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Flexible Working Programme



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Case study

Strategic flexibility: Upton Court Grammar School's innovative approach

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About Upton Court Grammar School

Upton Court Grammar School (UCGS) is leading as the flexible working ambassador for the South East. As part of Pioneer Educational Trust, they have pioneered flexible working in schools since 2019 and continue to find creative and innovative ways to use flexible working to deliver their school mission – Upton Court Grammar School ensures all students fulfil their academic and personal aspirations and thrive as successful and engaged citizens.

They became involved in the programme following the successful delivery of the Flexible Working Ambassador Schools programme. They wanted to share their learning on flexible working with other schools and MATs helping them to understand how flexible working can be used strategically and to support recruitment and retention.

Importance of flexible working in recruitment and retention

As a values-led organisation, their flexible working strategy is aligned with Pioneer's core values to drive equality and invest intelligently. The challenges they were facing are similar to other schools currently and related to recruitment and retention. Pioneer Educational Trust & UCGS recognised that flexible working has a key role to play in attracting, retaining and developing the best talent. As an organisation, they aim to be the employer of choice as a result of intelligent investment in providing a positive and enriching working environment and outstanding professional development opportunities. They are committed to encouraging and enabling flexible working opportunities and to supporting colleagues seeking to work more flexibly.

Upton Court Grammar School's flexible working strategy

Their flexible working strategy centres on the implementation of a flexible job design process that adopts a 'done with' approach. The flexible job design process sits alongside but is separate from employees' statutory entitlement to make a flexible working request at any time. As well as accepting formal applications in line with statutory and ACAS guidance, the process for flexible job design begins in the autumn term of an academic year with an invitation to colleagues interested in working flexibly for the following year to have a one-to-one conversation with the headteacher. Staffing requirements are confirmed following options by April, the timetable is completed and flexible working request outcomes granted, where possible, in July.

Benefits of flexible working

By opening roles up to flexibility, a more diverse range of skills and experience is being attracted and retained. In driving equality, they are supporting returners back into work after a career break or maternity leave. The flexible working strategy encourages a more diverse range of skills and experience, as well as equality of opportunity recognising that demographic changes can affect employees' needs to balance their job with other responsibilities. They have seen an improvement in employee job satisfaction and wellbeing and flexible working supports their talent management strategy attracting and retaining staff, increasing productivity and reducing costs.

Pioneer Educational Trust and UCGS recognises that flexible working brings benefits for both the individual and the organisation. They have seen an improvement in employees' work-life balance and wellbeing and the strategy will continue to form a key aspect of the school's overall talent management strategy.