring reviews, will not, in themselves, be used for Professional Growth discussion purposes. However, these observations may highlight the need for the Academy to undertake separate observations to understand someone's current performance – such observations may be used in Professional Growth discussions where this has been planned, agreed and communicated to all parties in advance.

10. Pupil progress and attainment

- 10.1. Pupil progress and attainment are an integral part of the teaching standards, so it is an expectation that teachers meet these 'quality of education' requirements as part of their role. The quality of education is measured by the effectiveness of curriculum delivery. This focuses on the quality of teaching (pedagogy) and how effective it is at delivering the curriculum intentions. It also focuses on the quality of assessment and interventions, both formative and summative, and how it supports student/pupils to maximise their progress. Middle leaders need to ensure that the quality of their curriculum design, its appropriateness and coverage aid with pupil progress.

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10.2. For Professional Growth, pupil progress and attainment will be an area that teaching/classroom-based staff will need to focus on to demonstrate their impact. Each year, staff will look at the data from their classes and will use this to decide upon their focus areas. For example, if boys' attainment seems to be an area for development in Key Stage 4, this will become an area for Professional Growth so that the member of staff engages in research, trial (of various strategies) and review.

11. Work Sampling

11.1. Work sampling can provide useful insights and information when exploring progress and development against an employee's standards for the role, and where relevant, against objectives. Work sampling should be carried out in conjunction with class data/ student/pupil interviews/ staff interviews and consider associated impact on workload.

12. Other Work Sampling

12.1. Staff are encouraged to think broadly around other information which may help them to identify where they have made progress against their objectives. Examples of such information may include (but are not limited to):

- Examples of short, medium and long-term plans
- Effective deployment and management of classroom-based support staff.
- Reports from external sources such as Ofsted, the local authority, or other reviews.
- Performance tables
- Samples of written correspondence or project work
- Examples of displays or resources
- Feedback from colleagues, managers, staff – this may be gathered via the Think Ahead app.

13. Feedback

13.1. Regular feedback is essential to supporting our staff Professional Growth. It's important that feedback is respectfully delivered, specific and sufficiently challenging to be useful.

13.2. Through use of the Think Ahead app and other dialogue, employees will share and receive regular, constructive feedback on their performance throughout the year. Feedback will highlight areas of strength and celebrate success, as well as any areas that need development and support.

13.3. Where there are any concerns about any aspects of an Employee's performance, this will be managed in accordance with Section 7 of this policy.

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13.4. For Teaching Staff, feedback and review meetings will always be held during directed time but, not within a teachers' PPA time. Support and Central Team staff meetings will be held during their normal working hours.

14. Annual Professional Growth Discussion

14.1. Every Employee will participate in a focussed discussion around their Professional Growth. Such a discussion for a Headteacher/Principal will include the Governing Body in consultation with the CEO.

14.2. For Teaching Staff, Annual Review meetings will always be held during directed time but, not within a teachers' PPA time. Support and Central Team staff meetings will be held during their normal working hours.

14.3. This conversation is the end point to the annual process, but objectives and progress will be reviewed and addressed throughout the year through regular check ins via Think Ahead and end of year Reflection Sessions. This reflection session will be used to discuss impact of the objectives on performance and will take place July-September annually to ensure this learning is captured within a useful time frame from delivery. The format of this will be at discretion of the Headteacher / Principal or Head of Department and may include presentations, discussions or one to one review.

14.4. An Employee will receive a written feedback summary as soon as practicable following the end of each year. The Employee will have the opportunity to comment on this. This summary will include:

- a review of progress against their Professional Growth objectives in the last year
- a review of performance of their role and responsibilities against the standards/accountabilities for their role in the last year
- a summary of relevant supporting information underpinning decisions made

The Employee will also receive a new summary for the new year. This will include:

- details of the three objectives agreed for the year ahead
- details of relevant supporting standards
- Professional Growth Plan identifying any learning & development needs or support that may be required in the coming year – this may be informed by the previous year's impact (see 6.3)
- An indication of when any observations may take place (if applicable)

14.5. All staff and reviewers are encouraged to also use Professional Growth meetings to discuss other matters pertinent to their employment.

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15. Talent & Development

3.1 Development

The Trust aims for staff to be more empowered to propose, shape and agree their Professional Growth objectives and with this ownership comes a personal responsibility for driving their own development alongside supporting colleagues to do so. Personal responsibility in this context includes:

- Seeking out development opportunities and feedback wherever possible
- Deepening expertise in their area of work to deliver the best outcomes for student/pupils & customers
- Taking time to reflect regularly using the Think Ahead app alongside conversation with line managers and colleagues
- Using the Think Ahead app as well as other channels to share constructive feedback with line managers, peers and colleagues.
- Increasing awareness of Think Ahead programmes to aid Professional Growth.

