

Flexible Working Policy

(effective 6th April 2024)

Frequency of Review	Every 3 years
Author	(Judicium adopted) COO
Approved by	COO
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Introduction

The Propeller Academy Trust (PAT) is committed to providing equality of opportunity in employment and to developing work practices and policies that support work-life balance. We recognise that, in addition to helping balance work and personal lives, flexible working can raise staff morale, reduce absenteeism, and improve our use and retention of staff.

This policy gives eligible employees an opportunity to formally request a change to their working pattern and all employees an opportunity to do so informally. Line managers (Trust central team) and Headteachers are encouraged to facilitate requests unless they cannot be accommodated for business or operational reasons.

The policy applies to employees of the Trust only. It does not form part of any individual's terms and conditions of employment and is not intended to have contractual effect. However, the policy does reflect our current practice and all employees are encouraged to familiarise themselves with its content. We reserve the right to amend this policy from time to time.

No employee who makes a request for flexible working will be subjected to any unlawful detriment or lose any career development opportunities as a result.

We are committed to a programme of action to make this policy effective and to bring it to the attention of all employees.

This policy is designed to be as comprehensive as possible, however, if you have any queries which are not answered, or if you have any other questions about the policy, please contact your Line Manager.

Requests made by employees under this policy for contractual variations will be referred to throughout the remainder of this policy as a 'flexible working request.'

Who may make a statutory request to work flexibly?

You have a statutory right to make a flexible working request provided you:

- are an employee of the Trust; and
- have continuous employment of not less than 26 weeks at the date your request is made; and
- have not made any earlier flexible working request during the previous 12 months.

If your request for flexible working is accepted under the formal procedure, you will have changes made to your contract of employment to reflect your new working arrangements.

If you are interested in flexible working, it is advised to request an informal meeting with your line manager to discuss your eligibility, the different options, and the effect your proposed work pattern will have on colleagues and the service delivery, before submitting

a formal or informal request. It may be that a short-term adjustment can be accommodated without instigating the statutory flexible working process.

Those working at management level have a specific responsibility to set an appropriate standard of behaviour, to lead by example and to promote the Trust's aims and objectives with regard to flexible working.

To facilitate this process line managers will be encouraged to seek advice from a Trust HR/Finance Manager on flexible working issues.

All members of staff are responsible for the success of this policy and must ensure that they familiarise themselves with it and act in accordance with its aims and objectives. Those involved in management or recruitment may request specific training and address any questions about the content or application of this policy to the COO.

Forms of Flexible Working

Flexible working can incorporate a number of changes to working arrangements:

- reduction or variation of working hours;
- reduction of the number of days worked each week; and/or
- working from a different location (for example, working from home).

Such changes may involve:

- starting a job share;
- working a set number of hours, a year, rather than a week (annualised hours);
- working from home (whether for all or part of the week);
- working only during term-time (part-year working);
- working compressed hours;
- working flexitime.

Making an Informal Flexible Working Request

This is available to employees who do not meet the eligibility criteria set out above. If you wish to make an informal request for flexible working, you may make a request to your Line Manager who will then consider it according to the Trust's academic and operational requirements.

It will help us to consider your request if you:

- make your request in writing by completing a Flexible working application form, and confirm whether you wish any change to your current working pattern to be temporary or permanent;

- provide as much information as you can about your current and desired working pattern, including working days, hours and start and finish times, and give the date from which you want your desired working pattern to start;
- think about what effect the changes to your working pattern will have on the work that you do and, on your colleagues, as well as on our service delivery and that of your team or department; and
- if you have any suggestions about dealing with any potentially negative effects, please include these in your written application. We can then consider whether they are workable.

We will advise you what steps will be taken to consider your request, which may include inviting you to attend a meeting, before advising you of the outcome of your request. There is no right of appeal against a decision to refuse an informal request in full or in part.

The Formal Right to Request Procedure

Requests under the formal procedure set out in this policy can only be made if you meet the eligibility criteria set out above.

Making a Formal Flexible Working Request

1. The application

If you are interested in flexible working, you should speak with your Line Manager to discuss your eligibility and any options before submitting a formal flexible working request.

You will need to submit a written application if you would like your flexible working request to be considered under the formal procedure.

