

People Directorate

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

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



Contents

1. Why do we have this policy?	3
2. Who does this policy apply to?	3
3. Principles	3
4. Professional Growth Process	4
5. Reviewers	5
6. Agreeing Rocks	5
7. Identifying Progress	6
8. Supporting Information	6
9. Feedback	7
10. Annual Professional Growth Discussion	7
11. Talent & Development	8
11.1 Development	8
11.2 Professional Support	8
11.3 Professional Growth Plans	9
11.4 Identifying Talent	9
12. Performance concerns	9
13. Appendix 1 – TSFE Professional Growth Process	10
14. Appendix 2 - Linking PG to Trust and School Improvement Objective setting for end 25/26 cycle / next 26/27 cycle:	11
15. Appendix 3 - Check in Schedule with allocating time, within working hours assigned, for 2025-2026	12
16. Appendix 4 – Annual Professional Growth Process	13

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



1. Why do we have this policy?

This policy sets out a framework for a clear and consistent approach for the professional development of TSFE 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. Unless evidence suggests otherwise, we assume that all staff are meeting the standards of their role. 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?

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 and intranet.

3. Principles

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.

3.2 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

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 rocks that are agreed should support the ambitions of the Trust, School and also the professional development of the individual setting them.

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.

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



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

The process of Professional Growth will be carried out in accordance with this policy, which is underpinned by local agreements for support staff.

The Governing Body, Executive Team, Senior Management Team and Headteacher/Principal will monitor the operation and effectiveness of the Central Team's Professional Growth processes including carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment.

The Professional Growth process will be treated with confidentiality. Normally only the reviewer, reviewee and the SMT Team Lead and PG Administrators will have access to development information and documentation relating to the reviewee.

However, to support moderation of rocks, records may be shared with members of the Senior Leadership Team.

In the event of an Ofsted inspection taking place, Ofsted inspectors may request that anonymised information about the 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 approach.

The Governing Body, or Service Lead/SMT 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.

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 Trust'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

The Professional Growth Process for all employees will run for twelve months. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the process and date schedule.

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.

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



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.

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

5. Reviewers

In this Trust the task of agreeing Professional Growth rocks for Leadership posts within TSFE will sit with the Deputy CEO or Directorate Lead.

SMT leads will decide who will review other staff, however this will normally be the employee's line manager. Reviewers will have the necessary knowledge and training in order to undertake this role.

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

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)

6. Agreeing Rocks

Rocks for each Employee will be agreed before, or as soon as practicable after, the start of each performance management cycle.

Staff of all levels will focus on three rocks that they should propose which should be agreed in collaboration with their line manager. The complexity and expected impact of those rocks will reflect the level and responsibilities of their role. Rocks agreed with any staff member will not represent the complete job that they are expected to perform – these are expected to have a narrower but significant focus. Rocks will be quality assured by SMT/Directorate

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



leads. If a member of staff has concerns about the rocks setting process, they should discuss this with the senior leader who manages their department or area of the Trust.

Rocks will be set 3 times per year, focusing on next 2 term's priorities. See Appendix 1 for process map.

In agreeing rocks, 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.

Agreed rocks will be ISM (Important: linked to The TSfE Strategic Plan, TSfE values, Directorate KPIs or People Strategy, Specific: clear, unambiguous, actionable and Measurable, up to 7 success criteria against which progress can be identified and recognised).

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

7. Identifying Progress

A core principle in Professional Growth is progress in the approach taken to delivering rocks 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 rocks. Progress should be acknowledged, and smaller milestones identified throughout the year to support incremental growth.

8. Supporting Information

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 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.

A successful outcome will automatically be assumed unless the Employee is on a formal capability process.

In order to support professional growth and to support efforts to deliver the Trust's commitment to streamlining data collection and minimising bureaucracy and workload burdens, the information gathered will be used for multiple purposes, mainly to aid staff on their professional growth journeys, but also supporting with self-evaluation and improvement strategies.

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



Central Staff who are not classroom-based may be observed carrying out their role in order to help identify strengths, development areas and gain insights into their approach to their role.