3.2 Professional Support

Professional support will be available for all staff so that they can continue to grow and develop. Alongside the ongoing Professional Growth Process the following areas may be considered as professional support:

- Co-designed work with colleagues
- Coaching or mentoring – either providing or receiving this
- Observations
- 360-degree Feedback
- Access to CPD activities including online learning

3.3 Professional Growth Plans

Following agreement of objectives, staff should agree key development requirements that will support them to deliver the best possible impact in their area of expertise. These should be captured using the Think Ahead app.

3.4 Identifying Talent

When we refer to 'talent' we are referring to staff members who have the potential to move on to broader or more senior leadership roles. Through more regular dialogue around Professional Growth, ownership of professional development and tighter focus on bespoke goals the opportunities to demonstrate talent will be more evident and accessible across the Trust.

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Line managers and Senior Leaders have a responsibility to promote opportunities to apply skills in areas alongside existing responsibilities wherever practicable and to signpost talented individuals to development programmes where they are available.

A range of programmes operate internally and externally to support talented individuals to progress to more senior or specialist roles. These programmes will be promoted to all staff and are subject to entry criteria and assessment process. Staff who are interested in finding out more about these programmes by visiting the Professional Development page on the TSAT Intranet.

16. Performance concerns

16.1. We will have honest, open conversations about staff performance to encourage discussion, accountability and ultimately improvement. We know that the majority of staff deliver their job well for the majority of the time, though sometimes performance may be viewed as below what's expected and support is needed to help return to and sustain the required level of performance to meet the standards or job description for their role. Should performance concerns be raised, the Professional Growth process will be paused until standards are being met to allow the staff member to focus their efforts.

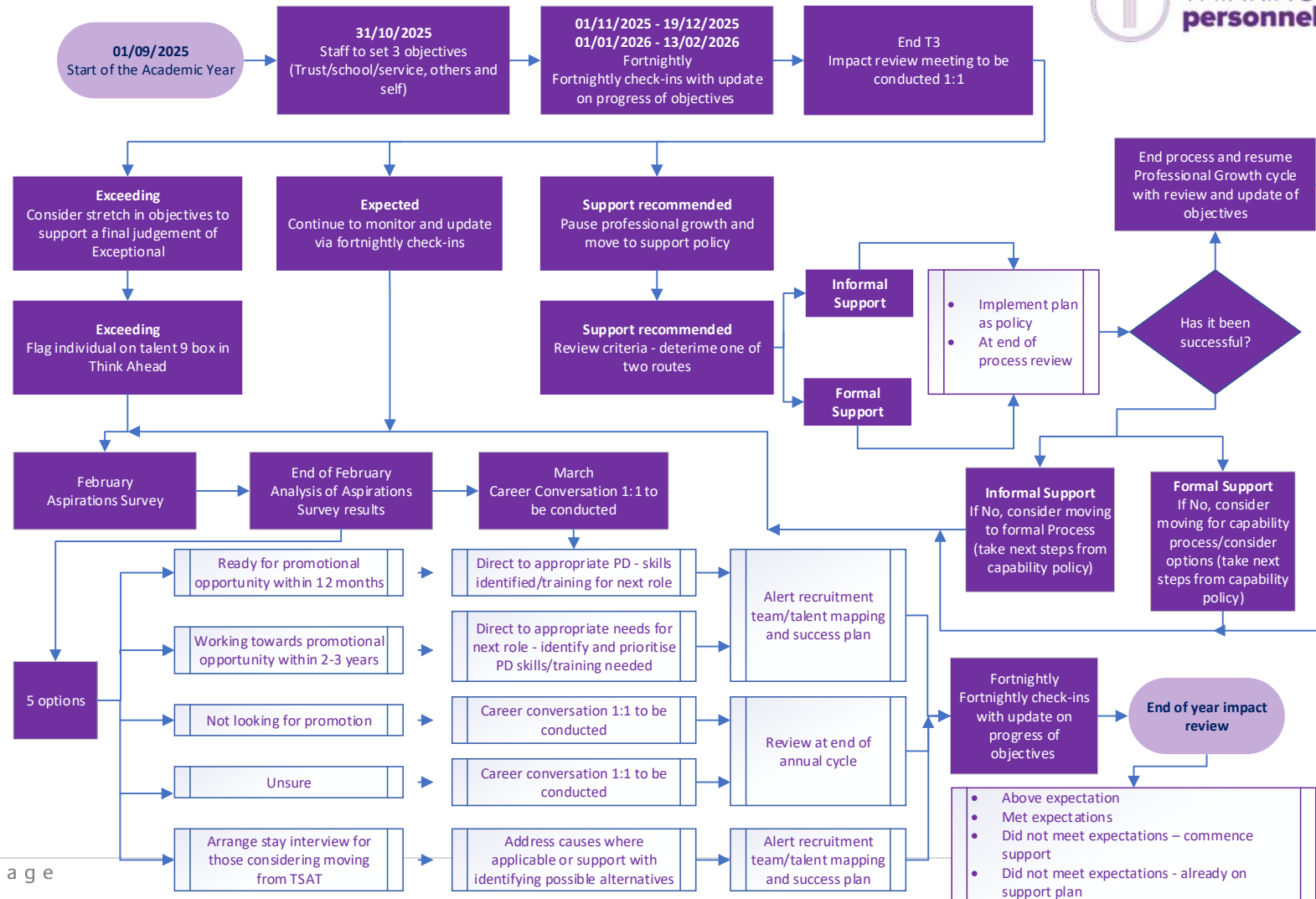
16.2. Processes and supporting documents to support Managers to address performance concerns can be found in the Managing Performance Concerns Policy. This document also outlines the Trust's Managing Capability process.