A flexible working application form is available from hr@propellertrust.org. It is advisable to obtain a copy of this form and use it when making your flexible working request, because that will ensure that you include all the required information. Otherwise, your request may not be able to be considered under this process.

In order to meet the requirements of the formal procedure, should:

- provide as much information as you can about your current and desired working pattern, including working days, hours and start and finish times, and give the date from which you want your desired working pattern to start;
- explain the reasons for your request;
- address the effect the changes to your working pattern will have on the work that you do; that of your colleagues and on service delivery. If you have any suggestions about dealing with any potentially negative effects, please include these in your written application;
- provide information to confirm that you meet the eligibility criteria set out in this policy; and

- state that it is a formal flexible working request and whether you have made a previous formal request for flexible working and, if so, when.

Applications from classroom-based/teaching staff should be submitted to at the earliest possible opportunity, bearing in mind the difficulties of arranging changes to the timetable mid-year. If you are not classroom based, you should submit requests at least three months before you wish the requested changes to take effect.

If you have a disability, and part of the purpose of your flexible working request is to ask for an adjustment to the way in which you work in order to alleviate any disadvantages from which you suffer in the course of your work as a result of your disability, you must also state this in your flexible working request and provide an explanation of how the suggested change would help alleviate those disadvantages.

If we receive a number of flexible working requests from different employees, we will consider them on their individual merits and in the order that we receive them.

2. Submitting your application

Your written and dated flexible working request may be submitted in any of the following ways:

- delivered in person, by handing it directly to your Line Manager or the Headteacher, or
- by first class post, sent to your school or the Trust Office (Trust central team only), or
- by email to your Line Manager

3. Meeting with you to discuss your application

We might be able to agree your proposal without the need for a meeting. If that is the case, we will write to you, confirming the decision and explaining the changes that will be made to your contract of employment.

If your proposal cannot be accommodated without further discussion, you will be invited to discuss your request with your Line Manager or the Headteacher. We will endeavour to arrange this meeting to take place within 28 working days of receiving your application, or as soon as reasonably possible.

You may bring a colleague to the meeting as a companion if you wish. Your companion will be entitled to speak during the meeting and confer privately with you but may not answer questions on your behalf.

In most cases, the meeting will be held at your usual place of work. However, we will ensure that the meeting is held at a time and place that is convenient for you.

The meeting will be used to consider the working arrangements you have requested. You will also be able to discuss what impact your proposed working arrangements will have on your work and that of your colleagues and/or your department or team.

If there are concerns about being able to accommodate your request, discussion at the meeting will also provide an opportunity to explore possible alternative working arrangements.

Your Line Manager may suggest starting new working arrangements under an initial trial period to ensure that they meet your needs and those of your department or team.

If we are minded to accept your request, or accept it with modifications, a further meeting may be arranged at a mutually convenient time and place to discuss how and when the changes might best be implemented.

Following this meeting or final meeting, we will notify you of our decision in writing as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within 14 working days, or within:

- three months of the date on which you made your application if that is earlier; or
- such extended period as has been agreed between both parties (as below) if that extended period expires earlier.

If we need more time to make a decision, we will notify you of this and the reasons for the delay within 3 months of the receipt of the request. For example, more time may be required to investigate how your request can be accommodated or to consult several members of staff.

4. Declining your application

We will only refuse your application, or offer to accept it on a modified basis (as compared to the original changes requested), if one or more of the following eight business reasons apply:

- the burden of additional costs;
- detrimental effect on the ability to meet the needs and the demands of the Trust's students;
- inability to reorganise work among existing staff;
- inability to recruit additional staff;
- detrimental impact on quality;
- detrimental impact on performance;
- insufficiency of work during the periods that you propose to work; and
- planned changes.

In these circumstances, we will write to you:

- giving the academic/operational reason(s) for turning down your application;

- explaining why these reasons apply in your case; and
- setting out the appeal procedure.

5. Accepting your application

If your request is accepted, or changes have been agreed, we will write to you with details of:

- the flexible working pattern agreed to;
- details of any trial period agreed to;
- an explanation of changes to your contract of employment; and
- the date on which the variation is to take effect.

You will be asked to sign and return a copy of the letter. This will be placed on your personnel file to confirm the variation to your terms of employment.

There may also be some additional practical matters such as arrangements for handing over work that will be discussed with you.