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

- Examples of short, medium and long-term plans
- Effective deployment and management of staff.
- Reports from external sources such as reviews/surveys.
- Samples of written correspondence or project work
- Feedback from colleagues, managers, staff – this may be gathered via the Think Ahead app.

9. Feedback

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.

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 particular areas of strength and celebrate success, as well as any areas that need development and support.

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.

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.

10. Annual Professional Growth Discussion

Every Employee will participate in a focussed discussion around their Professional Growth.

Support and Central Team staff meetings will be held during their normal working hours.

This conversation is the end point to the annual process, but rocks 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 the extent to which the three rocks and their measures were achieved and what celebration, support or next steps need to take place. These meetings will take place June-August annually to ensure this learning is captured within a useful time frame from delivery. The format of this will be at discretion of the SMT Lead and may include presentations, discussions or one to one review.

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



An Employee will receive a written feedback summary on think ahead 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 rocks 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

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

- details of the three rocks 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)

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

11. Talent & Development

11.1 Development

The Trust aims for staff to be more empowered to propose, shape and agree their Professional Growth rocks 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.

11.2 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:

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



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

11.3 Professional Growth Plans

Following agreement of rocks, 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.

11.4 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.

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.

12. Performance concerns

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.

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.

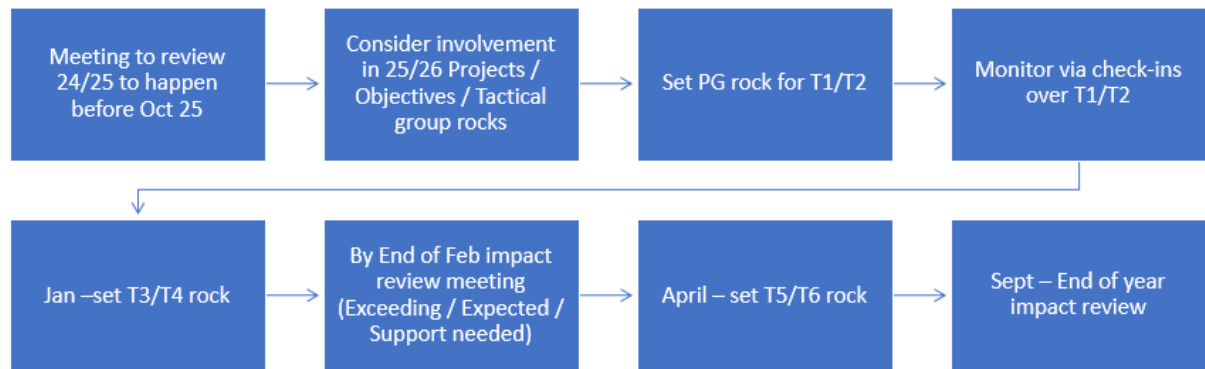
People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy

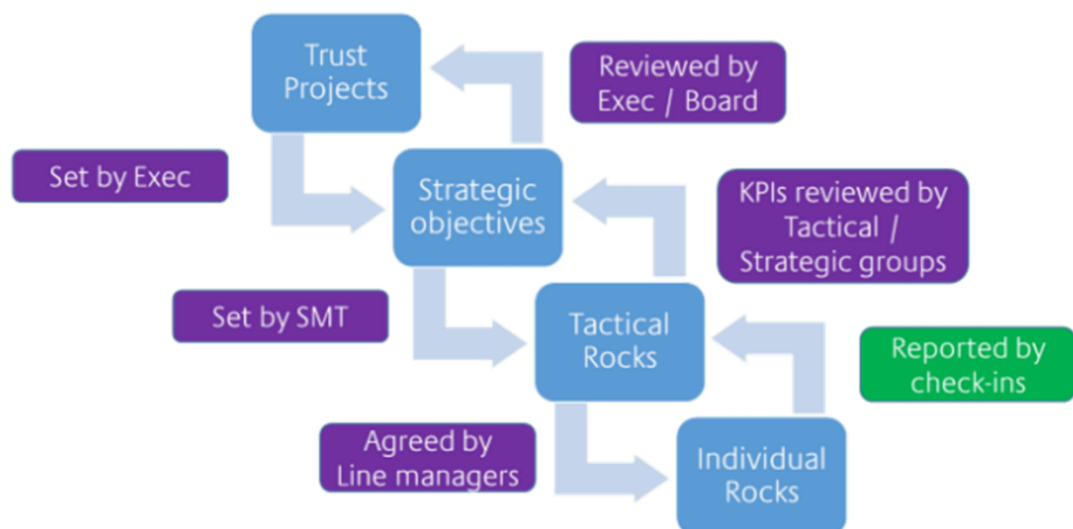


13. Appendix 1 – TSFE Professional Growth Process

Overview of calendar/process:



Flow of information under new structure:



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14. Appendix 2 - Linking PG to Trust and School Improvement Objective setting for end 25/26 cycle / next 26/27 cycle:

When	Who	What	Rationale
May	CEO/DCEO	Agree review against TSIP for 25/26 and publish TSIP for 26/27.	Ensuring all teams have this early will inform TSFE and key Trust priorities.
Jun-Aug	All TSFE Staff	Initial review of 2025/26 PG Rocks (all year). Agree PG rocks for 2026/27 (T1) on basis of TSIP.	Will have a good sense of how the STIP is impacting on practice in the organisation – successes / areas to improve. TSIP and TSFE plans will have been approved so know what we are trying to achieve in 2026/27 to inform PG rocks.
By End September	All TSFE Staff	Review PG rocks for 2025/26 and set targets for 2026/27 on Think Ahead templates and meet with managers for 1:1	

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.

People Directorate

Professional Growth Policy



15. Appendix 3 - Check in Schedule with allocating time, within working hours assigned, for 2025-2026

Date	Day	Think Ahead (TSFE)	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	Staff finalised key rocks/success criteria for Terms 1 & 2	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 / Staff agree key rocks/success criteria for Terms 3 & 4	1
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 / Staff agree key rocks/success criteria for Terms 5&6	1
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



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01/09/2025
Start of the Academic Year

LM to have initial career aspiration conversation as part of Discussing TSFE plans and identifying suitable rocks

Deadline 31/10/2025
Staff Set Rock 1 (1.9.25-31.12.25) with appropriate success criteria

Nov - Dec
Fortnightly check-ins with update on progress of Rock 1/ criteria set

Deadline 10/01/2026
Staff Set Rock 2 (1.1.26-31.3.26) with appropriate success criteria

Jan - Mar
Fortnightly check-ins with update on progress of Rock 2/criteria set

Feb
Aspirations survey

Mar
Impact review meeting to be conducted 1:1

3 options

Exceeding
Consider stretch in Rock to support a final judgement of Exceptional

Exceeding
Flag individual on talent 9 box in Think Ahead

Expected
Continue to monitor and update via fortnightly check-ins

Support recommended
Pause professional growth and move to support policy

Review criteria - determine one of two routes

Informal support

Formal support

Implement plan as policy

At end of process review

Has it been successful?

Yes

No

End process and resume Professional Growth cycle with review and update of Rocks

Informal Support
If No, consider moving to formal Process (take next steps from capability policy)

Formal Support
If No, consider moving for capability process/ consider options (take next steps from capability policy)

End of Feb
Analysis of Aspiration Survey results

March
Career Conversation 1:1 to be conducted

5 options

Ready for promotional opportunity within 12 months

Direct to appropriate PD - skills identified/training for next role

Alert recruitment team/talent mapping and succession plan

Working towards promotional opportunity within 2-3 years

Direct to appropriate needs for next role - identify and prioritise PD skills/training needed

Review at end of annual cycle

Not looking for promotion

Career conversation 1:1 to be conducted

Review at end of annual cycle

Unsure

Arrange stay interview for those considering moving from TSAT

Address causes where applicable or support with identifying possible alternatives

Alert recruitment team/talent mapping and succession plan

31/04/2026
Staff set Rock 3 (1.4.26-31.8.26) with appropriate success criteria

April - July
Fortnightly check-ins with update on progress of objectives

End of year impact review

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- Above expectation
- Met expectations
- Did not meet expectations – commence support
- Did not meet expectations - already on support plan