

Support Staff Capability Policy

Policy Code:	HR30
Policy Start Date:	September 2026
Policy Review Date:	September 2029

Please read this policy in conjunction with the policies listed below:

- HR8 Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy
- HR12 Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- HR18 Staff Sickness Policy
- HR13 Annual and Special Leave and Reporting Absences Policy

1 Policy Statement

- 1.1 The Priory Federation of Academies Trust (the Trust) seeks to provide each member of staff with the direction, development and support necessary to ensure a productive and rewarding career.
- 1.2 The Trust is committed to developing a culture where staff are supported and assisted in achieving the required standards of performance.
- 1.3 This policy does not form part of a member of staff's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.
- 1.4 This policy does not apply to agency workers, consultants or self-employed contractors.
- 1.5 This policy does not apply to staff on a probationary period or fixed-term contract.
- 1.6 References to the Trust or Academy within this policy specifically include all nursery, primary, secondary and special academies within the Trust, as well as Priory Apprenticeships and Lincolnshire ITT.
- 1.7 This policy does not form part of any member of staff's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2 Roles, Responsibilities and Implementation

- 2.1 The People, Performance and Operations Committee has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy and for ensuring compliance with the relevant statutory framework. This committee delegates day-to-day responsibility for operating the policy and ensuring its maintenance and review to the Head of HR.
- 2.2 This policy is approved by the People, Performance and Operations Committee before being ratified at the next available Trust Board meeting. Approval and ratification is minuted, with records kept by the Clerk to Trustees.
- 2.3 Leaders and Managers have a specific responsibility to ensure the fair application of this policy and all staff are responsible for supporting colleagues and ensuring its success.

3 Aims

- 3.1 To ensure that the Trust has fair and effective arrangements for dealing with work performance and capability matters before staff can be expected to reach appropriate standards of job performance, the Trust accepts they should be provided with appropriate training, guidance and support.

3.2 Accordingly, this policy aims to:

- improve and maintain the standard of work performance of an individual member of staff, through advice, coaching, guidance and support, with the emphasis on developing a series of performance improvement plans, which, wherever practicable, are mutually agreed to reach the required standards;
- ensure that all staff are treated in a fair, consistent and understanding manner in relation to capability issues;
- ensure that the Trust is a fair employer, meeting all relevant legal requirements regarding any capability related decisions it may take in relation to any member of staff;
- support managers in carrying out their responsibilities for the maintenance of high standards of work performance by all staff; and
- contribute towards the improvement of the performance and effectiveness of the Trust; and help protect the Trust, its staff and service users from the consequences of poor work performance.

4 Disabilities

4.1 The Trust is committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness. It will abide by all relevant equality legislation, including the duty to make reasonable adjustments where these are deemed either necessary or appropriate. The Trust will consider whether it is appropriate to make a referral to Occupational Health and/or make enquiries of the physician responsible for the staff member's care. The Trust will consider any reasonable adjustments which could be made to working arrangements which are suggested by Occupational Health. The Trust may also consider making adjustments to the Capability Procedure in these cases.

5 Confidentiality

- 5.1 The Trust aims to deal with performance matters sensitively and with due respect for the privacy of the individuals involved. All members of staff must treat any information communicated to them in connection with a matter which is subject to the Capability Procedure, as confidential.
- 5.2 The capability process will be treated confidentially. However, it needs to be recognised that, in supporting employees through this process, some degree of information sharing is likely to be necessary to quality assure the operation and effectiveness of the process.
- 5.3 Members of staff will normally be told the name of any witnesses whose evidence is relevant to the hearing, unless the Trust believes the witnesses identify should remain confidential.

6 Right to be Accompanied to Hearings

- 6.1 Any member of staff may bring a companion to any capability hearing or appeal hearing under this policy. The companion may be either a trade union representative or a colleague and the identity of any companion must be disclosed to the Trust in good time before the hearing.
- 6.2 Any member of staff who is asked to act as a companion will be allowed reasonable time off to fulfil these duties without any loss.
- 6.3 If a member of staff's choice of companion is unavailable for the hearing and will not be available for more than five working days after the hearing, the Trust may require the member of staff to choose a different companion.