You should be aware that (unless specifically agreed otherwise) changes to your terms of employment will be permanent. In addition, you will not be able to make another formal request until 12 months after the date of your original application.

Right to Appeal

If your request is refused in full or in part, you are entitled to appeal against the decision. Appeals must be considered and decided upon within three months of receipt of the appeal letter

Your appeal must:

- be in writing and dated;
- set out the grounds on which you are appealing; and
- be sent to your line manager or Chair of Governors (Chair of Trustees for CEO or COO) within 14 days of the date on which you received the written rejection of your request.

The Line Manager, Chair of Governors or Chair of Trustees will arrange for a meeting to take place as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within 14 working days of receipt of your notice of appeal. Alternatively, if we uphold your appeal without needing to hold a meeting then you will be notified in writing within this period and informed of the contract variation agreed to and the date from which the variation is to take effect.

The appeal meeting will be held at a convenient time for all those attending and, as at the meeting that considered your request, you may be accompanied by a colleague.

An independent and impartial Appeals Officer will be selected, specifically for the appeal, from either the Governing Body or Senior Leadership Team of the Trust.

You will be informed in writing, of the Appeal Officer's decision as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within 14 working days of the date of the appeal meeting or within three months of the date on which you made your application if that is earlier; or within such extended period as has been agreed, if that extended period expires earlier.

If your appeal is upheld, you will be advised of your new working arrangements, details of any trial period, an explanation of changes to your contract of employment and the date on which they will commence.

You will be asked to sign and return a copy of the letter. This will be placed on your personnel file to confirm the variation to your terms of employment.

There may also be some additional practical matters, such as arrangements for handing overwork that your Line Manager will discuss with you.

You should be aware that (unless specifically agreed otherwise) changes to your terms of employment will be permanent and you will not be able to make another formal request until 12 months after the date of your original application.

If your appeal is rejected, the written decision will state which of the eight business reasons (as listed above) is or are the grounds for the refusal of your application and will provide sufficient explanation as to why those grounds apply. You will not be able to make another formal request until 12 months after the date of your original application.

Withdrawal of an application

At any point before we give our final decision on your flexible working request, or its final decision after an appeal, you may agree with us to dispose of your application without the need for us to give a decision (or further decision) in relation to it. This will be confirmed in writing stating that both parties have agreed that no further action need be taken in relation to your application, and of the date on which that agreement was reached. You will be asked to sign and return a copy of that agreement to your line manager to confirm that your request has been disposed of as stated.

At any point before we give our final decision on your flexible working request, or its final decision after an appeal, you may withdraw your application by sending a written notice to your line manager which states that you have withdrawn your application, which must be signed and dated by you.

If you withdraw a formal request for flexible working, you will not be eligible to make another formal request for 12 months from the date of your original request.

Treating your application as withdrawn

We will treat a formal application as withdrawn where you have, without good reason, failed to attend both the first meeting arranged to discuss the:

- application and the next meeting arranged for that purpose; or
- appeal and the next meeting arranged for that purpose.

Where we decide to treat your application as withdrawn for the reasons set out above, we will send written notification to you informing you of that fact and why.

If you believe that we should not have treated your application as withdrawn, you may write to your Line Manager, within five working days of receiving notification, explaining why your application should not be treated as withdrawn.

Extending time under the Formal Procedure

Regardless of whether or not an appeal is made, we will communicate any final decision in regard to a formal flexible working application within three months of the date the request is made or within such longer period as may be agreed between both parties (referred to below as the 'extended period').

Where an extension period is required (within which the decision on your application must be made) it must be agreed:

- before the end of the initial three-month period or any current extension already agreed; or
- retrospectively after the current decision period has ended provided the extension is agreed within three months of the expiry of the current decision period.

Where an extension of time is agreed with you, your Line Manager will write to you confirming the extension and the date on which it will end.

We reserve the right to shorten any of the procedural time limits referred to earlier in this policy in circumstances where:

- observing the normal time limit specified in the policy would run a significant risk of us not being able to provide you with a decision on your flexible working request within the time limit that the law requires; and
- you will not agree to an extended period for provision for our decision, as such would allow the normal time limits specified in the policy to be observed.

Where we shorten any of time limits, we will send you a letter confirming which time limits have been shortened, by how much and any consequences of those changes.