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Appendix 1 –



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Appendix 2 -- Check in schedule with directed time allocation for 2025-2026

Date	Day	Think Ahead (TSAT)	Duration (hrs)
19/09/2025	Friday	Completion of review of last year	1
03/10/2025	Friday	Non-compulsory check in	0.25
31/10/2025	Friday	Set objectives by here / LM to have initial career aspiration conversation as part of objective setting discussion	1
14/11/2025	Friday	Check in 1	0.25
28/11/2025	Friday	Check in 2	0.25
12/12/2025	Friday	Check in 3	0.25
09/01/2026	Friday	Check in 4	0.25
23/01/2026	Friday	Check in 5	0.25
06/02/2026	Friday	Aspiration Survey	1
27/02/2026	Friday	Check in 6	0.25
13/03/2026	Friday	Check in 7	0.25
27/03/2026	Friday	Career conversations & mid-point reflections	1
24/04/2026	Friday	Check in 8	0.25
08/05/2026	Friday	Check in 9	0.25
22/05/2026	Friday	Check in 10	0.25
12/06/2026	Friday	Check in 11	0.25
26/06/2026	Friday	Check in 12	0.25
10/07/2026	Friday	Check in 13	0.25
			7.5

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Appendix 3 - Linking PG to Trust and School Improvement Objective setting for end 25/26 cycle / next 26/27 cycle:

When	Who	What	Rationale
April	SGR / LMR / MGE	Initial review of 2025/26 PG Targets. Agree PG objectives for 2026/27 on basis of TSIP.	Only 3 months remaining of the academic year and will have a good sense of how the STIP is impacting on practice in the organisation – successes / areas to improve. TSIP will have been approved so know what we are trying to achieve in 2026/27 to inform PG objectives.
May	RD's and Deputy RD's	Initial review of 2025/26 PG Targets. Agree PG objectives for 2026/27 on basis of TSIP and Hub / school specific needs.	Only 2 months remaining of the academic year and will have a good sense of how the STIP is impacting on practice in the organisation – successes / areas to improve. TSIP will have been approved so know what we are trying to achieve in 2026/27 to inform PG objectives.
June	HTs	Initial review of 2025/26 PG Targets. Agree PG objectives for 2026/27 on basis of TSIP and school specific needs.	Final term will know whether or not SIP has been delivered and had impact. Should have a clear view on key priorities for SIP 2026/27 to inform PG objectives.
July	Primary RDs / Deputy RDs + Primary HTs	Final review meeting following publication of Primary School data + confirmation of PG objectives for 2026/27.	Primary results published in July to inform final review and impact on student outcomes + make any adjustments to TSIP / SIP and PG objectives.
End August/start September	All remaining Exec	Final review meeting following publication of Primary and Secondary School data + confirmation of PG objectives for 2026/27.	Primary and secondary results published by mid-August to inform final review and impact on student outcomes + make any adjustments to TSIP and PG objectives.
By End September	Secondary HTs	Final review meeting following publication of Secondary School data + confirmation of PG objectives for 2026/27.	Secondary results published mid-August to inform final review and impact on student outcomes + make any adjustments to SIP and PG objectives.
By end October	All staff	Review PG objectives for 2025/26 and set targets for 2026/27.	This is within the current framework and means all targets would be informed by Trust and school priorities.

Through this process we will have effectively switched the order of objective setting so that this naturally flows down from the Trust priorities through the leadership of the organisation into schools so that priorities within the organisation come into alignment.