7 Informal Capability Process

- 7.1 In the first instance, performance issues should be dealt with informally between the member of staff and their line manager as part of day-to-day management. Where appropriate, a note of informal discussions will be placed on a member of staff's personnel file but will be ignored for any future capability stages. Informal discussions will help to:
 - a) clarify the required standards;
 - b) identify areas of concern;
 - c) establish the likely cause of poor performance and identify any training needs; and/or
 - d) set targets for improvement and timescales for review.
- 7.2 The informal process will normally allow an informal review period of between 4 to 10 weeks where an employee is supported by way of a support plan to meet the objectives.
- 7.3 In more serious cases, or where an informal discussion/plan has not resulted in satisfactory improvement, the formal procedure will be used.

8 Stage One Formal Capability Process

- 8.1 If the Trust considers there are grounds for taking formal action against a member of staff due to alleged poor performance, they will be required to attend a capability hearing. The Trust will write to the member of staff setting out its concerns about performance, the reason for those concerns and the likely outcome if the Trust decides the performance has been unsatisfactory. The Trust may also, if appropriate, disclose any documents or relevant information which has been gathered.

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- 8.2 The Trust will give the member of staff written notice of the date, time and place of the capability hearing. The member of staff will be given at least 5 working days' written notice of the formal meeting.
- 8.3 Any hearing will normally be carried out by a member of staff's line manager and a member of the Human Resources Team will also be present.
- 8.4 The aims of a capability hearing will be:
- a) Setting out the required standard that the member of staff has failed to meet, including any relevant evidence which has been gathered;
 - b) Allowing the member of staff to ask questions, present evidence, respond to evidence, make representations and, if appropriate, call witnesses;
 - c) Establishing the likely causes of poor performance and identifying why measures taken so far have not improved performance; including disability or health matters where reasonable adjustments to working arrangements or this procedure could be made;
 - d) Identify and explain any support, including training, that will be available to help the employee to improve their performance.
 - e) Agreeing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) which will, where appropriate identify whether further measures may improve performance and set agreed targets for improvement;
 - f) Setting a performance monitoring and review period, including timescales. Formal monitoring, evaluation, guidance and support will continue during this period; and
 - g) If dismissal is a possibility, discussing whether there are any practical alternatives to dismissal such as redeployment.
- 8.5 Following a Stage One hearing, if the Trust decides that a member of staff's performance is unsatisfactory, it will issue the member of staff with a copy of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) agreed at the formal capability meeting and a first written warning. This will set out:
- a) The areas in which the member of staff has not met the required standards;
 - b) Targets for improvement;
 - c) Any measures, such as additional training or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
 - d) A period for review; and
 - e) The consequences of the member of staff failing to improve within the review period and further unsatisfactory performance.
- 8.6 The warning will normally remain active for six months. In some circumstances, longer active periods may be necessary. After the active period has expired the warning will remain on a member of staff's personnel file but will be disregarded for future capability proceedings.

- 8.7 The member of staff's performance will be monitored during the set review period and at the end of the review period they will be advised in writing of the outcome:
- a) If the Trust is satisfied with their performance, no further action will be taken;
 - b) If the Trust is not satisfied, the matter may progress to a Stage Two capability hearing; and
 - c) If the Trust feel that there has been a substantial but insufficient improvement, the review period may be extended.
- 8.8 If at any stage the person conducting the meeting is satisfied that there are insufficient grounds for pursuing the capability issue, or after a review period the employee has made sufficient improvement, the capability procedure will cease and the appraisal process will restart.

9 Stage Two Formal Capability Process

- 9.1 If a member of staff's performance does not improve within the review period set out in the first written warning or there is further evidence of poor performance whilst the first written warning is active, the Trust may hold a Stage Two capability hearing.
- 9.2 The aims of the Stage Two capability hearing will be:
- a) Setting out the required standard that the member of staff has failed to meet during the Stage One Formal Capability Process, including any relevant evidence which has been gathered;
 - b) Allowing the member of staff to ask questions, present evidence, respond to evidence, make representations and, if appropriate, call witnesses;
 - c) Establishing the likely causes of poor performance and identifying why measures taken so far have not improved performance; including disability or health matters where reasonable adjustments to working arrangements or this procedure could be made.
 - d) Identify and explain any support, including training, that will be available to help the employee to improve their performance.
 - e) Agreeing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) which will, where appropriate identify whether further measures may improve performance and set agreed targets for improvement;
 - f) Setting a performance monitoring and review period. Formal monitoring, evaluation, guidance and support will continue during this period; and
 - g) If dismissal is a possibility, discussing whether there are any practical alternatives to dismissal such as redeployment.
- 9.3 Following a Stage Two hearing if the Trust decides that a member of staff's performance continues to be unsatisfactory, it will issue the member of staff with a copy of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) agreed at the formal capability meeting and a final written warning. This will set out:

- a) The areas in which the member of staff has not met the required standards
 - b) Targets for improvement;
 - c) Any measures, such as additional training or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
 - d) Any measures, such as additional training or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
 - e) A period for review; and
 - f) And the consequences of the member of staff failing to improve within the review period and of further unsatisfactory performance.
- 9.4 A final written warning will normally remain active for 12 months. In some circumstances, longer active periods may be necessary. After the active period has expired, the warning will remain on a member of staff's personnel file but will be disregarded for future capability proceedings.
- 9.5 The member of staff's performance will be monitored during the review period and at the end of the review period they will be advised in writing of the outcome:
- a) If the Trust is satisfied with their performance, no further action will be taken;
 - b) If the Trust is not satisfied, the matter may progress to a Stage Three capability hearing;
 - c) If the Trust feel that there has been a substantial but insufficient improvement, the review period may be extended.
- 9.6 If at any stage the person conducting the meeting is satisfied that there are insufficient grounds for pursuing the capability issue, or after a review period the employee has made sufficient improvement, the capability procedure will cease and the appraisal process will restart.

10 Stage Three Formal Capability Process

- 10.1 The Trust may decide to hold a Stage Three capability hearing if it has reason to believe:
- a) A member of staff's performance has not improved sufficiently during a review period set out in a final written warning;
 - b) A member of staff's performance is unsatisfactory while a final written warning is still active; or
 - c) A member of staff's performance has been grossly negligent such as to warrant potential dismissal without the need for a final written warning.
- 10.2 The aims of a Stage Three capability hearing will be:
- a) Setting out the required standard that the member of staff has failed to meet during the Stage Two Formal Capability Process, including any relevant evidence which has been gathered;

- b) Allowing the member of staff to ask questions, present evidence, respond to evidence, make representations and, if appropriate, call witnesses; and
- c) Establishing the likely causes of poor performance and identifying why measures taken so far have not improved performance.
- d) If dismissal is a possibility, discussing whether there are any practical alternatives to dismissal such as redeployment.

10.3 Following a Stage Three capability hearing, if the Trust finds a member of staff's performance unsatisfactory, it may consider a range of options including;

- a) Dismissing the member of staff:
- b) Redeploying the member of staff into another suitable job at the same or lower grade;
- c) Extending an active final written warning and setting a further review period (in exceptional cases where the Trust believes substantial improvement is likely within a review period); or
- d) Giving a final written warning (where no final written warning is active).

10.4 If a member of staff is dismissed following a Stage Three hearing, this will normally be with full notice or a payment in lieu of notice, unless the member of staff's performance has been so negligent as to amount to gross misconduct.

11 Appealing Against Action Taken

11.1 If a member of staff feels that a decision about their poor performance under this procedure is wrong or unjust, they should appeal in writing, setting out their full grounds of appeal, to the Head of Human Resources within 10 days of the decision.

11.2 If a member of staff appeals against dismissal, the appeal will not delay the dismissal. However, if the appeal is successful, the member of staff will be reinstated with no loss of continuity or pay.

11.3 If a member of staff raises any new matters in their appeal, then the Trust may need to carry out further investigations. If any new information comes to light, the member of staff will be provided with a summary and, where appropriate, copies of documents and witness statements.

11.4 Appeals will be heard without unreasonable delay and, where possible, at an agreed time and place.

11.5 The appeal hearing may be a complete re-hearing of the matter or it may be a review of the fairness of the original decision. This will be at the discretion of the Trust depending on the circumstances of each case.

11.6 The appeal will be dealt with impartially and, wherever possible, by a manager who has not previously been involved in the case.

- 11.7 Following an appeal hearing, the Trust may either confirm the original decision, revoke the original decision or substitute a different penalty.
- 11.8 There is no further right of appeal against the sanction or dismissal within The Priory Federation of Academies Trust.

12 Policy Changes

- 12.1 This policy may only be amended or withdrawn by The Trust.